

Project Proposal Webinar

19/06/2025

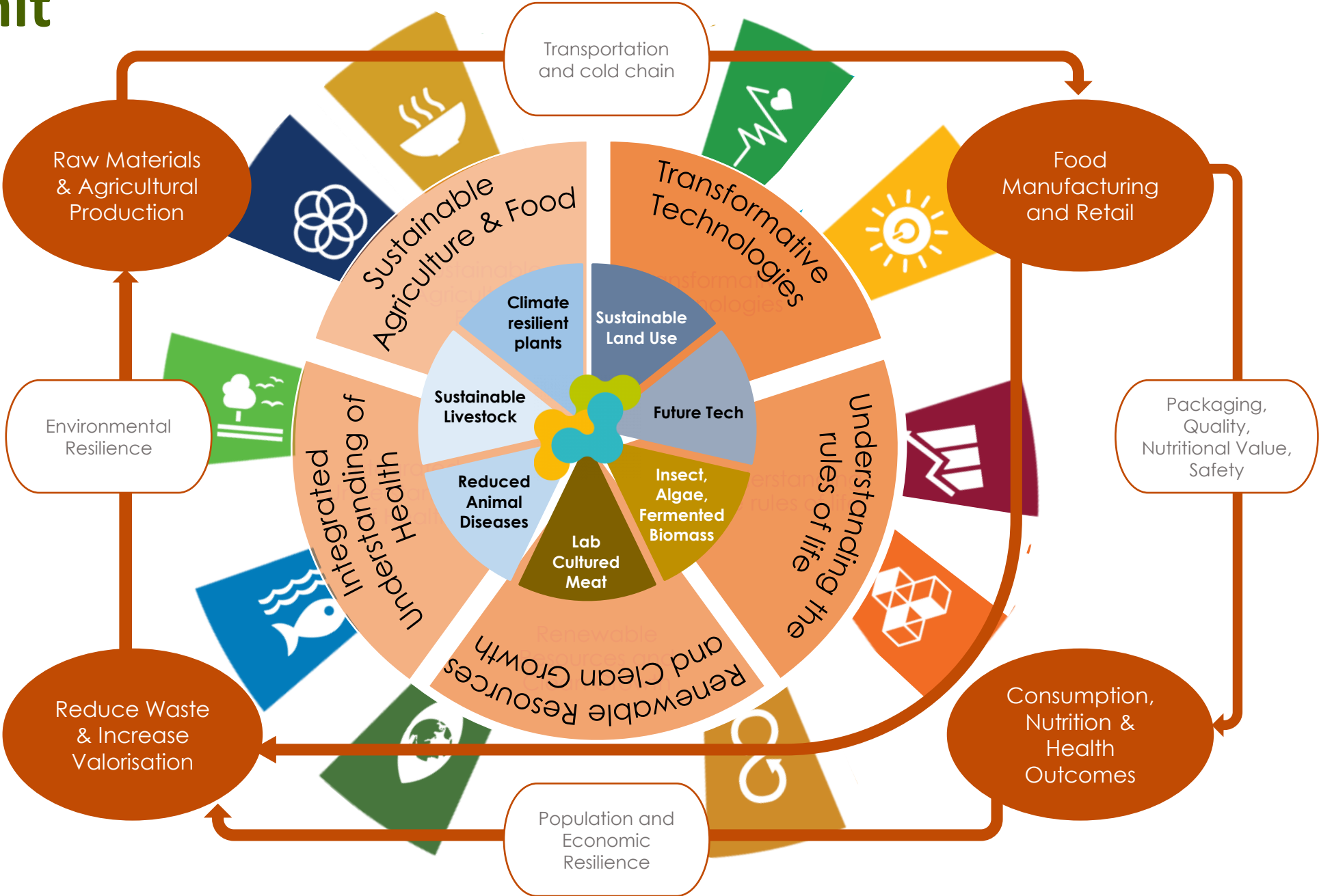
Agenda

- FoodBioSystems remit
- Proposal submission and selection processes
- What makes a strong studentship project proposal
- Industry Partners, Part-funded and CASE studentships
- Resubmitting previous proposals
- How the DTP supports proposal development
- Your proposal is selected – what next?
- Q&A

Our Vision

- To develop a diverse cohort of scientists and innovators
- With in-depth scientific knowledge, advanced technical capability & food systems understanding
- To address the challenges of sustainability, efficiency and safety of food systems
- To deliver better nutrition
- To strengthen resulting health and economic resilience of our society

Our Remit



Our Remit

All proposals must be within agri / food / nutrition area.

Projects within (but not limited to) the following research areas:

- alternative food systems
- biotechnology for health
- combatting antimicrobial resistance
- crop health
- farmed animal health and welfare
- food safety (microbial or other)
- lifelong health (involving model organisms, microbial or animal systems in areas of intersection between lifelong health and agri-food-nutrition)
- nutrition
- one health (e.g. research to combat infectious diseases such as fascioliasis, salmonella, or E.coli)
- precision agriculture and smart technologies
- reducing waste
- sustainable agricultural systems
- understanding and exploiting genomics

Summary of Project Submissions and Successes in the 2024/5 Round

High Submission & Success Rates:

- Sustainable agricultural systems: 22 submitted, 10 awarded (22:10), success rate 45%.
- Other agricultural projects: 15 submitted, 5 awarded (15:5), success rate 33%.
 - ✓ crop health (4:1)
 - ✓ farmed animal health & welfare (8:3)
 - ✓ understanding and exploiting genomics (3:1)

Low Success Rates:

- Nutrition: 11 submitted, 2 awarded (18%).
- Food safety (incl Microbial): 6 submitted, 1 awarded (17%).
- Combatting Antimicrobial Resistance: 5 submitted, 1 awarded (20%)
- Lifelong Health: 4 submitted, 0 awarded
- Reducing Waste: 5 submitted, 1 awarded

Low Submission Rates:

- Alternative Food Systems: 1 submitted, 0 awarded

No Priority call for 2025/26
However, we are interested to support more projects in the areas where we have had lower submission or lower success rates in 2024/25

2025 recruitment Outcome of Accepted Offers

University	Total no of submitted projects 2025	Advertised proposals 2025	Rejected proposals 2025	Annual Anticipated studentships to be awarded	SC agreed award 2025 allocation	Accepted studentships 2025 (% success rate within HEI)
Aberystwyth	21	8	13	3.5	4	4 (19%)
Brunel	3	2	1	1.5	1	1 (33%)
Cranfield	5	5	0	3.5	4	4 (80%)
Lincoln	2	2	0	2	w/d	0
Queen's	12	7	5	3.5	4	4 (33%)
Reading	26	9	15	5.5	6	6 (23%)
Surrey	13	6	7	3.5	4	3 (23%)
Total	82	39	43	23	23	22

- 1 studentship not filled at Surrey because 1st applicant and reserve declined
- Of the 22 student 6 are International (27%)
- Agreed not to use 2nd reserve list unless n<22

Project Submission

Time-line

Action	Date/Deadline
Pre-call information shared	Mid-July
Partner event at Kew Gardens	Thursday 11 September
Call for project proposals opens	Monday 8 September 2025
<u>Proposal submission site</u> opens	Monday 8 September 2025
Call for project proposals closes	Monday 20 October (noon GMT)
Projects sent out for review	29 October
Selection Committee meets to identify which projects will be advertised	w/c 17 November
Management Committee reviews and ratifies Selection Committee decision	w/c 24 November
Proposal outcomes shared with project teams	w/c 24 November

Project Selection

- We check all required information there & supervisor eligibility
- Proposals assessed by 4 reviewers who have no conflict of interest
- Every project is assessed by at least one person with subject specific expertise
- We check fit to BBSRC forward looking themes (<https://www.ukri.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/BBSRC-01122021-Forward-Look-for-UK-Bioscience.pdf>).
- Mean score used, uplift applied for CASE partnerships and match funded projects within Institutes
- At Selection Committee meeting:
 - Funding threshold agreed
 - Projects with scoring queries discussed
 - Projects scoring over the threshold placed on a ranked list for each university.
 - Projects selected for advertisement (up to the maximum for each university) based on their rank order.
 - If fewer projects than anticipated meet the funding threshold for advertisement from an individual university, projects are selected from the remaining partner universities based on the overall ranking scores.

2025 Project success rates

HEI	Number of project proposals			Number of Advertised Projects				
	Submitted	Advertised	Rejected	Awarded	Declined (no suitable reserve)	Reserve list (home students)	Reserve list (international students)	No appointable candidate
AU	21	8	13	4	2	2	1	0
BU	3	2	1	1	0	1	0	0
CU	5	5	0	4	1	1	0	0
UoL	2	2	0	w/d	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
QUB	12	7	5	4	0	1	2	0
UoR	26	9	15	6	0	1	2	0
UoS	13	6	7	3	1	0	0	2
Total	82	39	43	23	4	5	5	2

- We need to advertise more projects than there are available studentships. This year, 3/5 home student status reserve candidates were offered a studentship.
- Higher ranked projects are more likely to be allocated a studentship
- Projects that attract mostly or exclusively international candidates have a lower chance of success

What Makes a Strong Project Application?

- Remember it is a Studentship **Training** grant, not a research project proposal
 - The training for the student is top priority
- As a DTP/DLA we are measured on many different criteria
 - The sections we ask you to submit reflect this
 - **All sections** need to be strong
- There are limited funds for consumables (unless you have secured consumables elsewhere) so what you plan to do must be **realistic**.
- A project that gets through to **advertising** needs to then attract applicants, and ideally UK/home fees status applicants (we have 30% cap on international students):
 - Make sure the advert is clear (limit jargon & overly technical terms)
 - Make it attractive (why would an applicant want to choose this)
 - Make sure it is clear what skills they need and what skills they will gain

What Makes a Strong Project Application?

The Sections (Software is GoodGrants; we also provide a drafting document in word):

- Scientific Research Proposal (600 words)
- Indicate which BBSRC theme, justify that (100 words)
- Describe and justify the project's fit with FoodBioSystems science themes (150 words)
- Describe the novel aspects of this project (200 words)
 - novelty in the science, and/or novel application of a technique to the proposal's research field
- Potential impact of project on the wider UK food system (200 words)
- Details of the planned supervisory team profile (150 words)
- Project specific training opportunities (200 words)
- Provide an outline of the project supervision plan (150 words)
- Outline how Equality Diversity and Inclusion have been considered in relation to the design and delivery of this project? (150 words)
- Budget
- Gantt Chart (separate 1 page)

Note: Word counts subject to change until call released

Strength of Scientific Proposal

The proposal needs to:

- have clear research aims
- be important and timely
- aim to answer a clearly identified research question
- have objectives that clearly support the research question
- show how the research objectives will be met

Together the scientific proposal & Gantt chart should demonstrate:

- the project is achievable
- the objectives can be met within the periods specified on the Gantt chart

Potential strengths & weakness in other sections

Details of the planned supervisory team profile:

- Just showing how strong each member's research profile is, **that's not enough**
- Much better to say what skills they bring to the project and complement the students experience
- Must demonstrate the supervisory team members' track record in supervising students
- It's also great to include (where appropriate):
 - ECRs (if they are leading that's great, but then show their support, mentoring & training)
 - Research technicians and other research staff (if they are going to contribute then show that)
 - The diversity of the team

The project supervision plan:

- This is crucial
- It needs to be realistic AND it needs to be enough
- It needs to really show how the team will they will work together to support and train the student

Potential strengths & weakness in other sections

Project Specific Training Opportunities:

- Demonstrate multidisciplinary training
- Ensure the project specific training is integrated into the Gantt chart
- Identify and justify training requirements and/or opportunities that are specific to this project
- Highlight any project/ subject area opportunities for placements, internships or experiential learning
- **Do not just reiterate the DTP cohort training plan !**

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion consideration for design and delivery of this project? :

- **In weaker project proposals this can read as “a token gesture”,** for example just stating the diversity within the supervisory team (female/male, nationalities etc)
- **In stronger proposals then equality, diversity and inclusion are embedded throughout,** such as:
 - the research topic and outputs reflect diversity in society
 - inclusivity in volunteer studies, ensuring accessibility for research participants or stakeholders
 - use of inclusive language in communications
 - any specific EDI training for the student
 - consideration of EDI in the project’s potential impact on stakeholders

Including non-academic partners in your application: **WHY BOTHER?**

- Greater impact potential: “Pathways to impact” built into the project via the partner from the start. Contribute to REF impact cases/visibility/satisfaction
- Additional resources for your project (cash or in-kind support) – do more exciting things!
- Attract high quality applicants
- Network building: create opportunities for future, larger collaborative projects (PhD studentship as entry level for new collaborations).
- Ranking uplift within your University project selection
- Substitute your Universities financial commitment with industry income (local rules apply)



Two routes for including non-academic partners

1. Collaborative Awards in Science and Engineering (CASE)

- BBSRC Aims:
 - To provide doctoral students with research training experience as part of a research collaboration between academic and non-academic partners.
 - Promote collaboration between the research community and end-users of research.
- Must meet BBSRC requirements to be classified as CASE

2. Match-funded studentships

- Financial support is provided by a non-academic partner, but requirements for CASE are not met (e.g. no placement available, no UK base)

Non-academic partners:

- Industry (e.g. Unilever, SMEs)
- Government departments (e.g. Defra, FSA)
- Not for profit organisations (NGOs, Charities)

BBSRC CASE requirements

- CASE partners must provide co-supervision for the student's research.
- A three to 18 months placement with a CASE partner in a workplace outside of the academic environment. Flexible timing. **Substitutes PIPS requirement**
- CASE partners meet all costs incurred by the student when visiting and working within their partner establishment (e.g. travel and accommodation where required).
- Aim for financial contribution from CASE partners of at least 50% towards consumables and travel as a minimum (*but no-longer a requirement for any cash contribution here*)
- Case partners may also contribute up to 50% of the stipend and fees.
- Include a letter of intent (LoI) from the CASE partner in your application.
- CASE partners need to have a UK base. Exceptions where student will gain skills not available in the UK. They can undertake their placement overseas (student visa-dependent).

Match-funded studentships

- Fewer mandated requirements
 - A significant financial contribution to the project
 - Avoid conflicts of interest
 - Partnership makes a coherent project within remit to be selected
 - Cash contribution must not exceed 50% of the standard BBSRC full funding

Does not help the DTP with its CASE quota though!

How can the DTP help with partnerships?

1. We have a network of DTP-associated Research and Training partners:

Research support

Agri food industry companies
Agri Food and Biosciences
Institute
Diamond Light Source Ltd
James Hutton Institute
Rothamsted Research
Natural History Museum

Training

EIT food
IFSTAL
DEFRA
NNedPro
Professional Bodies (e.g. IFST)
Agri food industry companies
NGOs (e.g. Food Standards
Agency)

Internships

Royal Botanic Gardens Kew
Agri food industry companies
Start-up companies
SMEs
Professional Bodies (e.g. IFST)
Learned societies
Charities
NGOs

2. DTP run an annual Partnership Event (Lynda Deeks) in August/September

Ideally **plan at least one year ahead** to secure agreement from a partner (e.g. annual budget cycles)

3. Ask experienced colleagues to introduce you to partners, talk to you local DTP representative, and DTP Industry Liaison Officer (Lynda Deeks).

Resubmitting previous proposals

- FoodBioSystems welcomes resubmission
 - From projects not previously advertised
 - From project not previously attracting successful applicants
- However, feedback **MUST** be taken on board
 - Even for the projects that were previously advertised

How the DTP supports proposal development

The Selection Committee member your university can provide more information to support development of project proposals.

Brunel University: Lorna Anguilano	Queens University Belfast: Katerina Theodoridou
Aberystwyth University: Russ Morphew	University of Reading: Anisha Wijeyesekera / Lisa Methven
Cranfield University: Guy Kirk / Andrew Thompson	University of Surrey: Ruan Elliott
University of Lincoln: Bukola Onarinde/Kate Smith	

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).

Mentors

We are working on a list of named staff in university departments who will be available support early career lead supervisors on proposal development

Your proposal is selected – what next?

Action	Date/Deadline
Project teams confirm information for adverts	w/c 24 November
Call for student applications opens	w/c 1 December
Mentoring scheme closes	Tuesday 13 January
Closing date for student applications	Monday 26 January 2026 (10.00 am GMT)
DTP offices checks all applications for eligibility, applies first sift, allocates applicants to shortlisting teams on Good Grants reviewing portal	27 January – 9 February
Shortlisting opens on reviewing portal to supervisory teams	9 February 2026
Deadline for supervisors to identify shortlisted candidates	Minimum of 7 working days before interview date. Last date to notify = 27 February
Student interview window	27 February – 12 March
Deadline for supervisors to notify DTP Office of interview outcomes	13 March
Selection Panel review shortlisted applications	27 Feb – 13 March
Selection Committee meets and confirms awards	18/19 March
Management Committee ratifies awards	23 March
Award/rejection letters sent to shortlisted candidates	25/26 March

The Student Assessment Process

We assess candidates' academic background, research skills/experience, aptitude and motivation in a three stage process

Shortlisting by project teams

- Anonymised using standardised rubrics to ensure consistency across all project teams – no CVs!
- The supervisory team select 4-5 applicants for a 30-40 minute on-line interview.
- Applicants eligible for a guaranteed interview are added to the interview list

Interviews

- Standard format and candidates are assessed using a common rubric

Assessment by Selection Committee reviewers

- If candidates are suitable for a project, a panel of reviewers from the DTP Selection Committee assess their anonymised written answers from the application forms.

After the interview: student selection

- The selection panel make the final decision on awarding studentships.
- Interview and selection panel scores are combined and threshold for funding set (usually the mean candidate score).
- Studentships are awarded to projects with appointable candidates (in rank order of projects within each university)
- Supervisor and candidate project preferences are also considered (if the candidate is appointable)
- Some candidates/projects are added to our reserve list.
- Selection Committee may slightly reduce the eligibility threshold for reserve candidates to widen pool of projects with reserves (especially those with home fees status)

Applicant success rates

Year	Projects advertised	Number of international student applicants	% international applicants awarded a studentship (studentships awarded)	Number of home student applicants	% home applicants awarded a studentship (studentships awarded)	Studentships/projects declined
2022	37	501	1.4% (7)	86	23% (20)	8
2023	50	774	0.9% (7)	90	26% (23)	6
2024	57	1176	0.9% (9)	87	24% (20)	5
2025	37	761	0.8% (6)	85	18% (15)	4

Q&A