



## 2020 Project Call

### GW4 FRESH FAQs for supervisors

A NERC Centre for Doctoral Training in Freshwater Biosciences and Sustainability

#### 1. HOW MANY STUDENTSHIPS ARE AVAILABLE?

Up to 12 studentships are available for October 2020. The NERC awarded 8 notional studentships to the CDT and the four universities are contributing additional funds to uplift this number to 12.

#### 2. HOW DO I SUBMIT A PROJECT PROPOSAL?

Freshwater bioscience project proposals must be submitted **by noon on Thursday 12th September 2019** using the online survey:

<https://cardiff.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/gw4-fresh-nerc-cdt-project-proposal-2020>

(please note you will get a broken link message if trying to access before the open date of 29 June)

Once the application deadline has passed, a project selection panel comprised of at least one representative from each institution will first score then jointly scrutinise projects and select the top 24 for advertisement. **You will be informed of the outcome of this process by the end of September.**

Only proposals submitted via the online survey by the deadline will be considered. The online survey form cannot be shared, so we advise you to save a version of your answers e.g. in a Word doc, to facilitate collaboration with your team and also in the event the online survey crashes whilst you are completing it (to assist you, a copy of the questions as a Word document is available to download from the [FRESH website](#)). You will be able to save and revise your proposal online before the deadline, but once it is submitted it cannot be amended. If you need to revise your form you must submit a new one and advise us to delete the original, but this cannot be done after the deadline has passed.

Please note that after the selection process has taken place, **there will be no appeals against decisions.** Please therefore familiarise yourself with the aims and themes of the CDT and **ensure you read this FAQ document before completing your proposal.**

*Please ensure you have approval from your home institution to submit your project.*

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

(Timetable subject to change. Supervisor actions in bold)

<b>12:00pm (noon) 12th September 2019</b>	<b>Supervisor project proposal submission deadline</b>
<b>By end September</b>	<b>Supervisors notified of CDT panel selection of projects</b>
14 October	Projects advertised on CDT website
14 October to 13 December	Advertise externally on FindaPhD.com
14 October	Student applications open
9am 13 December	Student applications close
Thursday 19 December	Applications forwarded to Lead Supervisors. Supervisors select which of their candidates they wish to interview.
<b>2 January to 14 January</b>	<b>Applicant/supervisor interviews</b>
<b>5.00pm 17 January 2020</b>	<b>Supervisor submits report to CDT outlining first choice and reserve choice candidates</b>
	Management Board scores shortlist of preferred candidates
23 Jan 2020	Interviewees notified
w/c 17 February 2020	Selection board interviews 24 candidates
Noon 18 March 2020	NERC Student offer acceptance deadline.
1 October 2020	Official funding start date

### 4. DO I HAVE TO APPLY THIS YEAR? CAN I APPLY EVERY YEAR?

The CDT is funded for three consecutive intakes, this is the third intake. Supervisors are only permitted to submit one proposal per year as lead supervisor, and if successful, can only be a lead supervisor in two of the three years. Supervisors can be co-supervisors on an unlimited number of projects in all years.

### 5. IF UNSUCCESSFUL, WILL I BE ALLOWED TO SUBMIT THE SAME PROJECT PROPOSAL NEXT YEAR?

Yes. If you were unsuccessful, you might consider reviewing the selection criteria to strengthen your project, its fit to the themes outlined in paragraph 6, and consider how to improve the advertising text/title to be more attractive.

### 6. DOES THE PROJECT HAVE TO FIT INTO ONE OF THE FOUR THEMES?

In line with NERC requirements for the CDT, all projects must demonstrate a strong **biosciences** component and should address at least one of these four key challenges in managing freshwater resources sustainably:

- 1) Quantify and mitigate emerging risks to freshwater ecosystems that stem from changing patterns, such as changes in behaviours, demography, governance or climate;
- 2) Develop and test next generation sensing and monitoring tools for freshwater ecosystems and ecosystem services; based on recent advances in omics, sensing novel sensor technology, imaging, and big data computing.
- 3) Tackle extinction and impairment in freshwater ecosystems; namely through landscape scale measures to enhance ecosystem health, natural capital and ecosystem service resilience.

4) Create integrated solutions to utilise freshwater ecosystem service sustainably for people and ecosystems, namely through improving our understanding of how multiple pressures interact to impact on freshwater ecosystems, and determining how best to manage these pressures.

Project proposals that sit between the key themes, but offer students outstanding training opportunities, especially in interdisciplinary or industry-led areas, may be considered for funding.

#### **7. CAN SUPERVISORS FROM OUTSIDE THE ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES APPLY?**

Yes. The CDT and NERC are keen to promote interdisciplinary working; we also aim to attract excellent students from a variety of disciplines. However, the project **must** focus on freshwater bioscience and sustainability.

#### **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 and research training than would be the case in a non-CDT studentship. Less experienced supervisory teams may include an experienced supervisor to act in a 'mentoring' role. Please note: projects that require use of specialist resources or techniques should include a relevant supervisor in the team.

#### **9. CAN PROJECTS BE SUBMITTED AND LED BY CEH AND BGS?**

Yes, but they must be co-supervised by one of the four academics partners. The student will be registered at the academic institution of the second supervisor and as the awarding body, the student will be subject to that University's progress monitoring procedures *etc.*

#### **10. HOW WILL THE CDT CORRESPOND WITH THE SUPERVISORY TEAM?**

The majority of communications will be directed via the lead supervisor, who will be expected to cascade the information onto the rest of their team. This is to try and reduce the volume of communication the CDT hub has to process.

#### **11. SHOULD PROJECTS HAVE SUPERVISORS FROM MORE THAN ONE GW4 PARTNER?**

Yes. The CDT 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. We have given an undertaking that **100% of projects will be across two or more GW4 partners or research partners at CEH/BGS.**

Collaboration can mean access to laboratories, specific training, etc., not just co-supervision. However, experience has shown that one of the most effective ways of building collaboration and cohesion across a network and adding extra value to the student experience is through co-supervision.

#### **12. SHOULD NON-ACADEMIC PARTNERS/STAKEHOLDERS BE INVOLVED?**

Yes, and this is compulsory. The CDT seeks to have **100% co-designed projects with end-users**, and **each supervisory team should involve a stakeholder representative**. In some cases, the CDT will consider instead an overseas academic if these are in an ODA country. A stakeholder letter of support (see para 13 below) must be submitted at the time of the project application.

### 13. WHAT TYPE OF STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT ARE YOU SEEKING?

Other than the compulsory supervision role, the CDT expects stakeholder partners to be involved in a number of ways, such as:

- Student supervision and management,
- Access to data, software, resources, equipment, materials or facilities,
- Hosting of the student in the organisation,
- A financial contribution: e.g. a contribution towards the student's research costs (a Research Support Training Grant) e.g. for fieldwork / specialist training needed for the particular project etc.

There is an expectation from the NERC that CDTs become financially sustainable. To demonstrate our commitment, we welcome larger financial contributions too, for example 0.5 studentship is approximate £11,000 p.a. to fund.

*High quality, high engagement stakeholder project proposals will carry premium in the selection process.*

**CASE studentships will be particularly welcome; a CASE studentship includes a minimum contribution of £1,000 per annum to the student's RTSG and a minimum three month placement (up to 18 months) which can be spread over the project lifetime.**

**There is also an expectation that the partner will cover a student's out-of-pocket expenses, such as travel to the site, and provide access to the resources, facilities and equipment necessary to carry out the project.**

At Annex A is a template for a letter of support from stakeholders, which is required as part of your application, and should be submitted to [fresh@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:fresh@cardiff.ac.uk) by the same deadline as the online application.

At Annex B is a template for a CASE letter of support from stakeholders along with detailed information on what is a CASE studentship.

### 14. WHAT IS COVERED BY THE STUDENTSHIP?

Most of the studentships will be of 3.5 years' duration. Our award has been calculated on this basis. Applications for a longer duration will be considered on a case-by-case basis, as the grant allows for flexibility.

The elements of the studentship are: fees (UK/EU rate); UKRI national minimum stipend; RTSG (see para 15)

Please note: 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 best ranked student on the list. Therefore, supervisors will not automatically be able to re-advertise their project for a new student.

### 15. WHAT FUNDING IS AVAILABLE FOR PROJECT COSTS – E.G. CONSUMABLES, TRAVEL, CONFERENCES?

Each studentship will include an RTSG (Research Training Support Grant) as a contribution toward basic consumables and training. NERC notionally allocates £11,000 per student.

As set out in the bid, the FRESH CDT is offering 3.5 year studentships, with the first 6 months involving intensive cohort training. The CDT will therefore retain and centrally manage £2,750 of each student's RTSG to help cover their cohort training expenses.

The remaining fund of £8,250 per student is a contribution towards the research, training and development costs of the student, *over the lifetime of the project*. Project proposals should outline how the research costs

will be met whilst leaving sufficient funds for activities such as conference attendance, overseas opportunities, workshops, advanced training and travel to development opportunities etc. *Note that there are specific rules governing the use of RTSG funds, which cannot be used to purchase consumables or equipment which would normally be expected to be provided by the institution.* The RTSG can be used for the purchase of laptops, or as a contribution towards the cost of a laptop, if standard provision is not considered adequate.

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

The RTSG and any supplement awarded, will be made available to the student and lead supervisor via the host institution. It is the responsibility of the supervisory team to manage the funds across institutions, to ensure costs are within budget. Reimbursement of RTSG expenditure is made annually at the year-end; host institutions/schools claim actual expenditure in arrears from Cardiff University. Co-supervisory institutions will not receive a portion of tuition fees.

#### **17. WHAT TRAINING WILL THE CDT PROVIDE?**

Training details are provided on the CDT website. In addition, please see an extract from the CDT bid available as a download from the website. Please note: engagement with the CDT training programme is compulsory for both students **and** the supervisory team. Continued sponsorship is contingent on that engagement.

Please note that one of the main differences between a studentship in a CDT or DTP and a standalone PhD is that there is a substantial amount of cohort training in competencies and broader skills sets than the student may need for their individual project. This is delivered to students as a group, which also helps the building of a cohesive and supportive community of researchers. Thus training and cohort building events are mandatory for students to attend. Supervisors should recognise this and be supportive of students spending time away from their own research. Therefore, at the first progress monitoring or upgrade point, supervisors need to take account of the fact that as a result of this additional training, CDT students may not have achieved as much in terms of their project outcomes as may traditionally be expected of non-CDT students.

#### **18. 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 modules.

#### **19. SHOULD PROPOSALS INCLUDE FULL COSTINGS?**

We do not need a formal budget for reviewing 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. By submitting a project, you are undertaking to underwrite high project costs that are not covered by the studentship grant, hence a requirement to confirm institutional approval (see para 20 below).

#### **20. HOW WILL PROJECTS BE SCREENED?**

Project proposals should be approved at institutional level **before** being submitted to the CDT. This will be a light-touch screening, primarily to ensure the supervisor/School/Dept. has the operational capacity and the supervisory team satisfies the local supervisory regulations. You will be asked to check a box on the application form to confirm you have received institutional approval before submission of your project proposal eg from a Head of School/Faculty.

Project screening will be made on the basis of scientific and training excellence, and alignment with the strategic priorities of the CDT and will be scored against the following criteria:

1. The suitability of the FRESH supervisory team namely as regards track record and access to facilities;
2. The suitability of the research project in terms of:
  - 2.1. fit to the FRESH priority areas
  - 2.2. clear question defined
  - 2.3. originality and/or significance
  - 2.4. feasibility

In preparing project proposals, supervisors may also want to make reference to the following:

*UKRI Statement of Expectations*

*NERC Success Criteria for Training*

*NERC CDT Call 2017*

## **21. IS IT IMPORTANT FOR THE SUPERVISORS TO HAVE A RECORD OF NERC FUNDING?**

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 NERC, but if there are no NERC grants then the supervisors will want to highlight other funding, publications and indicators that demonstrate the project and supervisory expertise lie adequately within NERC remit.

## **22. HOW WILL PROJECTS BE ADVERTISED?**

The lead supervisor will be informed if their project has been approved. Successful project proposals will be advertised on the Fresh CDT website collectively, and a generic advert placed on FindaPhD.com. Each partner will advertise on their own website and via other advertising channels, e.g. specific project adverts on FindAphD via their institutional licence. Standard text will be provided for applicant guidance, including terms and conditions.

## **23. 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.

**There are UK and EU residency eligibility criteria, which may be revised in light of the BREXIT negotiations.**

The last statement issued on 28 May 2019 by Universities Minister Chris Skidmore made reference to students from the European Union starting courses in England in the 2020/21 academic year, and confirmed that EU students would continue to be eligible for 'home fee status', meaning they will be charged the same tuition fees as UK students and will also be able to access financial support for the duration of their course on the same basis as is available today.

We will therefore continue on a "business as usual" basis, with the understanding that these are uncertain times and the policy may have to be altered in the near future. Our current policy is thus that full awards may be made to UK students and EU students who have been resident in the UK for at least three years. Because of the match-funding provided by the universities, it will also be possible to support a small number of EU students who would otherwise be eligible for fee-only awards, by a legitimate blend of MRC and institutional monies. International (non-EU) students are not eligible for funding.

Students will need to meet pass the English Language requirements of their home institution. The CDT 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. This question is for administration purposes only; the Management Board will not be made aware of applicant's English language skills during the shortlisting process. We have requested this information as a simple check, in particular to encourage applicants to consider their eligibility against the requirements. Successful applicants will still need to meet the requirements of their home institution.

#### **24. HOW WILL CANDIDATES APPLY?**

The CDT application process aims to select the best applicants and will make an 'offer of funding'. The host institution will be responsible for checking eligibility and making an 'offer to study'. The process for applying will be made clear on the advertisements.

Applicants will apply via a centralised online application form direct to the CDT. The application form is hosted on JISC Online-Surveys. After the closing deadline all application forms will be forwarded to the Lead Supervisor of the projects to which the student applied, for shortlisting (see para 25 below).

The application to the CDT is for an 'offer of funding'. In addition, students must also apply for an 'offer to study' (ie for a 'place' at or admission to the 'home' university of their primary academic supervisor, either directly or through the University's Online application form, dependent on institutional practices). Note that for Bath, Bristol and Exeter project applicants this is ONLY necessary if the student is made an offer of funding (awarded a studentship); however, for Cardiff projects this is done before shortlisting by the CDT, and Cardiff applicants will be advised of this *after* they have submitted their CDT application form.

Applicants are encouraged to apply for up to two projects.

#### **25. HOW WILL STUDENTS BE SELECTED?**

Students will select up to two preferred projects. Supervisors of those projects will be required to nominate their preferred and reserve candidate (via a CDT online supervisor report) having shortlisted against the following criteria:

- i) Why the student is keen to pursue a freshwater PhD?
- ii) What experience they have of freshwater research and interdisciplinary work?
- iii) Whether they have the necessary personal and academic skills to complete their PhD project
- iv) Whether the FRESH scheme is suited to the student and is likely to best contribute to their career.

Nominated candidates will be interviewed by a central CDT interview panel, which aims to have representation from each University and our research partners (BGS and CEH).

The interviews, application form and supervisor report will all contribute to the panel's considerations for allocating studentships. The Management Board will allocate studentships based primarily on candidate quality ranking and student choice, but also taking account of the scientific strategy of the CDT, ensuring balance across themes and strategic skills (see para 26).

#### **26. HOW WILL THE BALANCE BETWEEN THE THEMES AND INSTITUTIONS BE ACHIEVED?**

The overriding goal of the CDT is to recruit excellent students. That said, the CDT seeks to recruit students in approximately equal numbers to the four research themes, and there are institutional expectations that the allocation of studentships will result in 8 studentships each over the three intakes.

The final allocation decisions will focus on the quality of the applicants but also take into account: balance between themes; balance between institutions; cross-institutional/industrial supervision; end-user contributions.

Note that balance will be sought over the three years of intake, so that imbalances in one year due to the spectrum of students who applied, may be redressed later. We are also monitoring for equality and diversity and will take action as necessary to redress any imbalance.

## 27. WHO WILL STUDENTS BE REGISTERED WITH?

Students will register for a PhD with the HEI of the primary academic supervisor (less those engaged on a project with CEH or BGS, as outlined in para 9 above). They will be registered with one HEI only, but will have access to other HEI(s) (e.g. through visiting student status) at the other GW4 institutions.

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 Management Board, however, will oversee the progress of all students as well, receiving 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 office.

## 28. FURTHER QUESTIONS?

Please contact the CDT Manager in the first instance at [Fresh@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:Fresh@cardiff.ac.uk) or 029 208 76942 or your Institutional or Operational Lead

NAME	ROLE	EMAIL
Steve Ormerod	<b>Cardiff</b> co-director	<a href="mailto:Ormerod@cardiff.ac.uk">Ormerod@cardiff.ac.uk</a>
Penny Johnes	<b>Bristol</b> co-director	<a href="mailto:penny.johnes@bristol.ac.uk">penny.johnes@bristol.ac.uk</a>
Charles Tyler	<b>Exeter</b> co-director	<a href="mailto:C.R.Tyler@exeter.ac.uk">C.R.Tyler@exeter.ac.uk</a>
Jan Hofman	<b>Bath</b> co-director	<a href="mailto:J.A.H.Hofman@bath.ac.uk">J.A.H.Hofman@bath.ac.uk</a>
Daren Gooddy	<b>BGS</b> Lead	<a href="mailto:dcg@bgs.ac.uk">dcg@bgs.ac.uk</a>
Stephen Thackeray	<b>CEH</b> Joint Lead	<a href="mailto:sjtr@ceh.ac.uk">sjtr@ceh.ac.uk</a>
Dan Read	<b>CEH</b> Joint Lead	<a href="mailto:dasr@ceh.ac.uk">dasr@ceh.ac.uk</a>
Sarah Brasher	<b>CDT</b> Manager	<a href="mailto:fresh@cardiff.ac.uk">fresh@cardiff.ac.uk</a>
Kelsie Patton	<b>CDT</b> Administrator	<a href="mailto:fresh@cardiff.ac.uk">fresh@cardiff.ac.uk</a>



[Partner Address Line 1]

[Address Line 2]

[Address Line 3]

[Postcode]

Date: DD/MM/YYYY

To the FRESH NERC CDT,

On behalf of [Organisation], Please accept this Letter of Support for:

Project: xxxxxxxx

Please include here a brief organisation description, specifying why your organisation is interested in supporting this application.

In support of this application, [Organisation] will provide:

**Individual PhD project support:** We will work with the FRESH researchers to further co-design the PhD projects. We understand that the projects and scholarships will be allocated on a competitive basis. If the advertised project is selected, we will commit to the following contributions over the 3.5 year funded studentship: [please fill in below as appropriate – delete / amend sections as needed]

- *Student supervision and management:* Staff time (Staff member name)
- *Access to [please list data/software/resources/equipment /materials/facilities]*
- *Research support training grant:* Please indicate if you are able to offer a £ contribution towards the student's research costs e.g. for fieldwork / specialist training needed for the particular project etc.
- *Hosting of the student in the organisation:* Please indicate if you are able to host the PhD student at your institution and for how long (per year/in total).

**Cohort support:** We recognise that our involvement in the interdisciplinary training programme is critical and will support this by [please enter any in-kind or explicit support e.g. X days of staff time per year to participate/lead a workshop/training event AND/OR invite the whole cohort to visit our organisation].

[Insert Signature]

[Insert Name]

Named Project Contact for the CDT.

[Insert Date Signed]

Annex B

Stakeholder Address

To GW4 FRESH NERC CDT  
School of Biosciences, Cardiff University  
The Sir Martin Evans Building  
Museum Avenue  
Cardiff CF10 3AX, Wales, UK

Date

#### GW4 FRESH CDT CASE STUDENT AGREEMENT

We at (stakeholder organization) agree to the partnership with GW4 FRESH in respect of the project (Insert project title) with student (insert student name) being formally deemed a CASE studentship under the definition as provided by the Natural Environment Research Council (see below).

We agree to the payment of (insert amount, min £1,000) per annum being paid to the student's Research Training and Support Grant via their Research Organization in support of their training and research costs, and a placement in the company of at least 3 months (which can be a cumulative total of short placements over the full length of the PhD). In addition, we will provide an appropriate supervisor (insert name), and agree to cover the student's expenses incurred in undertaking the placement, including travel and accommodation if required.

Signed

(insert name)

## **NERC CASE Requirements**

It is mandatory that students spend a part of their training (between three and eighteen months) with the CASE partner.

NERC studentships can be delivered in collaboration with non-academic partners from the private, public and third/civil sectors; where studentships are delivered in collaboration they are referred to as 'CASE studentships'. CASE studentships provide the PhD students with enhanced training opportunities by ensuring they spend between three and eighteen months in total with their CASE partner in a workplace outside the academic environment. This placement represents an important contribution to the training of the student and should provide specific training or access to capabilities and expertise not available at the academic partner.

CASE studentships provide outstanding students with access to training, facilities and expertise not available in an academic setting alone. The CASE partners benefit from self-motivated, highly capable PhD students undertaking cutting-edge research relevant to their organisation's priorities and objectives. Both parties are also able to build and strengthen business and research collaborations. CASE studentship projects must provide sound training in research methods, and a stimulating intellectual challenge for the student. The work's impetus and initial requirement should originate from the CASE partner. Both the research organisation and the CASE partner nominate supervisors responsible for overseeing the student's training.

Impact is one of the CASE scheme's main criteria. Studentships should demonstrate the potential for societal or economic impact through collaboration with the CASE partner and the provision of high quality training in research skills.

### **CASE partner responsibilities**

CASE partners are required to supplement the studentship, and thus enhance the research project, by:

- paying at least £1,000 per year to the lead research organisation to supplement the Research & Training Support Grant (RTSG) for the duration of the studentship

- in addition to the cash contribution above, meeting the extra expenses (such as travel and subsistence) incurred by the student visiting and working in the CASE establishment(s)
- contributing in cash or in kind towards necessary materials whilst the student is based at the CASE partner establishment(s).