

ACCE PARTNERSHIPS INFORMATION PACK

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WHAT IS ACCE?

ACCE (Adapting to the Challenges of a Changing Environment) is a doctoral training partnership (DTP) between the Universities of Liverpool, Sheffield and York, the UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology and the Natural History Museum London. It offers doctoral training with funding from the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC), which supports research in all aspects of environmental science in the UK (<https://nerc.ukri.org/about/>). The partnership, which is led by the University of Liverpool, brings together c.30 other partners representing the end-users of NERC research and the likely employers of our graduates. It is the only NERC DTP with an explicit emphasis on the **biological aspects of environmental research**. ACCE started in 2014 and has grown into a multi-disciplinary research training community centred on our c.80 students.

ACCE includes a strong element of **cross-institutional co-supervision of students** and **whole cohort training** to ensure students gain the necessary experience and skills that will enable them to become leaders of the next generation of environmental scientists. Equally important is training in **professional and transferable skills** essential in today's public and private sector workplaces. In terms of scientific remit, the ACCE DTP focusses on four key areas of innovation:

- Securing ecosystems and their natural capital
- Predicting and mitigating impacts of environmental change
- Understanding the dynamics of biodiversity
- Investigating mechanisms of evolutionary change: genes to communities

HOW PARTNERS CAN COLLABORATE

Research and training opportunities within ACCE are expanded and strengthened significantly through interaction with our partners. There are a variety of ways that partners contribute to the ACCE community, from co-designed PhD projects and steering the DTP's science, to offering training events or placements.

The next section is devoted to explaining co-designed PhD projects. Before that, we briefly introduce training and placement opportunities.

TRAINING EVENTS

There is large potential for partners to complement the training that we already offer ACCE students, resulting in even better skilled, and more rounded graduates. For example this could take the form of:

- Careers cafes: Streamed career insight talks which run every couple of months
- Specific skills workshops, according to partner expertise (e.g. species identification; policy and legal knowledge; business acumen; fundraising/ financing etc.)

Remuneration is potentially available to training providers. Any partner with a training suggestion is encouraged to contact Jesamine.Hughes@sheffield.ac.uk who will link you with the most relevant team member.

PLACEMENTS (AKA INTERNSHIPS)

Hosting a placement can be a good starting point if you are interested in ACCE, but not yet able to make a broader commitment

- One of our talented students will add value to a project of up to 3 months, working embedded within your organisation for mutual benefit
- Your ACCE Student will work with you to shape the objectives and parameters of the project, so that both your interests are met

For more details on planning a placement and securing funding for it, see Appendix A.

CO-DESIGNED, COLLABORATIVE PHD PROJECTS

Specific collaborative PhD projects are bespoke projects that aim to produce new scientific evidence that's relevant to your organisation's strategic direction. This tailored approach is for partners who have broad questions they would like to explore and on which they would like to bring in academic expertise.

What does a collaborative PhD project mean? Note the UKRI Vision for Collaborative Training is very broad:

“A first-rate, challenging research training experience, within the context of a mutually beneficial research collaboration between academic and partner organisations in the private, public and civil society sectors”

In this context, a collaborative PhD offers benefits to the student such as:

- Training, facilities and expertise not available in an academic setting alone
- Experience of a diversity of approaches with an applied/translational dimension
- Significantly enhancing future employability

And benefits to the partner organisations, broadly:

- A motivated, high-quality doctoral student undertaking cutting-edge research relevant to your priorities and objectives
- Explore topic areas and collect high quality data for long term benefits to your organisation.
- Get a fresh academic insight to your ideas and shape the future strategy for your organisation

PATHWAYS TO CO-DESIGNED COLLABORATIVE PHD PROJECTS

Importantly, all collaborative PhD projects have the following features in which partners:

- develop the scientific project together with the academic supervisor(s)
- help to shortlist applicants
- guide the project throughout as a co-supervisor

- give the student a unique career-relevant experience including, but not limited to, hosting them for some time

Specifically, we have four collaborative PhD project pathways, which can suit a variety of partner situations. Note that we strongly recommend a formal Collaboration agreement between the partner and the academic institution for all types of project. The four pathways are:

Co-funded projects: 33-50% of funding comes from the partner, with the remainder coming from ACCE. The partner benefits from this level of investment by gaining a high level of influence over the research objectives and direction of the project at all stages.

CASE projects: The partner contributes £1,000 p.a., and undertakes to host the student for a mandatory placement, and co-supervise the student throughout the project (<https://nerc.ukri.org/funding/available/postgrad/focused/industrial-case>).

“Highlight theme” projects: These projects match the end-user focussed annual theme. ACCE will organise a workshop to help match make researchers and partners towards timely and impactful project ideas. Projects that fit the theme benefit from a boost in the likelihood of recruitment, and potential synergies from related projects starting in the same year. Please check Partnerships page on our website for any new details as Highlight themes and activities will differ each year.

Collaborative projects: These flexible projects fall outside the more strictly defined pathways above, but still involve some level of interaction between the academic and partner organisations in the supervision and running of the project. They are particularly useful if the partner is not eligible to be a CASE partner (notably if an overseas or independent Research Organisation [RO]).

COLLABORATION VIA CO-FUNDED PROJECTS

Via this route, the partner contributes 33-50% of the funding for the project. This route is potentially open to any organisation, including research organisations (ROs). As a funder of research via this pathway you may have specific requirements which you can discuss with a potential partner and our Partnerships Offer Jes Hughes (Jesamine.Hughes@sheffield.ac.uk).

The ACCE bid contained proposals for co-funding with a small number of partners. ACCE’s commitment to the partners in the bid will take precedence over new offers, but we can accommodate more as appropriate. The final decision about whether to release NERC funding to match a partner’s funding in any given year lies with the Management Board.

If you offer co-funding, we can offer:

- Extra help to develop the proposal, including finding the best matched supervisor
- 3.5 or 4-year duration projects
- More flexible project start dates
- A simpler recruitment process.

A co-funded project must have a feasible scientific proposal that meets the remit requirements (see below under “How does a PhD project start”), and needs two or more ACCE academic supervisors (at least one from a University).

COLLABORATION VIA A CASE PARTNERSHIP

The CASE (Co-operative Awards in Science and Engineering) scheme aims to promote partnerships between Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and other bodies, which will enhance the training received by the PhD student and will help the student to gain first-hand experience of work outside a purely academic environment.

CASE partners will act as one of the student's co-supervisors and will give a financial contribution towards the costs of the project of £1,000 per annum (formalised by a contract with the hosting ACCE institution). The student should work embedded at the host organisation for between 3 and 6 months within the funded period (which is normally 3.5 years). The detailed objectives of this mandatory placement can be negotiated between the student, the partner and the other supervisors, but we recommend they are planned and conducted in a similar way to the optional placements.

We have a target of 40% of our projects receiving CASE support (NERC expects 25%), so CASE project proposals have a higher probability of being advertised and recruiting than standard projects.

Who can be a CASE partner?

An eligible CASE partner may be any non-academic organisation within the public, private or third sector (see <https://nerc.ukri.org/funding/available/postgrad/focused/industrial-case>). NERC has previously stated that CASE partners should be UK based but international partners can be eligible if they offer the opportunity for students to gain skills that could not be provided by a UK-based equivalent, which could be justified by providing highly specialist skills unique to an organisation's geographical location, facilities, or way of working. Organisations that are eligible to receive UKRI research grants in their own right (so-called Research Organisations, ROs or IROs) are no longer eligible to be CASE partners. If your organisation is affected by these restrictions, you can still plan a *non-CASE collaborative project* or a *Highlight Theme project*

HOW DOES A PHD START? UNDERSTANDING THE ACCE RECRUITMENT PROCESS

Selection occurs based on the quality of both the project idea and the student to be appointed, and it starts approx. 1 year before the student starts their studies.

If you can identify someone with appropriate research interests from ACCE academic partner institutions (Universities of Liverpool, Sheffield or York, UKCEH or NHM) You are welcome to contact them directly to discuss your idea. If not, contact the Partnerships Officer Jes Hughes (Jesamine.Hughes@sheffield.ac.uk) and we will do our best to find you a match.

Develop your project proposal together with the ACCE researcher(s) – this is entered into a short application form. The call for proposals is sent each summer to eligible academic supervisors and it is accompanied by detailed up-to-date guidance on the selection criteria. The deadline for project submission will be in September each year. Projects submitted to ACCE will be checked for eligibility and selected for advertising to students from October to January. The top PhD candidates for each project are selected by the supervisors and collaborative partners. There is then further selection for interview by the ACCE selection panel. Interviews take place in February, and the PhD studentships usually start in October.



Remit of projects: Proposals must be sufficiently original scientifically and feasible such that they are likely to end up with the student producing a successful thesis at the end of 3.5 years. Additionally all projects must align to the ACCE remit and to NERC's remit. NERC's remit is broad and covers all environment based science.

Contacting us for further information

We are available to discuss your objectives and find the best way to put your project together and bring it to life. Support options:

- Contact the ACCE partnerships sub-committee via Partnerships Officer Jesamine Hughes (Jesamine.Hughes@sheffield.ac.uk).
- Visit our website acce.shef.ac.uk/.
- Individual academic supervisors; contact a researcher directly from their institution's website if you are interested in their research as showcased on their profile.

APPENDIX A: FAQ'S FOR HOSTING A STUDENT THROUGH THE ACCE DTP PLACEMENT SUPPORT SCHEME

WHAT CAN ACCE PROVIDE SUPPORT FOR?

ACCE can provide financial support for students undertaking placement opportunities with a range of public research organisations (non-academic), NGOs, small-medium enterprises and other private organisations, charities, trusts, local councils etc. or other parties for up to three months.

Placements may support a range of activities, including, but not limited to:

- Seeding new relationships with partners that might then progress into longer term engagement;
- Improving the student's understanding of how research is used in society and hence help them to design better research;
- Embedding the culture of Knowledge Exchange with external partners, students and supervisors.

The key to a successful work placement is the identification and planning of an opportunity that provides mutual benefits and positive outcomes for both the student and employer.

Many of the most effective placements are based upon project work which the employer is actively seeking to have carried out – work experience has the greatest payoff when both the employer and the student are meeting tangible objectives and needs; the student also needs to be able to reflect on what they have learned during their time with you.

WHAT DOES A GOOD IDEA FOR A PLACEMENT LOOK LIKE?

The placement should be a well-justified enhancement to the Ph.D. training. It should provide relevant training on subject-specific or generic transferable skills identified in their training need analysis or the UK Researcher development framework (<https://www.vitae.ac.uk/vitae-publications/rdf-related/researcher-development-framework-rdf-vitae.pdf/view>).

At the same time, ACCE wishes to incentivise genuine engagement with non-academic end users of research with this scheme. Placements are intended to help students understand how their research and professional skills can be used in a broad but relevant context.

Placements should ideally be discrete projects and they must be well planned and managed.

They should provide experience at a level appropriate for a postgraduate student.

Examples of different types of placements include:

- Conducting surveys, analysing data and producing reports.
- Investigating efficiency and cost-saving activity.
- Managing, delivering a particular service for a period of time.
- Joining specific teams to assist in the delivery of their activities and projects.

Non-research roles such as:

- Teaching – in schools, using the Researchers in Residence scheme, or through other mechanisms
- Policy – developing policy or working in a related setting, such as a government department, local authority, non-departmental public body, professional association, charity, research funder or medical organisation;
- Media – a wide variety of roles are possible here that help students understand the wider societal context of their research. Such placements could include working in science communication roles or other roles in a press office, science publishing company, zoo, museum or botanic garden etc.

HOW IS THE PLACEMENT PLANNED AND FUNDED?

ACCE Students may approach you through one of two routes:

- by approaching you directly to negotiate a placement project opportunity;

- by responding to an advertisement placed on your behalf;

In either case, you may wish to hold a formal interview for the role or discuss a potential project proposal for placement in person with the student, or have a web communication and decide whether it will be mutually beneficial for you and the student.

When you have decided whether you would like to proceed with the placement and provide the opportunity to the student, they will formally apply for financial support through the **ACCE placement support scheme**. Applications are accepted on a rolling basis, and the placement may start at any time of year. You should agree with the student on timing that fits both with your priorities and with managing their PhD.

The student needs to apply for ACCE placement support to the ACCE Management board. The support includes – payment of stipend (at RCUK standard rate) for the duration of the placement, travel and accommodation costs as well as some occasional expenses.

Placement support is awarded on a competitive basis, and the ACCE Management board will evaluate applications based on criteria reflecting the benefit/impact, added value to the student's programme of study, and value for money.

We will require the Placement provider to confirm that they wish to host this student during their placement and, if placement support is granted they will:

- Provide the necessary resources to complete the placement and relevant training: computer/workstation, desk, appropriate personal protective equipment (where necessary; other equipment etc.;
- Take due care for the health and safety of the student and will ensure that the work the intern will undertake has been risk-assessed and that reasonably practicable control measures are in place;
- Make the necessary arrangements in their organisation to accommodate the placement;
- Cover any additional costs regarding the work the student will undertake to complete the tasks described in the placement proposal;
- Enter into a placement agreement with the research organisation to formalise expectations on both sides;
- Provide the Intern with an induction to the organization and the role the Intern will be carrying out.
- Complete a short Host Feedback Report following the placement.

WHAT DOES THE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE ACCE STUDENTS LOOK LIKE?

It will be helpful for both you and the intern if you are clear about how the placement will be managed before the project or placement begins.

Therefore, we recommend that you agree the following:

- The purpose of the project/role and how it sits with the aims of the organisation;

- The deliverables for the role and how they should be produced (for example, a set of marketing materials, regular contributions to a blog, a written report etc.);
- A brief description of the work or the project – Description of the placement, main duties, work plan, including milestones - outlining what the individual will be working on, what colleagues they will encounter and their specialities, what the work environment will be, and identifying the responsible line manager;
- The key objective for the placement – if a desired outcome or set of results is spelt out, the work experience benefits from the clarity that this generates. It can also provide an important frame of reference for the work-based learning which the student will be acquiring through the placement;
- A list of resources/reading that will help them to prepare;
- The student's aspirations for the project, in terms of skills development, career exploration and professional networking.
- The hours and days they will work with you.

For any enquires about partnering with ACCE please contact partnerships officer Jesamine Hughes who will be happy to help. Jesamine.Hughes@sheffield.ac.uk.