

Please note, as of 1 May 2014, all new NERC studentships now fall under the RCUK harmonised postgraduate terms and conditions and not the NERC studentship handbook or FAQs below. All studentships that commenced prior to 1 May 2014 still fall under the NERC handbook and FAQs below.

NERC Studentship and Doctoral Training Grant (DTG) Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) – Prospective Students and Current NERC-funded Students

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1. Glossary

DTG – Doctoral Training Grant
FES – Final Expenditure Statement
GDP Deflator – Gross Domestic Product Deflator
Je-S – Joint Electronic Submission
SDP - Studentship Details Portal
RO – Research Organisation
SSC – Shared Services Centre

2. Application Procedures

Q: How do I apply for a NERC Studentship?

A: NERC Studentships are not awarded directly to individuals, but to Research Organisations (Universities and NERC Research Centres). If you are seeking a studentship award you should address enquiries about the specific availability to your chosen RO.

3. Student Eligibility

Q: I am not sure I am eligible for a NERC studentship. How can I check?

A: NERC studentship eligibility requirements are published in section B of the studentship [handbook](#). If you are still unsure please discuss this with the student services office or university Registrar in the first instance. Contact stag@nerc.ac.uk if still unsure.

Q: I am an EU student – am I eligible for NERC funding?

A: As an EU student, you cannot receive a maintenance grant from a NERC DTG unless you have been ordinarily resident in the UK throughout the three year period preceding the date of application for an award. However, you would be eligible for a fees-only award (which covers fees and research

training support costs). Once you have been resident in the UK for three years, you can convert to a full award during the period of the studentship.

Q: I have a UK passport, my parents moved outside the EU, since then I have been in full time education. I now want to return to the UK to undertake a PhD. Am I eligible for NERC Funding?

A: You may be eligible for a NERC award if you can prove that your absence from the UK was temporary. Temporary absence is where a UK citizen has spent an extended period living outside the UK, either for study or employment. Candidates will have to show that they have maintained a relevant connection to the UK. Temporary does not depend on length of absence.

Q: I have a working permit/student visa, am I eligible to apply for a studentship?

A: No. Student Visas, work permits or dependent visas have restrictions on the time spent in the UK and therefore holders of these cannot demonstrate a relevant connection or settled status.

Q: I am an international student and I would like to study in the UK. Am I eligible for NERC funding?

A: In order to be eligible for NERC funding, you must be able to prove settled status in the UK as per the [Immigration Act 1971](#). You must also be able to prove that you have a relevant connection to the UK, which requires that you have been ordinarily resident in the UK throughout the 3 year period preceding the date of the award. NERC does not currently fund international students outside of these criteria.

4. Paying Students from DTGs

Q: I am a NERC-funded student, and I would like to attend a conference/undertake fieldwork. Will NERC pay for this?

A: The DTG paid directly to the RO includes a Research Training Support Grant (RTSG) to cover the costs of field work, consumables and conferences etc., so you should approach your supervisor to agree your expenditure against the grant.

Q: How long do NERC students need to be funded for?

A: DTGs currently include 3.5 years funding per notional studentship, and NERC students should be funded for between 3 and 4 years. Your RO has flexibility in how it uses the remaining 0.5 year (fourth year) funding, but their processes should be fair and transparent.

Q: Do I have to be funded from a single DTG?

A: No, you could be funded from a number of DTGs, as long as your supervisor ensures that the Je-S SDP is updated to show which grants you have received funding from.

Q: Do I pay tax on the payments I receive?

A: Payments made as part of a NERC studentship are not regarded as income for tax purposes. However, earnings received during the final year from sources such as teaching and demonstrating should be aggregated with income from post-award employment when assessing income tax liability for the tax year in which your award ends.

Q: Does NERC make payments for my National Insurance contributions?

A: No. NERC will not make any payment for your National Insurance contributions, and students should consider whether they wish to pay contributions as non-employed persons. You should consult your local office of the Department for Work and Pensions about your position to determine the effect of non-payment of contributions on any future claims for benefit. You may become liable for contributions in connection with any paid teaching or demonstrating which you undertake.

5. Maternity, Paternity and Illness

Q: I am going on maternity leave, what do I need to do?

A: As a NERC funded student you are entitled to 6 months stipend as maternity pay if your maternity period starts within the funded period of your studentship. You can then have up to another 6 months of unpaid leave. The same entitlement applies for additional paternity or adoptive leave. You may then continue your studentship on a part-time basis (at least 50%) if required.

Your supervisor should ensure that the Je-S SDP has been updated with your new funding end date and expected submission date (6 months or more depending on the period of unpaid leave and part time working).

Q: Can I take paternity leave?

A: A total of ten days paternity leave may be taken at any time during a partner's pregnancy or within three months following the birth. No extra funding will be provided. Students may also take up to six months additional paternity leave.

Q: I am on sick leave, what do I need to do?

A: NERC funded students are entitled to up to 13 weeks in any 12 month period of sick pay, if they have medical certificates. NERC no longer needs to be sent medical certificates, but your RO may wish to retain copies for audit purposes. Sick periods beyond the 13 weeks should not be funded from the DTG, so your supervisor should put your studentship in abeyance.

Your supervisor should also ensure that the Je-S SDP has been updated with your new funding end date and expected submission date (based on the period of sickness and any abeyance and subsequent part time working).

Q: Can I hold a NERC studentship on a part-time basis?

A: Yes, NERC studentships can be held either full or part-time. Part time awards should not normally be less than 50% of full-time.

6. Abeyance and Employment

Q: For personal/family reasons I need to put my studentship into abeyance. Is this possible?

A: We expect students to complete their training in a single continuous period and we do not encourage the suspension of awards (except for short policy internships or work placements). However, we acknowledge that there are times when an abeyance may be an appropriate course of action. Any requests for abeyance should be made to your supervisor and they should give sympathetic consideration to requests for abeyance due to family or personal reasons. The maximum period of suspension should normally be twelve months, and your supervisor should ensure that your studentship end dates and expected submission dates are updated on the Je-S SDP to reflect any periods of abeyance.

Q: I would like to do some paid work during my PhD. Is this allowed? A:

We encourage students to undertake some teaching or demonstration work, when this is compatible with your training and provided that your supervisor approves. The total time spent (including preparation and marking) should not exceed six hours in any week during term time. As the provision of teaching and demonstrating is the responsibility of your RO, you should be paid for this at the RO's usual rate and be supported by appropriate training.

You can also undertake a small amount of other paid work, provided your supervisor gives consent and it does not delay or interfere with your research training. In both cases, you should ensure that any income is reported for tax purposes.

Q: I would like to go on a work placement but I will need to suspend my NERC award. Can I do this?

A: You can take up to a three-month abeyance of your award to enable you to undertake a work placement that is directly related to your training or that will provide valuable transferable skills, provided that this is well justified and approved in advance by your supervisor and Research Organisation. Your supervisor should ensure that your studentship end dates and expected submission dates are amended on the Je-SDP to reflect any periods of abeyance.

Q: Where can I find more information about NERC Policy Internships?

A: NERC funds a number of three-month policy internships. Further information can be found on our [website](#).

Q: Can I take a holiday during my studentship?

A: Reasonable holidays, not exceeding eight weeks in the year including public holidays, may be allowed by your supervisors. Up to a maximum of four weeks holiday may be taken at the end of the period of the award.

7. Student Terminations

Q: My studentship has been terminated, what do I need to do? A: Your supervisor should have gone through your RO's published procedures with you and agreed a suitable termination date. You need do nothing further for NERC. Your supervisor should then arrange for the Je-S SDP to be updated with the studentship termination date and reason.

8. Student Disability

Q: I have a disability. Can I get any support?

A: If your studentship is funded by NERC and you have a long term disability which results in additional expenditure in connection with your studies, you may be eligible for an extra allowance, known as a [Disabled Students' Allowance \(DSA\)](#). Please contact the Disability Coordinator (or equivalent) at your Research Organisation for guidance on the application and assessment procedure.

9. Problems

Q: I have a grievance with my supervisor. What should I do?

A: Your department is responsible for ensuring that you have access to procedures for resolving problems with your supervisor and your departmental code of practice should provide you with further details. The [QAA](#) also provides guidance to current and prospective students about how to deal with complaints about universities.