



GW4 BioMed MRC Doctoral Training Partnership

Project Call 2021-22

[Project Application Call](#)

[Frequently Asked Questions](#)



FAQs for supervisors

The GW4 BioMed DTP aims to attract and select the best students for training in high quality projects and environments. This document contains guidance for supervisors considering submitting a project for a GW4 BioMed MRC studentship, commencing in the academic year 2021/22. Advice on the whole process including project submission criteria, how students are selected and critical dates can be found under the following headings:

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1. HOW MANY STUDENTSHIPS ARE AVAILABLE?

Up to 18 studentships are available with the GW4 BioMed MRC DTP for October 2020; this comprises 13 (notional) MRC studentships per annum, and the four universities are contributing additional funds to uplift this number, depending on the distribution of successful candidates.

2. HOW DO I SUBMIT A PROJECT PROPOSAL?

Project proposals must be submitted using [the online form](#) from Monday 8th June 2020. The deadline for applications is **5pm on Monday 27th July 2020**.

Please ensure that you read this FAQ before completing your proposal.

A copy of the survey questions is attached to the FAQs to help with writing your project proposal. As there is no function within the online system to share partially completed forms, please use this document to prepare your project application and share your answers with your supervisory team before copying and pasting your final answers into the online survey.

You will be able to save and revise your proposal online. However, once submitted, no amendments can be made to the application. Once the deadline for applications has passed, the online form will close down and you will not be able to submit your project proposal.

Once the DTP receives all applications, the DTP will confirm with the home institution that they are content for the project(s) to go forward to the shortlisting stage.

3. WHAT ARE THE KEY DATES FOR THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS?

Date	Time	Deadline
Monday 8th June 2020	By 9am	Supervisor project proposal submission form opens
Monday 27 th July 2020	By 5pm	Supervisor project proposal submission deadline
Monday 3 rd August – Monday 7 th September 2020	By 5pm	Project panel scores projects and submits scores to DTP
Friday 11 th September 2020	1pm to 3pm	Project shortlisting panel
Thursday 17 th September 2020	By 5pm	Supervisors notified of project shortlisting panel outcome
Monday 21 st September – Sunday 22 nd November 2020		Projects advertised for student applications
Monday 23 rd November 2020	By 5pm	Student application deadline
Wednesday 25 th November – Friday 11 th December 2020		Panel scores and shortlists applicants
Wednesday 16 th December 2020	1pm to 3pm	Student shortlisting panel
Friday 18 th December 2020	By midday	DTP notifies candidates and supervisors of successful applications
Friday 15 th January 2021	By 9am	Supervisor interviews all candidates
By Friday 15 th January 2021	By 9am	Candidates send references and transcripts to the DTP
Wednesday 20 th January – Thursday 21 st January 2021		DTP student interviews
Thursday 21 st January 2021	1pm – 3pm	Student shortlisting panel
Friday 22 nd January – Friday 26 th February 2021		Clearing period
w/c Monday 27 th September 2021		Local induction events
Friday 1 st October 2021		Official funding start date

4. CAN I APPLY IN MORE THAN ONE YEAR?

Supervisors are only permitted to submit **one proposal per year as lead supervisor** and, if successful, **can only be a lead supervisor in three out of the five years, with no more than two in any three-year rolling period.**

Supervisors can be co-supervisors on an unlimited number of projects in all years.

5. CAN I RESUBMIT THE SAME PROJECT PROPOSAL?

Yes, if you were unsuccessful during previous recruitment rounds, you will be able to submit the same project proposal this year.

6. DOES THE PROJECT HAVE TO FIT IN WITH ONE OF THE THREE THEMES?

The studentships will be awarded against the three key research themes that characterize the GW4 BioMed MRC DTP:

- Infection, Immunity and Repair;
- Neuroscience and Mental Health;
- Population Health.

Project proposals that sit outside these key themes but offer students outstanding training opportunities, especially in the cross-cutting skills priority areas, will also be considered for funding.

7. CAN NON-BIOMEDICAL SUPERVISORS APPLY?

Yes. The DTP and MRC are particularly keen to promote interdisciplinarity with particular reference to mathematics, physical sciences, engineering and social sciences. We also aim to attract excellent students from these disciplines and there is funding available to provide biomedical training for these students as necessary.

While we do not anticipate that many of the lead supervisors will be from disciplines outside of biomedical sciences, we are hoping that many of the projects will include co-supervisors or collaborators from these disciplines.

8. HOW MANY SUPERVISORS CAN BE ON THE PROPOSAL?

There is no maximum number of supervisors. The application form allows space for up to four, so please use those spaces to identify the main supervisory staff and include the remainder as a project team in the later sections.

Those listed as co-supervisors will be required to have a greater level of involvement in the student's progression monitoring than in conventional supervisory teams. Less experienced supervisory teams may include an experienced supervisor to act in a 'mentoring' role.

You can find further details in the Supervisor Expectations document at the end of these FAQs.

9. HOW WILL THE DTP CORRESPOND WITH THE SUPERVISORY TEAM?

The majority of communications are directed to the lead supervisor who will be expected to disseminate the information to the rest of their team. Funds relating to the project will be paid to the institution of the Lead Supervisor.

10. IS IT ADVANTAGEOUS TO HAVE SUPERVISORS FROM MORE THAN ONE GW4 PARTNER?

Yes. The GW4 BioMed MRC DTP aims to show what can be achieved by harnessing the combined power of four research-intensive universities. Supervisors are strongly encouraged to seek out partners for training or experience in other GW4 HEIs and include them as co-supervisors. The DTP has given an undertaking that at least 50% of projects will be across two or more GW4 partners.

Please note that collaboration can mean access to laboratories and specific training, rather than just co-supervision.

11. CAN OTHER PARTNERS BE INVOLVED?

Any partners (academic and non-academic) can be involved in the project—not just those within the GW4 partnership. Supervisors should be aware, however, that the DTP seeks to have at least 50% collaborative projects across at least two of the GW4 institutions, so should consider opportunities for 'internal' collaboration as a priority.

12. IS THE DTP LOOKING TO CONVERT PROJECTS TO CASE?

The GW4 BioMed MRC DTP has no CASE conversion target. However, this does not preclude industrial involvement that can take several forms (including placement, co-supervision and financial contribution to project costs).

Industrial project proposals will not carry any premium in the selection process, but collaboration and subsequent enhancements to research and training opportunities will be scored favorably.

13. WHAT IS COVERED BY THE STUDENTSHIP?

The elements of the studentship include fees (UK/EU rate), UKRI national minimum stipend, RTSG (Research Training Support Grant) and conference/travel allowance (£300 p.a.).

Most of the studentships will be of 3.5 years' duration as this is the 'notional' duration defined by the MRC. As such, awards have been calculated on this basis. Applications for a longer duration will be considered on a case-by-case basis **as long as the extension is related to enhanced and time-consuming training requirements of the project** as the grant allows for flexibility. Please note that extensions related to increased project needs alone are expressly forbidden by the MRC.

Part-time studentships will also be considered: part-time studentships are expected to be at around 60% of stipend and 50% of fees over a period of 6 years, but can last up to 7 years.

Please note that **the funding is linked to the successful student**. If the student withdraws at any stage, the funding will be re-allocated by the Management Board to the next successful student and their preferred project. As such, supervisors will not be able to re-advertise their project for a new student.

14. WHAT FUNDING IS AVAILABLE FOR PROJECT COSTS?

Each studentship will include a Research Training Support Grant (RTSG) as a contribution towards basic consumables. The MRC makes a distinction between wet-lab and dry-lab projects and expects wet-lab projects to receive £5k and dry-lab projects to receive £2k per annum in RTSG.

A further one-off grant from the Flexible Supplement of up to £6k for the life of the project will be considered where there are in vivo elements to cover the costs of training associated with this skill.

Please note that the studentship is expected to cover all training costs but **NOT** all consumable and equipment costs for the project; support is also expected to be provided from the project and programme grants held by the supervisory team for these project costs.

The grant from the MRC also includes a Flexible Funding Supplement, which is a small budget that aims to support high-cost research and/or training needs, including essential extensions where there are enhanced training needs. To determine the allocation of this funding, the Management Board set up a funding panel that includes the three Research Theme Leads. Calls for funding are held twice a year and your application acts as your first call. Supervisors should identify any high-cost training or training-related expenses (including travel) integral to the project in the application form and should indicate whether this will require the project duration to be longer than 3.5 years.

15. WHEN STUDENTS UNDERTAKE RESEARCH AT DIFFERENT GW4 INSTITUTIONS, HOW WILL THEIR RESEARCH BE FUNDED?

Research at GW4 institutions other than the student's home institution will be supported through the RTSG and Flexible Funding Supplement, which will be made available to the student and the lead supervisor via the host institution.

Please note that it will be responsibility of the supervisory team to manage the funds across institutions to ensure costs are within budget. Co-supervisory institutions will not receive a portion of tuition fees.

Costs against these budgets are claimed in retrospect and further information regarding the financial arrangements for the DTP will be sent to the lead supervisor and student should the project be successful.

16. WHAT TRAINING WILL THE DTP PROVIDE?

A core set of basic research skills consistent with those recommended by the MRC and Vitae.co.uk has been agreed by the DTP and incorporated into bespoke elements of [the RDF online portal](#). All students are required to record their projected training plans and progress in completing these in their online RDF planner, which will be shared with supervisors and the DTP Management. Supervisors will be required to undertake a Skills Needs Analysis with their student on a regular basis and use entries by the student into their RDF planner to record this. Periodic review of RDF planner downloads will be reviewed by supervisors and the DTP to ensure that arrangements and progression are satisfactory.

An Online Core Training Course has been developed with 30 elements over 3 modules which covers all aspects of the agreed DTP research skills. As specified in the Supervisor Expectations document at the end of these FAQs, it is a requirement of GW4 BioMed MRC DTP that supervisors agree to contribute to student training, including facilitating the online training.

Basic core-skills training as defined by the DTP may be provided at institutional level (research ethics and integrity, statistical approaches, presentation skills, etc.), via the DTP Online Core Training Course modules or through a mixture of both, as long as all areas are covered. Students can request exemption from duplicated elements of the online core skills training programme if they can provide evidence of having done them elsewhere.

In addition, students are strongly encouraged to take advantage of the wide range of advanced training offered across the 4 HEIs of the DTP. The DTP will facilitate access to a range of advanced training across the partnership and will co-ordinate specialist training days and Advanced Training Elements around the research themes that are aligned to MRC priorities for training. In Years 2 or 3, all students will be expected to undertake at least one Advanced Training Element, and one opportunity for Broadening Horizons (e.g. a public engagement internship, industrial placement or a research visit).

There will also be induction days, an annual congress and cohort building activities and supervisors are required to release students to attend these events.

Engagement with the DTP training programme is compulsory and continued sponsorship is contingent on that engagement.

17. CAN PROJECTS INCLUDE A MASTERS COURSE IN YEAR ONE, E.G. 1+3?

We are not running a 1+3 programme. However, if relevant, the student can undertake Masters components. If studying Masters components will significantly delay the PhD programme, there is limited funding to extend the PhD by 6 months.

As a rule, the DTP consider the dissertation portion of the Masters as unnecessary as the student will develop these skills in the PhD stage.

18. SHOULD PROPOSALS INCLUDE FULL COSTINGS?

We do not need a formal budget for shortlisting projects. However, your own institution may require this to ensure the project will not be underfunded. Proposals need to outline anticipated high costs and potential funding sources. Please use [the online application form](#) to specify any additional costs expected to be incurred throughout the duration of the project.

19. HOW WILL PROJECTS BE SELECTED?

Projects will undertake a light-touch screening at institutional level to ensure that the School and Department the project comes under has the operational capacity to support this project and that the supervisory team satisfies the local supervisory regulations. If any institution is unhappy for the project to be considered further, it can be withdrawn from the project selection process.

Projects will be reviewed by one of the three research theme panels. Each selection panel will consist of the Theme Lead and will include membership from all four universities. Where conflicts of interest are declared, the panel member will abstain from scoring. Declarations are required whether the panel member is part of the project supervisory team or has a close involvement in that particular research team.

A proportion of project applications from all themes will also be scored by at least 2 independent moderators to ensure parity in scoring across panels and adjustments to overall scores may be made where there is consistent under- or over-scoring compared to the moderator's assessment. The final scores and recommendations from the three research theme panels will be combined to provide overall rankings for consideration by the Management Board. The Director will chair and overview the process, including checks for scoring biases.

Project selection will be made on the basis of scientific and training excellence in addition to the project's alignment with the strategic priorities of the DTP. All projects will be scored against the following criteria. Supervisors are strongly advised to take note of these criteria and consider them in preparing project applications as the scoring will act as an indicative guide for discussions by the Management Board.

1. Evidence of **high-quality doctoral training (the project)**:
 - Significance, originality, feasibility and degree of challenge presented by the proposed research
 - Research training, including use of novel, cutting-edge/innovative technologies, approaches and/or special resources
 - Added-value features, e.g. exposure to working across disciplinary boundaries, opportunities for collaboration with other academic centres or industries
 - Strategy for knowledge transfer and maximising the impact of the doctoral research.
2. Evidence of **an excellent research and training environment (the environment)**:
 - Track record of the supervisors in attracting research funding
 - Publication of research outputs in high quality journals
 - Critical mass of academic and research staff, and doctoral students
 - Project supervisors' PhD submission rates in the last 5 years.
3. Evidence of **alignment** with key DTP goals:
 - Cross-cutting skills priority areas (e.g. quantitative skills; in vivo science; interdisciplinary skills – e.g. imaging, health economics, engineering, chemistry)
 - The strategic aim to support collaboration across the partner institutions: as the norm, PhD projects are expected to involve collaboration in supervision and/or specialist training
 - The strategic aim to support the development of early career researchers as lead supervisors.

In preparing project proposals, supervisors may want to refer to the following:

[UKRI Statement of Expectations](#)

[MRC Review of Vulnerable Skills and Capabilities](#)

[MRC Strategic Plan](#)

20. WHAT IS YOUR DEFINITION OF THE RESEARCH ENVIRONMENT?

We appreciate there are differences in what the 'research environment' encompasses when considering wet and dry lab projects. For 'wet' lab projects, the research environment might refer directly to a physical lab run by a particular academic and the funding and equipment available. Alternatively, a dry lab research environment could be about a wider network of academics and access to expertise from a range of disciplines.

As the proposals will be shortlisted by theme panels, the panel will assess and score the environment based on markers of excellence relevant to type of research.

21. WHAT IS YOUR DEFINITION OF AN EARLY CAREER RESEARCHER?

For the purposes of the GW4 BioMed MRC DTP, an ECR is either an individual who is within

eight years of the award of their PhD or equivalent professional training, or an individual who is within six years of their first academic appointment. These durations exclude any period of career break, e.g. for family care or health reasons.

The 'first academic appointment' is defined as the first paid contract of employment, either full-time or part-time, which lists research and/or teaching as the primary functions.

22. IS IT IMPORTANT FOR THE SUPERVISORS TO HAVE A RECORD OF MRC FUNDING?

No. The record of the proposed supervisory team in attracting research funding will be taken as evidence of a high-quality research environment in which the student will work. There is no requirement that the funding is MRC but, if there are no MRC grants, then the supervisors will want to highlight other funding, publications and indicators that demonstrate the project and supervisory expertise lie adequately within MRC remit.

Grants and publications from at least the last five years should be noted on the application form. Please note that only grants and awards recorded on the form will be scored – please do not assume that reputation replaces the need to complete this section.

23. HOW MANY PROJECTS WILL BE SELECTED FOR ADVERTISEMENT?

To support our goal of recruiting the best students to the DTP, more projects than available places will be selected for advertisement to ensure that the final selection is on the basis of the quality of the applicant. We plan to select around 70 projects, which will be advertised on the GW4 BioMed MRC DTP website, on partners' own local websites and FindAPhD (which will be arranged by each partner institution). Supervisors are also strongly encouraged to use their own networks and spheres of influence to attract good candidates.

The GW4 BioMed DTP will also promote the programme in targeted advertising. The title and project description wording you put on the application form will be used on our website to advertise your project. Therefore, please ensure that it is jargon-free and understandable to applicants who are not yet experts in your field.

24. CAN APPLICANTS APPLY FROM DISCIPLINES OTHER THAN BIOMEDICAL SCIENCE?

Yes. The DTP is particularly interested in recruiting students from non-biomedical, but numerate subjects (e.g. from a computing, mathematics, statistics, chemistry, engineering or quantitative social sciences background). Such students may need to undertake additional biomedical training in their first year to prepare them for their project.

25. WHAT ARE THE STUDENT ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA?

Students will need to meet the standard academic eligibility criteria: a first or upper second class honours degree (or equivalent) in a relevant subject. A less than sufficient first degree may be enhanced to meet the requirements by the acquisition of a Masters.

Successful applicants will also still need to meet the requirements of their home institution.

We are waiting UK Government guidance on the recruitment of EU students following the post-Brexit transition period, which ends of 31st December 2020 (please see [Universities UK](#) for more information). International (non-EU) students are not eligible for funding.

Students will also need to meet pass the English Language requirements of their home institution. The DTP application form asks, if applicable, whether the student has taken the IELTS test and met the required level, taken the test and failed to meet the level, or needs to take the test. However, this question is for administration purposes only and the Management Board will not be made aware of the applicant's English language skills during the shortlisting process.

26. HOW WILL CANDIDATES APPLY?

Applicants will apply via a centralised online application form **between 21st September and 22nd November 2020**.

The DTP application process aims to select the best students and will make an offer of funding to the top ranked applicants. The host institution will be responsible for checking eligibility and making an offer to study. Each institution requires applicants to make the application for the offer to study to the University at different stages: for Cardiff, this is at the time of the application to the DTP. However, for Bath, Bristol and Exeter this will only be if the candidate is successful.

The process for applying will be made clear on the advertisements. Documents provided by shortlisted students can be shared by the DTP to speed up the local application process.

27. HOW WILL STUDENTS BE SELECTED?

Students can apply for up to three projects in order of preference. Theme specific panels will consider and score all applications before drawing up an interview shortlist of around 60 applicants.

Shortlisted applications will then be passed to the lead supervisor of the chosen project/s by **5pm on 18th December 2020**. Shortlisted students are required to meet (in person or remotely) with all their potential lead supervisors **before 9am on 15th January 2021**. The onus for arranging these meetings is placed on the students and expenses will not be available for candidates to attend these first round of interviews.

Supervisors will be expected to complete a standardized online report following each interview by **9am on 15th January 2021**. The purpose of these reports is to assist the interview panel with their deliberations and are an important part of the recruitment process so that the DTP can ensure a suitable match between project and applicant.

Candidates that have been informed they have been shortlisted for interview will be required to provide their academic transcripts and two references to the DTP by **9am on 15th January 2021**. Preferably, these documents will be sent directly to the DTP from the referee but can also be supplied by the student. While there is no standard format for references, it is expected that they do not exceed 500 words.

Supervisors are reminded that the final selection will be based on the qualities and performance of the student and will be competitive between all students according to the criteria listed below.

- **Proven academic quality:** normally evidenced by an excellent performance to first degree and/or Master's level but may also be demonstrated by a record of relevant professional practice.
- **Research potential:** evidenced through their supporting statement and supported by performance in research projects at first degree and/or Master's level, or another form of dedicated preparation for research.
- **Personal motivation and commitment:** evidenced through their supporting statement, by their enthusiasm for the project area and how they see it relating to their career goals.
- **Non-biomedical disciplines:** In line with supporting interdisciplinary and quantitative skills, special consideration will be given by the interview panels to non-biomedical applicants, therefore supervisors are encouraged to consider for nomination those candidates who may be disadvantaged by the selection criteria, which may be biased towards biomedical applicants.

Interview performance assessed by:

- **Critical thinking** (assessed through a discussion of a student-selected piece of data).
- **Fit with project** (assessed through justifications around why did they chose the project and their understanding of the key issues in the project).
- **Personal commitment/motivation.**

Candidates will then be interviewed by a centralised DTP theme-based interview panel with representatives from all HEIs. Interviews will be 30 minutes in length and will include a discussion of a piece of research data that the student was involved with. Candidates will then be scored and ranked according to the agreed criteria. To ensure parity of scoring and to allow students to be competitively ranked, moderators will be present across all interview panels.

Interviews will take place on **20th and 21st January 2021.**

The supervisor report, interviews, academic transcripts, references and the application form will all contribute to the panel's considerations for allocating studentships. The Management Board will allocate studentships based primarily on candidate quality ranking, but will also take into account the scientific strategy of the DTP, ensuring balance across themes and strategic skills. Students for whom their first choice project has already been taken will be offered their second or third choice project.

28. HOW WILL THE BALANCE BETWEEN THE THEMES AND INSTITUTIONS BE ACHIEVED?

The overriding goal of the DTP is to recruit excellent students. There is no internal quota and alignment with the research themes should not preclude an excellent project proposal, particularly one which will provide outstanding training in one or more of the vulnerable skills areas. That said, the DTP seeks to recruit students in approximately equal numbers to the three research themes and there are institutional expectations that the allocation of studentships will reflect, to some extent, the relative research grant success that underpins the value of the DTP award.

The final allocation decisions will focus on the quality of the applicants but also take into account:

- balance between themes;
- balance between institutions;
- involvement of early career researchers as supervisors;
- inclusion of high ranking students from non-biological disciplines;
- cross-institutional supervision.

At the project selection stage, some consideration will be given to ensure that the portfolio is not too heavily skewed away from a reasonable representation of theme or institutional balance. Note that balance will be sought over the duration of the DTP, so that imbalances in one year may be redressed later.

We are also monitoring for equality and diversity and will take action as necessary to redress any imbalance.

29. WHO WILL STUDENTS BE REGISTERED WITH?

Students will register for a PhD with the HEI of the lead supervisor. They will be registered with one HEI only, but will be registered as visiting students across the other HEIs to provide them with access to all resources and facilities across the DTP.

The monitoring of progression, appraisal and pastoral support will be provided in the first instance by the relevant PGR office of the home HEI. The GW4 BioMed Management Board, however, will oversee the progress of all students as well, receiving termly reports from the PGR offices and supervisors as well as the students themselves. Where problems arise, the Management Board will seek to provide additional support over and above, but in collaboration with that provided by the local PGR/Doctoral office.

30. FURTHER QUESTIONS.

In the first instance please contact the DTP Hub at GW4BioMed@Cardiff.ac.uk.

In light of more specific institutional or theme-specific queries, please contact the relevant institutional or theme lead at the email addresses below.

Professor Colin Dayan	Director	dayancm@cardiff.ac.uk
Dr Tom Freeman	Bath Academic Lead	tpf24@bath.ac.uk
Dr Anita McGrogan	Deputy Bath Academic Lead	am399@bath.ac.uk
Professor Paul Martin	Joint Bristol Academic Leads	Paul.Martin@bristol.ac.uk
Professor David Sheppard		D.N.Sheppard@bristol.ac.uk
Dr Emma Kidd	Cardiff Academic Lead	Kiddej@cardiff.ac.uk
Professor Ann Ager	Deputy Cardiff Academic Lead	AAger@cardiff.ac.uk
Dr Emma Pitchforth	Joint Exeter Academic Lead	E.Pitchforth@exeter.ac.uk
Dr Kate Ellacott		K.Ellacott@exeter.ac.uk
Professor Phil Taylor	Infection, Immunity and Repair Theme Lead	TaylorPR@cardiff.ac.uk
Dr Sarah Richardson	Deputy Infection, Immunity and Repair Theme Lead	S.Richardson@exeter.ac.uk
Professor Anthony Isles	Neuroscience and Mental Health Theme Lead	IslesAR1@cardiff.ac.uk
Dr Jon Brown	Deputy Neuroscience and Mental Health Theme Lead	J.T.Brown@exeter.ac.uk
Dr Rhian Daniel		DanielR8@cardiff.ac.uk

Dr Abigail Fraser	Joint Population Health Theme Leads	Abigail.Fraser@bristol.ac.uk
Dr Emma Lane	Research Culture and Wellbeing Lead	LaneEL@cardiff.ac.uk