

Our expectations for PhD training

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1. Purpose

The purpose of this document is to ensure that our funded PhD studentships are managed consistently and effectively. It seeks to clarify the responsibilities of host institutions, grant holders, supervisory leads and funded students, promote good practice and provide clear guidance to support the delivery of high-quality training for students.

2. Supporting our PhD students

We're committed to investing in and nurturing the next generation of cancer researchers who can tackle pressing cancer research problems. We want to ensure a high-quality training experience for all our funded PhD students aligned with best practice.

To meet this objective, the below noted guiding principles should be followed:

2.1. Guiding principles

2.1.1. PhD project

Projects should be well defined, provide high quality scientific training, and allow a thesis to be produced within four years for non-clinical PhDs or three years for clinical PhDs.

The research proposed should be feasible for a researcher at this career stage to deliver.

2.1.2. Supervision

The student should be supervised by a researcher with the appropriate level of experience and training.

2.1.3. Optimal research and host environment

Students should have access to relevant and high-quality broad career development and training opportunities to allow the development of key supporting

skills. Where a student is funded on a response mode award at one of our centre locations, they should be nested within the centre training award cohort where possible.

3. Scope

With the exception of Clinical Research Training Fellowships (CRTFs), this guidance document applies to all our funded PhD students (including MB-PhD students), host institutions, grant holders and supervisory leads responsible for managing awarded PhD training and studentship funds. It sets out our expectations, responsibilities and provides guidance to support the effective delivery of PhD training programmes.

All PhD studentships and their parent award are subject to our [Grant Conditions](#). Acceptance of a grant constitutes acceptance of both the conditions and these guidelines.

4. Recruitment

The grant holder may allocate PhD studentships to trainees and research projects deemed appropriate, abiding by the university's local regulations and eligibility criteria, whilst accounting for our conditions as outlined below.

- All PhD student posts should be openly advertised and competitively awarded.
- Diversity and inclusion should be promoted in all aspects of recruitment and the career management of students.
- There should be a clearly defined process for identifying the best students and the most appropriate research projects in each round of recruitment. The emphasis should be on recruiting the most outstanding students.
- Per section 10 below, information on each student should be provided to us. Information should be provided via student registration of their project(s) on Flexi-Grant within the first month of the studentship. Detailed instructions regarding the submission and management of this information will be provided to grant holders.

- At many locations, there will be several PhD posts being recruited at the same time, supported by a variety of funders. Where possible and relevant, recruitment should be streamlined at host institutions to attract the most competitive and talented candidates.
- The grant holder is responsible for selecting, administering and supervising students throughout their period of training (at least until examination of their thesis) in line with current good practice. See section 5 for more details.
- Projects should lie within the remit of our strategy.

Please contact the Research Careers & Culture team at students@cancer.org.uk if you have any concerns, questions or problems with PhD recruitment.

5. Training

We endorse the Statement of Expectations for Postgraduate Training and are committed to further develop highly skilled researchers and the next generation of researchers.

We're also a signatory of The Researcher Development Concordat and expect the principles and obligations outlined within it are extended to the strategies to support doctoral training.

As part of this, we expect grant holders to outline the training and support available through the host institution to newly recruited PhD students. We expect students to have up to four years to complete their PhD. Funding will be provided only up to the point at which the thesis is submitted.

We are keen to provide opportunities for our student cohort to network and foster relationships during their PhD and beyond. We will contact students directly to invite them to networking meetings. Supervisors should also support and facilitate student attendance of events, both ours and locally held events.

All new PhD students should be encouraged to visit Vitae's website for guidance on many aspects relevant to their training. Vitae is a national organisation championing the personal, professional and career development of doctoral researchers and research staff in higher education institutions and research institutes.

6. Student supervision

We believe that it is essential that all students receive regular tailored support and supervision specific to their individual needs at each stage of their training and career.

Supervisors time should not be split between too many students.

It's important for students to receive regular support from their named supervisor that should include:

- personal development reviews
- general good management practices
- clear and ongoing communication regarding expectations of the role of both student and the supervisor throughout the duration of the studentship

7. Mentoring

Both formal and informal mentorship are essential components of PhD training. Mentorship provides the support and guidance necessary for the development of students through their training.

Ideally, mentors should be outside the mentee's direct line management and academic supervision. We encourage supervisors to support and facilitate both formal and informal (e.g. peer-to-peer) mentoring.

8. Post PhD training support and opportunities

It's important for host institutions to highlight career and funding opportunities to their students. Here are some examples of these kinds of opportunities:

- Providing training opportunities to support the next stage of career development e.g. writing grants, leadership/management training.
- Signposting to our [Competency Framework for fellowships](#) as a useful tool when assessing the relevant research skills and experience, as well as wider enabling skills expected for our fellowships at different career stages.

- Signposting career and funding opportunities. Visit our website for information on our [funding opportunities](#).
- Signposting possible career opportunities and highlighting alternative career paths.
- Providing support and training for students that are considering a non-academic career on completion of their PhD e.g. training on CV writing or identifying their transferable skills.
- We also encourage host institutions to maintain engagement with former PhD alumni and consider networking or engagement events could be beneficial for shared learnings and cohort building.

9. Managing PhD funding

9.1. PhD student funding

Except for MB-PhD funding, PhD funding is based on a four-year PhD on a full-time basis. Funding will only be provided by us up to the point at which the thesis is submitted, expected to be within the four-year period.

If the duration of the PhD training differs from four years, please contact the Research Careers & Culture team at students@cancer.org.uk.

[Our Costs Guidance](#) details the total funding support for a studentship inside and outside of London, in Cambridge and in Oxford.

9.2. Uses of funding

We provide funding to support various costs associated with studentships.

Please refer to [our Costs Guidance](#) and [Grant Conditions](#) for more details on costs that we cover, may cover and do not cover.

You can also contact the Research Careers & Culture team at students@cancer.org.uk to discuss areas of flexibility, particularly with respect to computing costs for bioinformatics or other 'dry lab' research projects.

9.3. International health surcharge for students

We will not usually cover the costs of the immigration health surcharge (IHS) for international non-clinical PhD and MB-PhD students funded by us.

However, in exceptional circumstances only, we may consider covering the costs of the IHS for a non-clinical student (or MB-PhD student) in the following circumstances:

- Where the costs cannot be covered by other means including e.g. by the official immigration health surcharge reimbursement scheme for EU and Swiss students or host institution offering to cover these costs as standard.
- Where excellent candidates face significant hardship that would prevent them from being able to take up the position offered if financial support with the IHS is not provided.
- Where supervisors have assessed and approved any exceptional requests according to the criteria we set.
- IHS costs are only covered for the student themselves; we will not cover costs for dependents.
- We will not cover visa costs and international tuition fee. We will only support fees at the rate we set for home/UK fees.
- We will not provide any supplementary funding. These costs must be borne by underspend from the students originally allocated funding source.
- Where full justification is provided to the Research Careers & Culture team at students@cancer.org.uk

10. Information gathering and sharing

One of our strategic priorities is to train the next generation of cancer research leaders. To support this, it's crucially important for us to know our students, their research projects, outputs and career progression. The information collected allows us to communicate directly with the students, welcome them to our community and invite them to training and networking events.

It also allows us to accurately report on their research and outputs, and to understand their motivation to continue a career in cancer research – improving our training provision.

Grant holders are responsible for ensuring that information relating to each student is submitted to us.

Grant holders must ensure that students are informed of their requirement to register their project(s) on Flexi-Grant within one month of the commencement of their studentship. We will provide grant holders with detailed instruction on the submission and management of this information.

10.1. Gathering information about students

Funded students at all host institutions will be asked to register a ResearchFish account, our official research reporting tool. They will also need to submit their research outputs on an annual basis. Students who have finished their studentship will be asked to share their career plans after their PhD. This information is invaluable in helping us to improve the support and training offered to current and future students.

We will provide grant holders with further information on the type of data that will be collected, and the use of the submitted data.

Please contact the Research Careers & Culture team at students@cancer.org.uk, or Centres & Institutes team at centres-institutes@cancer.org.uk if you have any queries about the process.

10.2. Information sharing

Grant holders are responsible for ensuring that students, supervisors and project partners are made aware of:

- what information, including personal data will be shared with us
- how this information will be used by us
- that all personal information is and will be kept in accordance with [our privacy policy](#)

Grant holders must ensure that when individuals accept a studentship, they are aware they are permitting us to contact them to request they complete a diversity monitoring form. This is part of registering their project on Flexi-Grant.

We are committed to promoting equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) in research. As part of this commitment, we conduct diversity data monitoring across our research funding.

For students, we are aiming to understand at an aggregate level who is funded through our training awards, how they progress throughout their careers and what barriers, if any, there are for students from different backgrounds staying in research and progressing.

We will use information from our diversity monitoring form to analyse who our students are and who we're funding and to develop future ways of working. We may share anonymised, aggregated data with our leadership team and Scientific Executive Board and may also share this with other funders or other sector bodies for the purpose of sector research and analysis. In the future, we may publish anonymised, aggregated data about our student cohorts on our website and/or in (online) journals (see also section 11.2).

Grant holders should disclose student contact details to us. This is to allow correspondence with our students. Correspondence is likely to be about courses, events or possibly surveys and questionnaires about their training.

Grant holders should disclose any information that we request regarding the progress of their studies, submission of their thesis and completion of their studies.

We or a third party on behalf of us may contact a studentship holder during or beyond the life of their studentship for evaluation of training/support given or career tracking purposes.

10.3. Gathering information about the host institution

We are interested to learn how the PhD student training is progressing throughout the year and how we can best support you. Therefore, we are keen to hear about any challenges that you may face and any suggestions on how to improve support

for the students. We encourage you to share this information with us informally through our site visits, emails and phone calls throughout the year.

Please contact the Research Careers & Culture team at students@cancer.org.uk if you would like us to visit or attend any relevant meetings/events at your host institution.

10.4. Extensions, suspensions and terminations of studentships

We expect students to complete their training without interruption where possible and do not encourage the suspension of awards unless as defined below. Where suspensions are agreed, total periods of suspension must not normally exceed one calendar year over the lifetime of the award.

We outline in our [Long-term leave policy for researchers](#) how consideration should be given to requests for abeyance due to taking long-term parental, sick or other long-term leave covered by a medical certificate, reasonable adjustment periods or extended jury service, subject to approval by us.

Where students funded by us take parental, sick or other long-term leave, we will, where appropriate, extend the official end date of the grant through a no cost extension for the period equivalent to the period of leave taken.

Where a student funded by us on a programme or fellowship grant (the parent grant) takes parental, sick or other long-term leave, the studentship may need to be completed after the end date of the parent grant. In such cases, the host institution must ensure the student has appropriate support and supervision to complete the studentship.

As per section 11.3. below, we should be informed and updated about end dates and expected submission dates to reflect periods of abeyance.

Grant holders must make suitable arrangements with supervisors/lab managers/other relevant contacts for coping with absences of students for parental, sick or other long-term leave, reasonable adjustment periods, extended jury service and holidays.

Grant holders should contact the Research Careers & Culture team at students@cancer.org.uk to let us know about any changes to study patterns that may include changes in a student's personal or employment circumstances.

10.5. Failure to convert to doctoral studies at the end of year one

If a student fails to upgrade to doctoral studies at the end of year one (formally via viva or informally) the student award must be terminated. If a student leaves within the first year, another student can be recruited in their place using the resulting underspend.

11. Policies

11.1. IP/ownership

Any intellectual property rights (including but not limited to data) generated by a PhD student funded by us during the studentship will be governed by the terms outlined in the grant award letter/agreement. Supervisors and students should consult their host institution's contracts team and us for guidance where needed or necessary.

11.2. Equality, diversity and inclusion

We are committed to promoting EDI in research. We expect grant holders to embed EDI in their research funding practices, policies and culture as far as possible, with a focus on ensuring a positive and inclusive research culture.

Host institutions must ensure that all training and research activities for our funded PhD students comply with all legal obligations of the Equality Act 2010 (as amended).

11.3. Flexible working policies

11.3.1. Part-time working

We encourage and support the option of part-time study. Studentships should be advertised as available on either a full-time or part-time basis to allow researchers to combine caring responsibilities or any other reason and their academic research.

While we support part-time study, part-time studentships must not exceed the overall lifetime of the parent grant award. In such case, stipends should be provided on a pro-rata basis.

Grant holders are expected to notify the [Research Careers & Culture team](#) at students@cancer.org.uk of any changes to a student's study pattern that may include changes in a student's personal or employment circumstances.

11.3.2. Annual leave

The host institution should ensure that a clear policy on annual leave entitlement exists, and the grant holder should ensure that this is made known to the student at the start of their studentship.

11.3.3. Parental, sick or other long-term leave

In accordance with our Flexible research careers support, all students funded by us are entitled to take the full period of parental and other long-term leave as reflected in our [Long-term leave policy for researchers](#) and in accordance with their host institution's standard employment policies and procedures on the issue.

In all cases, if a student needs to take parental or other long-term leave we require the following actions:

- Provide the student's name, institution, leave start date, leave end date, reason for leave and any new expected end date/viva date to the Research Careers & Culture team at students@cancer.org.uk.
- Keep accurate records and certificates of leave entitlement e.g. maternity certificate, MATBI form or sick notes.

If costs cannot be covered through underspend, contact the Research Careers & Culture team at students@cancer.org.uk to discuss alternative funding arrangements.

12. Research integrity, dignity at work and complaints

12.1. Research integrity

We require host institutions to have robust policies to prevent research misconduct and investigate research misconduct allegations. The host institution is responsible for ensuring that students and supervisors:

- receive training and support regarding research integrity, experimental design, statistical analysis and reporting standards
- understand our funded research must be conducted according to the highest standards of research practice to ensure the integrity and reliability of the research and outputs

Please also refer to our [Research integrity – guidelines for scientific conduct](#).

12.2 Dignity at work in research

The grant holder is also responsible for helping foster positive research environments and for ensuring supervisors and students are aware of our [Policy on dignity at work in research](#).

12.3. Complaints

The host institution must have a policy to support the identification and satisfactory resolution of complaints from students.

Host institutions are responsible for ensuring that students and supervisors have access to all relevant policies and effective procedures for resolving problems arising from the administration and supervision of the studentship.

12.4. Policy on research involving animals

In addition to complying with all applicable legal, regulatory and ethical requirements, host institutions should ensure that students and supervisors conducting research involving animals are provided with our [Policy on the Use of Animals in Research](#). They should understand the importance of principles of the 3Rs (replacement, reduction and refinement of animals in research), experimental design, NC3Rs guidance, reporting animal work and the importance of these principles in improving research reproducibility and reducing research waste.

Training on these topics is equally important for students whose research does not involve animals. The grant holder should ensure that all students receive detailed training on these topics, including how to accurately identify reporting standards that are applicable to their work. Students should also understand the significant impact of poor experimental design and/or reporting practices on research reproducibility and research waste.

12.5. Open access

Grant holders must ensure that students understand it is a condition of their funding that, if they have an original primary article accepted for publication in a peer-reviewed journal, it must be published in accordance with our [Policy on open access](#).

13. Research assessment approach

We are a [DORA \(San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment\)](#) signatory and expect host institutions to:

- develop complementary outputs sharing policies
- sign up to DORA
- apply DORA principles in student recruitment and assessment

13. Review

These guidelines are effective from February 2026 and will be reviewed every three years. Any changes to these guidelines will be approved by our Grants Management Policy Board.

14. Support and advice

For any queries about these guidelines, please contact us at research.careers@cancer.org.uk or policies@cancer.org.uk.

15. Related documents

For more information, please see the following linked documents/web pages:

- [Competency framework](#)
- [Cost guidance for grants](#)
- [Grant Conditions](#)
- [Flexible research careers support](#)
- [Salary guidance for grants](#)
- [Long term leave policy for researchers](#)
- [Research integrity – guidelines for scientific conduct](#)
- [Policy on dignity at work in research](#)
- [Policy on open access](#)
- [Privacy policy](#)
- [Use of animals in research policy](#)