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ACCE DTP Studentship Project Proposal Ranking Criteria

ACCE expects to receive 14 studentships per year from NERC. With additional institutional support from Liverpool, Sheffield, and York, at least 22 studentships per year will be available across the five ACCE partners (University of Liverpool, University of Sheffield, University of York, UK CEH, NHM). The number of potential projects greatly exceeds the number of available studentships and project proposals are subject to a review stage prior to advertising. We anticipate advertising 50-60 studentships across the consortium per year. Before submitting a proposal, please review the criteria below, against which all projects will be ranked.

Questions about project proposals should be sent to stephen.cornell@liverpool.ac.uk.

Ranking criteria

1. Fit to ACCE: all projects must align closely to one or more of the four ACCE research themes (detailed at the end of this document). In particular, projects should emphasise the core ACCE focus of the ***biological component of the natural environment***. ***Projects that do not fit closely to the ACCE remit will not be advertised.***

2. ACCE track record: Only one project proposal can be made per lead supervisor per year. You cannot be lead supervisor on more than three non-CASE or co-funded PhD projects within the 5 years of ACCE2 (2019 – 2023 recruitment rounds).

3. Fit to budget: ACCE studentships will receive a total Research Training Support Grant (RTSG) of ~£8,200**.** Only projects that can be completed within this budget, or where sufficient additional research funding has been secured, will be considered.

4. Confirmed CASE funding: NERC requires that a minimum of 25% of ACCE funded projects are CASE funded and ACCE has further committed to 40% CASE or collaborative partners in the next 5 years. NERC requirements for CASE funding are outlined here: https://nerc.ukri.org/funding/available/postgrad/focused/industrial-case/. Confirmation from the CASE partner (e.g. a letter or email correspondence) should be provided.

5. Confirmed co-funding: Co-funding is a commitment from a partner organisation to provide 33-50% of the total costs of the studentship, i.e. fees, full RTSG, stipend. We recognise that ACCE deadlines do not always fit with the co-funding timelines of partner organisations. If you have secured, or have potential co-funding please inform your local ACCE lead at the earliest opportunity.

6. NERC funding track record: the funding that ACCE receives from NERC was secured partly on the basis of the excellent track record of NERC funding across the five partner institutions (University of Sheffield, University of Liverpool, University of York, CEH, NHM). Projects proposed by a lead supervisor with a recent track record of NERC funding (grants/fellowships awarded in the last 5 years as PI or co-I) will be

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favoured over those with no recent NERC funding and those as PI will be weighted more strongly than those as co-I.

7. Cross-institutional supervision: the members of the ACCE partnership have committed to cross-institutional support for at least ⅔ of studentships. Projects which span at least two ACCE institutions will, therefore, be favoured.

8. **Partnership projects.** A core principle of ACCE is to encourage studentships that incorporate genuine collaborations between academics and non-academic, end-user partners. Whereas in previous years we have focused these on defined 'Highlight Topics', this year we are taking partnership PhD proposals from across the breadth of the Adapting to Challenges in a Changing Environment theme (see https://accedtp.ac.uk/research/ for list of research foci covered by ACCE). Proposals that demonstrate clear co-design between an academic or academic supervisory team and a supervisor from a partner organisation will be more likely to be advertised. You will be required to evidence this co-design in the ACCE application. We strongly encourage supervisors who developed an unsuccessful proposal in previous highlight topic rounds to resubmit that proposal. More information about partnership PhDs can be found in the document available at: https://accedtp.ac.uk/partnerships/.

9. Early Career support: ACCE is committed to supporting early career researchers (e.g. independent research fellows, recently-appointed lecturers) in establishing their research groups.

10. International student eligibility. From October 2021 entry international students can make up to 30% of the cohort, across all ACCE partners. Please contact your local ACCE lead to discuss student fees for potential international candidates as this varies amongst the partners. Please note that from October 2021 entry EU candidates are classed as international candidates.

ACCE core research themes as outlined in our 2018 ACCE DTP renewal application

1. Securing ecosystems and their natural capital

Developing sustainable habitats to secure ecosystem functioning and natural capital is urgently needed as global human populations and demands on environmental resources grow. We have strength in research that provides a fundamental understanding of ecosystem services and resources, and how their long-term future can be secured to guide the protection and restoration of multiple ecosystem services.

2. Predicting and mitigating impacts of environmental change

Understanding the consequences of anthropogenic environmental change underpins our ability to conserve biodiversity and ecosystem resilience. ACCE partners study the impacts of environmental change, including climate change, on populations, communities and ecosystems, with approaches ranging from physiological processes within leaves, climate modelling and paleoecology, through changes in species richness and distribution, to global carbon dynamics.

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3. Understanding the dynamics of biodiversity

The mechanisms that generate and maintain global biodiversity underpin our understanding of the impacts of invasive species, climate change, and habitat loss on ecosystem function. ACCE partners develop and use theoretical models, lab populations, experimental microcosms, real-world environments, and phylogenetics to understand ecological and evolutionary dynamics across scales from single-species to interacting communities, and from generational to geological time-scales.

4. Investigating mechanisms of evolutionary change: genes to communities

Understanding how evolutionary responses to changing environments impact the structure and function of communities is a major challenge. We are international leaders at using multi-disciplinary approaches to study evolutionary biology, investigating adaptation of species to rapid environmental change, studying fundamental drivers of genetic diversity including gene flow and horizontal gene transfer, and the genetic basis of symbiosis, competition, co-evolution and co-operation between species and organisms.