

STFC studentships: accreditation of departments' training quality

Criteria for the assessment of accreditation

1. The training environment

There should be a critical mass of STFC-funded or other students within the Department (or equivalent) so that students can benefit from interactions with other students; or, if numbers are low, there should be compensatory arrangements, such as interactions with relevant students in other institutions/departments. STFC would not expect to allocate students to any department where they would not be able to interact in person with at least two other students.

There should be ready access to a relevant seminar/ colloquium series, typically 1 hour per week during academic term time.

The training environment should be enriched for students including interaction between the students and postdocs and postgraduate conferences for interaction between different cohorts of students.

The diversity of the student body and ethos of the training environment should be monitored and any evidence of practices or processes leading to inequality of opportunity should be addressed. The department should be in receipt of either Athena Swan or Juno accreditation or be able to demonstrate equivalent good practice. There should be mandatory supervisor training on equality and diversity.

Resources should be in place for supporting the health and welfare of students including provision of counselling, occupational health services, mental health support, pastoral care and support for students on long term fieldwork and formal mentoring from other students. There should be mandatory supervisor training on harassment.

2. Quality of training

Students should receive a structured programme of induction.

Effective formal training (which may include lectures, training courses, tutorials, summer schools, seminars and workshops) should be made available, either by the department, institution or in other institutions, including:

- at least 40 contact hours of subject-specific training in the first 12 months to provide students with a broad knowledge of their subject area,
- research skills training, including research integrity and avoiding research misconduct
- advanced skills training, involving more in-depth subject-based training or training in specific methods (such as specific techniques, statistics), tailored to the requirements of the student
- at least 70 contact hours of transferable skills training each year, relevant to the broader employability of STFC students. For this purpose, transferable skills training covers training in software, communication and presentation skills, outreach, networking, team working, leadership, time management, entrepreneurship and business skills.

Recognising that students will start their PhDs with a range of prior knowledge, skills and experience, there is no requirement for training to be mandatory in all cases. There should be a flexible approach to training and appropriate systems should be in place to identify and review the training needs of individual students throughout their PhD. Students should be involved in setting the training agenda.

Where possible and appropriate, students should benefit from cohort training within a peer group (by year group and/or subject area) which may include students funded from other sources (e.g. CDT's) and those at other universities, including summer schools and other graduate school activities (e.g. those organised by SEPNET, SUPA).

Provision should be made for the needs of part-time students including training on suitable days and times and for any students located off-site (e.g. working primarily at home and working online).

There should be evidence of monitoring the quality of training provided, including monitoring of attendance and seeking feedback from students.

3. Quality of supervision

There should be arrangements for:

- ensuring that supervisors have the skills, knowledge and time to supervise effectively including refresher training at least every five years
- management of the supervisory workload
- Identifying supervisors' training needs and evaluating and monitoring supervisor performance
- ensuring high quality supervision of students, and evaluation of their training needs, including normally at least weekly contact (either in person or remotely) between students and their supervisor (or if their supervisor is not available, an appropriate alternative)
- Co-supervision/second supervisors
- ensuring that student progress is monitored at key milestones, typically at three months and end of first year, end of second year and pre-submission and underperformance addressed.
- dealing with any issues or problems arising in the student-supervisor relationship including ability for confidential monitoring/feedback from students on supervisors to someone outside of the group
- transferring students to a PhD registration after the first year
- dealing with any issues or problems arising from students underperforming or in particular failing in their first year

4. Careers advice/support

There should be arrangements both at the institution and the department or other organisations such as GRADschools, SUPA, SEPNET for:

- providing appropriate careers advice and for encouraging and supporting students in developing their future careers, both in academic life and non-academic life.
- networking events and workshops with industry involvement

- specific postgraduate careers events
- career readiness training including CV writing, interview techniques and mock interviews with feedback

5. Recruitment

There should be arrangements for:

- ensuring a robust, fair and unbiased process for attracting and recruiting outstanding applicants for PhD places
- providing appropriate training for staff involved in admissions decisions and processes to monitor compliance with requirements.
- ensuring that students are not pressured into accepting early offers (i.e. before 31 March of the intake year)