

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 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 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. In this context the achievement of Project Juno and/or Athena Swan accreditation is encouraged and is likely to become a criterion in future accreditation exercises.

2. Quality of training

Students should receive a structured programme of induction.

There should be provision for effective formal training (which may include lectures, training courses, tutorials, summer schools, seminars and workshops) 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 10 contact days of transferable skills training each year, relevant to the broader employability of STFC students. For this purpose, transferable skills training covers training in software engineering, 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.

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 and those at other universities, including summer schools and other graduate school activities (eg those organised by SEPNET, SUPA).

Provision should be made for the needs of part-time students and for any students located off-site (eg working primarily at home).

There should be evidence of monitoring the quality of training provided, including 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.
- 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).
- ensuring that student progress is monitored and underperformance addressed
- dealing with any issues or problems arising in the student-supervisor relationship
- supporting the health and welfare of students
- Identifying supervisors' training needs and evaluating and monitoring supervisor performance

4. Careers advice

There should be arrangements for providing appropriate careers advice and for encouraging and supporting students in developing their future careers, whether in academic life or elsewhere.

5. Recruitment

There should be arrangements for ensuring a robust, fair and unbiased process for attracting and recruiting outstanding applicants for PhD places, including appropriate training for staff involved in admissions decisions and processes to monitor compliance with requirements.