

STFC STUDENTSHIP ENHANCEMENT PROGRAMME

This is a new scheme aimed at helping departments to retain in research the most promising researchers among completing PhD students. STFC STEP awards are intended to enable STFC-funded students to develop their research further and to increase the impact of their PhDs by delivering outputs, including publications, knowledge exchange and outreach.

The awards will be for a maximum of one year, and departments will be required to issue them for a minimum of six months.

The total funding available for the scheme is sufficient to support up to fifteen 12-month awards a year. Funding will be provided in training grants once every four years and it will be for departments to select which of their students they wish to benefit from the awards. There will be no application or nomination process involving STFC.

Eligibility

The scheme will be open to any STFC-funded student (that is, at least 50% STFC funded), including CASE and project students, as well as quota students.

Students must have completed their Ph.D. in the institution where the STEP award will be held and must have submitted their thesis before taking up an award, but no longer than 6 months before commencing an award.

Value

The recipient of an award must be employed on a salary equivalent to a postdoctoral researcher (on the appropriate University salary scale).

Funding will be set at £40k/award (plus £2k London weighting), to cover up to a year's worth of salary costs, travel, equipment, training and/or other costs at the discretion of the department.

Within the restrictions outlined here, the funding may be used flexibly, for example to provide more or less funding for an award; and may be used in conjunction with funding from other sources, providing the STFC funding constitutes at least 50% of each award.

The funds available for STEP within the training grant may be enhanced by up to 20% with funds from elsewhere within the training grant.

However, the STEP funds may not be used to fund or part-fund additional studentships or to help meet the travel costs of current students or for any other purpose than STEP.

STFC classes the awards as training, so are not funded under FEC.

Reporting

Departments will be required to provide information about the allocation of STEP awards in each year for monitoring purposes and to report at the end of each award on the amount of funding allocated, what it was used for, outputs obtained, next career destination of the recipient and a short report from the recipient on benefits obtained. Details of the reporting requirements will be provided later.

Funding issues

The funding starts in financial year 2012/13, while the next batch of training grants run from October 2011 to October 2015. Initially, therefore, we will include 3.5 years' worth of funding for STEP (equivalent to ~52 12-month awards) within the training grants (covering the period April 2012 to October 2015).

Funds will be profiled across the latter 3.5 years of the grant, but departments may deploy the funding at any time within the grant period.

The scheme will be reviewed within three years, using the reports on each award, to establish whether it is meeting its objectives. If it continues into a second wave, the training grants starting in October 2015 will contain funding for four years' worth of STEP awards.

Allocation process

STEP awards will be allocated *pro rata* to the estimated number of completing quota students in each department during the period April 2012 to April 2015, rounded to the nearest whole number. The estimate will be based on past quota allocations to each department. Assuming an average 3.5 years/Ph.D., this equates to students starting between October 2008 and October 2011.

This of course means that departments with relatively few students will not, at least in the first round, qualify for any STEP awards because their fractional allocation will fall below 0.5. We will keep a record of these fractional allocations and review the position of small departments at the 3-year review point.

Departments were informed of their allocations in July 2011.