

Call for PhD Projects for September 2024 Entry

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Call summary

Welcome to the FoodBioSystems 2023-24 call for doctoral research projects across Agri-Food. The DTP expects to award a maximum of 25 projects in this cohort.

PhD students will receive a full UKRI studentship (including stipend, university fees at UK home student rate, training and contribution to conference costs) for four years. The studentships will be open to individuals eligible for UK home student status and to international students; however the maximum number of studentships that can be awarded to international students in 2023 is seven.

Please read this guidance document before submitting your proposal.

Call timeline

Action	Date/Deadline
Pre-call information released	19 July 2023
Call for project proposals opens	Monday 14 August 2023
Call for project proposals closes	16 October 2023 (noon GMT)
Projects sent out for review	26 October 2023
Selection Committee meets to identify which projects will be advertised	w/c 20 November 2023
Management Committee reviews and ratifies Selection Committee decision	w/c 20 November 2023
Call for student applications opens	4 December 2023
Closing date for student applications	Monday 22 January 2024 (10.00 am GMT)
Shortlisting opens on Good Grants application portal to supervisory teams	Tuesday 6 February 2024
Deadline for supervisors to identify shortlisted candidates	Tuesday 20 February 2023 (noon GMT)
Student interview window	21 February – 6 March 2024
Deadline for supervisors to notify DTP Office of interview outcomes	7 March 2024
Selection Panel review shortlisted applications	21 February – 6 March 2024
Selection Committee meets and confirms awards	14 March
Management Committee ratifies awards	18 or 19 March 2024
Award/rejection letters sent to shortlisted candidates	25 March 2024

Applications

Applications (including resubmitted projects from previous rounds) must be made on the FoodBioSystems DTP applications portal <https://foodbiosystemsdtg.grantplatform.com>. This will close at noon 16 October 2023. Proposals that are submitted by email will not be processed or reviewed.

BBSRC remit

Project proposals must align with the [BBSRC remit](#) and hence be in one or more of the following themes: [Bioscience for an integrated understanding of health](#); [Bioscience for Sustainable Agriculture and Food](#) (including the [Agriculture and Food Security Research Strategic Framework](#)); [Bioscience for renewables & clean growth](#), [Food, Nutrition and Health](#), [Transformative Technologies](#) and [Understanding the Rules of Life](#). Further information about BBSRC research topics is on the [BBSRC website](#). Out of remit projects will not be eligible for funding.

Scientific scope of projects

Our vision is to develop the next generation of bioscientists with in-depth knowledge and technical expertise of food systems and biological processes across the Agri-Food system from pre-farm to post-fork. The scientific scope of this project call reflects our broad remit and, we are running an **OPEN CALL** where proposals can be submitted across the whole agri-food system.

We therefore anticipate projects within (but not limited to) the following research areas: across the food chain projects, alternative food systems, animal health and livestock agricultural systems, consumer focused projects, decarbonising food systems, food safety (microbial or other), food security, gut microbiota, nutrition (human), plant / crop systems, soil systems.

Joint studentships with Diamond Light Source

We are particularly interested to receive project proposals that have been developed as joint studentships with our partners at [Diamond Light Source](#). Diamond provides high brightness X-ray, infrared and ultra-violet radiation for the investigation of materials and processes at the nano to micron scale. Diamond is ideally suited to investigating hierarchical structures and chemical fingerprints within agricultural systems relevant to food or human nutrition. More information about Diamond's instruments, techniques and capabilities is available from the [website](#).

Joint studentships (funded 50% by the DTP and 50% by Diamond) will require separate proposals to Diamond and FoodBioSystems DTP. Please check the [Diamond](#) website for information about the benefits of submitting a jointly funded proposal and details of their application process. As of 31 August 2023, Diamond have not released call details for 2024 [PhD studentships](#) but they anticipate updating this soon.

Applicants submitting joint proposals will have the option, on the DTP application form, to provide extra information so that the DTP can consider the proposal if Diamond does not award a joint studentship. We will ask for details on how the project will be modified without Diamond as a partner and for an amended budget that does not include the Diamond contribution. The modified proposal can include proposed beamtime at Diamond under the usual arrangements.

Supervisor eligibility

- The lead supervisor must be from one of the 6 academic partners (Aberystwyth University, Cranfield University, Queen's University Belfast, University of Reading and University of Surrey) and meet BBSRC PI-status. The student will be based at the host department of their lead supervisor and registered as a PhD student at that university.
- The second supervisor (co-supervisor) must be from another partner university.
- It is important that the lead supervisor has an employment contract that exceeds the length of the studentship (i.e. ending no earlier than 30 September 2028).
- At least one of the supervisors must have successfully supervised at least one doctoral thesis to completion (as lead supervisor).
- Each supervisor **can lead on only one proposal per year**, they can however be co-supervisors on other proposals.
- Each student must have at least two supervisors and a maximum of four (including any supervisor from a CASE partner where this is relevant to the project).
- Proposals with lead supervisors who have NOT been in receipt of two FoodBioSystems DTP studentships in the last two consecutive years (i.e. studentships awarded and accepted in 2022 and 2023) will be given priority.

Funding partners

As in previous years, we encourage project proposals that involve either CASE or match funding partners.

CASE Studentships: Where the project is submitted for a CASE Studentship the partner must be specified and a letter of support (LoS) submitted. The LoS must include a statement of the financial contribution from the company and confirmation that the company will cover all accommodation and travel expenses for the student whilst on placement for a minimum of 3 months during the PhD.

The minimum financial contribution by a CASE partner is £1400 per annum (where number of employees >50) for 4 years. This co-funding contributes to the research support element of the studentship and is not paid to the student directly. CASE partners may also choose to top up the student stipend, this can offer an incentive to attract applicants.

Generally CASE partners need to have a UK base. In exceptional circumstances where the student will gain skills not available in the UK they can undertake their placement overseas.

Further information about requirements for CASE studentships is available from the [FoodBioSystems Consortium Teams space](#).

Match funded studentships: We also welcome applications that include non-CASE partners who offer match/part funding (including Diamond Light Source).

If you have any questions about eligibility of project partners please contact the DTP Liaison Manager (FBSDTPpartners@cranfield.ac.uk).

Equality Diversity and Inclusion

Please state in the proposal if the project is expected to involve a considerable length of time at the co-supervisor's university. Please include details of how any additionally incurred costs will be funded and outline a provisional plan to support students who may have restrictions in moving location.

Part time registration

All BBSRC funded studentships must be offered on a part time basis in addition to full time registration. To comply with this rule, all FoodBioSystems DTP projects will be advertised as available for part time registration. Minimum registration is 50% FT and the studentship end date will be extended to reflect the part-time registration. In keeping with the DTP's aim to support a healthy work-life balance, the combined paid work and PhD study hours of part time registered students must not exceed the maximum 48 hours per week outlined in the UK Government's working time directive (<https://www.gov.uk/maximum-weekly-working-hours>).

Budget

The project consumables budget request and justification must be provided in the application form.

Project Selection

The Selection Committee will be formed from the DTP leadership team (Professor Lisa Methven (DTP Director), Professor Andrew Thompson (DTP Co-Director), one PhD admission tutor from each university, a representative from the UoR Graduate School and three representatives from Associate / Affiliate partners. The DTP Manager and /or DTP Liaison Manager will be in attendance to support and record decision making at the meeting.

Assessment and selection process

- To continue to advertise more projects than we will finally fund (up to 2 x studentships to award). This is essential as each year we, unfortunately, find that some projects do not attract applicants that are eligible to fund, or that score above the funding threshold.
- To ensure balance of project distribution across DTP partner universities, we anticipate advertising the following distribution of adverts: Aberystwyth University (9), Brunel University (2), Cranfield University (7-8), Queen's University Belfast (7-8), University of Reading (11-12), University of Surrey (7-8). However, the distribution of the advertised projects will remain dependent on the quality of the projects submitted.
- All project proposals will be checked to ensure that all required information has been provided and that the supervisors are eligible for DTP funding. The supervisory teams will be given 48 hours to respond to any requests for missing information. Proposals with missing information will not be forwarded to the selection panel for review.
- The proposals will be assessed by four reviewers who have no conflict of interest (i.e. they are not on the supervisory team, related to someone on the supervisory team or have no direct line management responsibilities for the lead supervisor).
- All projects will be assessed as either *Yes* or *No* in terms of their fit to BBSRC remit and only projects within remit will be considered for funding.
- Projects will be rated for each of the following criteria:
 - Scientific excellence based on the research proposed
 - Scientific fit to the aims of the FoodBioSystems DTP
 - Training opportunity and provision (for example research training, cross disciplinary skills). Please note it is **not** compulsory for students to spend extended periods of time at the co-supervisor's institute. The type of involvement of the partner university can vary substantially depending on the project.
 - Supervisory team – the added value each supervisor brings to the project.

- Involvement of external partner(s) – for example through CASE or otherwise
- Potential impact of the research

The fields used in the assessment are clearly indicated in the relevant sections of the online proposal form.

- An overall assessment score will be applied to each proposal and a small uplift will be applied for CASE partnerships and match funded projects (up to 50% of the studentship, equivalent to approximately £53,000 over four years).
- Projects that have achieved a score over an agreed funding threshold will be selected for advertisement based on a ranked list for each university.
- If fewer projects than anticipated meet the funding threshold for advertisement from an individual university, projects will be selected from the remaining partner universities based on the overall ranking scores.

Advertising information

- Selected projects will be advertised on Find a PhD.com and other online platforms including the FoodBioSystems DTP and BBStem (Black British Professionals in STEM) websites.
- The proposal submission platform will request information for adverts required for the FindAPhD.com website and this will also be formatted into a standardised layout for inclusion on the FoodBioSystems website. The FindAPhD.com adverts do not include images. If you wish to include images in your advert on FoodBioSystems website, please submit a separate document using the [template](#) that you can download from the FoodBioSystems Consortium Teams space.
- As part of the DTP to widening diversity in the student cohort, please ensure that your advert information is culturally sensitive, does not use jargon and also includes the following information:
- Project description: A brief project description in language aimed at a non specialist audience. This should explain the context and the purpose of the project and also provide an overview of the work that the student will do during their studentship.
- Training opportunities: A brief description of the skills/techniques that the student will develop and the training opportunities offered by the project partners.
- Student profile: Please give a brief description of the must-have qualities you are looking for in the student who carries out this project and the degree subjects that are most relevant to the project. Please note the minimum entry requirement for a FoodBioSystems DTP is a BSc honours degree at upper second class level (or equivalent). We do not ask for a 1st class honours degree or Masters qualification.

Offers on studentships will only be made to the best students so your project needs to draw strong applications. Last year the number of applicants per project varied between 2 and 97. A clearly worded and attractive advert is crucial to getting enough potential students applying to your project.

Selection Committee Contacts

The DTP Selection Committee member at each institute can provide more information to support development of project proposals. They have all feedback from previous project submissions. Selection Committee members at each institute are:

Brunel University: Valentina Stojceska	Queens University Belfast: Katerina Theodoridou
Aberystwyth University: Paul Shaw	University of Reading: Anisha Wijeysekera
Cranfield University: Guy Kirk	University of Surrey: Ruan Elliott

Other information

Call Information

Information for the call is held within the Teams space [FoodBioSystems Consortium](#), where the [General Channel](#) includes [profiles](#) of academics at DTP partner universities, a [word document](#) for drafting proposals a list of non-academic [DTP partner organisations](#) and information about [Case Studentships](#). If you are unable to access to this Teams space please email foodbiosystems@reading.ac.uk.

DTP Office Contacts

foodbiosystems@reading.ac.uk – enquiries relating to project remit, supervisory teams, EDI, proposal submission portal

FBSDTPpartners@cranfield.ac.uk – enquiries relating to projects with non-academic partners (CASE and match funding).