

MRC DTP flexible supplement guidance

The flexible supplementary funds are available for all MRC-funded studentships registered at the DTP. Supported use of this flexible supplement fall broadly into the following areas:

1. **High cost training**, which could include (but does not exclusively cover):
 - advanced *in vivo* training¹
 - imaging training
 - skills priority training
 - bioinformatics training
 - modelling training
 - clinical training
2. **exceptional training opportunities**, which could include (but does not exclusively cover):
 - overseas fieldwork
 - internships/placements
 - laboratory visits/training
 - training in new advanced research skills
 - industrial collaborations
3. opportunities to provide training in partnership **working with industry** or at the **interdisciplinary interface**, which could include (but does not exclusively cover):
 - internships/placements
 - collaborative training
 - travel/logistical support for cohort building activities in this area
 - attracting individuals from another discipline into MRC studentships
4. **transitions from PhD** for outstanding candidates to increase competitiveness in applying to positions within and beyond academia, following thesis submission, which could include (but does not exclusively cover):
 - travel to potential laboratories for visits
 - internships/placements

The funds should not be used to:

1. Provide funding for more studentships – the funds may not be used to award additional studentships but must be used to better support existing students.
2. Extend existing studentships to delay submission of thesis (unless there has been a substantial training period or time out of programme – see FAQs below).
3. Provide funding for standard experimental costs such as consumables or equipment.

Further guidance is provided in the FAQs (at the end of this document) regarding the types of activities which could be supported by the flexible supplement.

Reporting flexible supplement use

Annual reporting of the flexible supplement award is required by the MRC. When reporting this use for a specified award period, all **actual spend and committed funds** should be included to allow accurate evaluation of what funds have already been accounted for and the remaining available, so these data are comparable across DTPs. See FAQ Q2 and 3 for additional information.

¹The flexible supplement replaces the ‘*in vivo* strategic skills awards’, which provided between £5-10k per year research training costs in addition to the standard Research Training Support Grant for studentships with advanced integrative *in vivo* mammalian research training.

MRC DTP flexible supplement – Frequently Asked Questions

1. Who can benefit from a flexible supplement award?

This is a supplement targeted to the entire DTP and all MRC-funded students registered at the DTP University, which would include:

- Core DTP students (independent of grant reference – e.g. they may be funded through a past DTP)
- MRC industrial CASE students²
- National Productivity Investment Fund studentships
- MRC Unit, Institute, Centre or Partnership students
- MRC Clinical Research Training Fellows

2. What is the deadline for spending the flexible supplement funds?

The flexible supplement awards are allocated per intake year but are linked to the DTP award and corresponding end date. **All flexible supplement funding should be allocated/spent by the end date of the DTP award.** Therefore, there is flexibility in how each DTP budgets their allocated flexible awards; a flexible supplement award is not restricted to that cohort intake year, nor within the award year. However, it is worth noting that the flexible supplement awards are available on a year-to-year basis and due to variable budget restraints and modelling of the eligible studentship population, may not always be awarded annually and may fluctuate in size.

3. What type of reporting will be required for flexible supplement use?

Annual reporting of the flexible supplement award will be required by the MRC. We will be seeking information at the level of the individual, e.g.: student name, type of MRC funding, JeS ID, type of award, brief description of what was provided, impact of the award (as far as can be shown or expected impact), amount awarded, next destination information (where relevant).

4. Can the funds be used to support students taking online learning courses?

Support can be provided for training in new research skills and at the interdisciplinary boundary. Online learning may be an effective way for students to gain skills in maths and computing techniques that are relevant to model and analyse biological systems.

5. Can the funds be used to pay for cohort building activities or cohort-wide training?

The DTP should regularly organise cohort building activities, with costs for these expected to be covered by the DTP. If cohort building activities were relevant to interdisciplinary training or industrial collaborations, and travel was required between sites, the flexible supplement could be used for covering these costs and reported under the 'working with industry/interdisciplinary interface' category.

External training courses can be delivered by external bodies, if such training courses/expertise cannot be provided by the DTP. Costs for such essential high-cost training courses could be covered by the flexible supplement. This supplement would not be expected to cover generic training, or that delivered internally.

² Consideration should be given to the additional financial contribution the non-academic partner will be providing.

6. Can the funds be used to support attendance at conferences?

Attendance of conferences within the student's scientific field would not normally be considered an exceptional training opportunity and we would therefore not expect the DTP flexible funds to be used in this way. MRC studentship funding already includes some support for conference attendance (see our [website](#) for the current **minimum** stipend and allowance every student should be provided).

In certain circumstances, attendance at an interdisciplinary conference, removed from a student's area of research, may be appropriate (as it may address training at the interdisciplinary interface). However, the DTP holder will need to balance impact of conference attendance against other opportunities (such as an internship/placement) when prioritising which requests to support.

7. Can the funds be used to support overseas visits/internships/training courses?

Financial support for overseas trips would be considered an appropriate use of flexible supplement funds if this contributed to the development of the student, whether that be training/skills-related or creating data with novel techniques/equipment not available in the host centre or contributing to sample collection.

8. What can be supported under the transitional support category?

The flexible supplement should not be used to extend existing studentships to complete their thesis or bridge the time period between PhD and their next position. Awards under this heading should increase the competitiveness of outstanding candidates for the next stage of their career, whether that be an academic or non-academic post-doctoral position. This might include learning a new technique, becoming skilled on novel equipment, developing a new avenue of research beyond their PhD project, attending overseas laboratory visits or an internship/placement between thesis submission and viva. Time and funds associated **primarily** with preparing publications would not normally be considered appropriate for use of flexible supplement funds.

9. Can the funds be used to extend a PhD due to extensive training or internship/placements?

A studentship can be extended if extensive training of the PhD and/or an internship/placement not related to the PhD has occurred. Extensive training may be required at the start of a studentship (for example, background skills/knowledge required due to an interdisciplinary background) which would merit extension of the studentship. Internships/placements which would merit extension of the studentship would be expended when these are not directly related to the PhD. For internships/placements aimed at providing transitional support, these should occur post-thesis submission and therefore the studentship would not be required to extend.

10. Can the funds be used to support an activity which does not align with the described reporting categories?

The suggested categories of flexible supplement use provide a guide for potential uses of awards but are not exhaustive. If a proposed flexible supplement activity does not appear to align with the described categories, but it would provide the student with valuable additional training and/or experience, please contact us at Students.Students@mrc.ukri.org to discuss further.