**Policies & Procedures**

**Annual Studentships Competition**

The **Bioscience for Sustainable Consumer Products** (**BiSCoP**) **CTP** is led by Procter & Gamble and also comprises three academic associate partners and one industrial associate) partner.

It will train 48 PhD students in the BBSRC topics of *Industrial Biotechnology*, *Synthetic Biology*, *Structural Biology*, *Microbiology*, *Technology Development* and non-food aspects of *Diet & Health*.

The partnership comprises Durham University (DU), Newcastle University (NU), Northumbria University (UNN), Procter & Gamble (P&G) and Prozomix (PZ).

 Part 1 - Policy

ALLOCATION PRINCIPLES

1. The BISCOP CTP runs a single, combined annual studentship competition to recruit and select postgraduate students of the very highest calibre to study at Durham, Newcastle, Northumbria or (as needed) other UK Universities.

BISCOP CTP operates an open competition for the awarding of studentships, which is centred on the quality of candidates and their proposed research.

2. BISCOP CTP’s studentship competition has been designed to be open and transparent. We welcome and encourage applicants from diverse backgrounds and are committed to providing equal opportunities in employment and supporting career progression. Our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) board are accountable to embed positive EDI practises in all aspects of the studentship programme and share best practises throughout all partner institutions and the broader community.

In support of BISCOP CTP’s emphasis on quality and transparency, all decisions around which projects are funded are based on clear and agreed assessment criteria.

 AVAILABLE AWARDS

3. BISCOP CTP has 48 fully funded postgraduate (PhD) studentships to award to students commencing their postgraduate studies from October 2022 split across 4 cohorts. >30 of these studentships are funded by the BBSRC.

The studentships that can be applied for (in line with the host institution regulations) are 4-year PhD studentships. Part-time equivalents to the above studentships are available. Should a part-time candidate be successful the BISCOP CTP will consult with the successful candidate and their host institution to ensure the appropriate arrangements are in place to support their studies and that they comply with the UKRI’s employment requirements affecting part-time award-holders.

COLLABORATIVE AGREEMENT

4. The associate partners and the lead partner have one common legal agreement that underpins access, intellectual property and any financial contributions. Any other collaborating parties that can benefit the CTP will be asked to sign the same agreement. Collaborating partners can be national, regional, or local organisations and based in any geographic location but only UK-based Universities may be the lead institution where a PhD student is based.

POSITIVE ACTION IN RELATION TO UNDER-REPRESENTED GROUPS

 5. BISCOP CTP has a clear strategy outlining EDI considerations when recruiting staff and supervisors, doctoral candidates, advisors, and other community partners. “Representation” forms one pillar of this overall strategy, and measures include ensuring diverse representation in selection and onboarding teams, unconscious bias training and ensuring accommodations at each stage of the studentship journey.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT

6. BISCOP CTP’s studentships provide successful applicants with the following financial support:

a) Payment of tuition fees for home candidates, and a contribution of the UKRI tuition fee rate to all international students (see BBSRC website for 22/23 figures; 23/24 figures yet to be released); please see the section on Eligibility below (points 11 - 16 specifically) for more information;

b) A tax-free maintenance grant set at the UKRI’s national rate.

Students will additionally receive financial support for their industrial placements.

7. Additionally, applicants may apply for contributions towards funding for travel, accommodation, childcare and catering for conferences and events above and beyond what is supported by the BBSRC studentship grant as well as other incidentals (incidentals capped at £250)), which must be applied for by award-holders following the commencement of their studies. Please note that funds are limited. We therefore encourage supervisors and candidates to work to ensure any projected needs are economically feasible.

8. All maintenance grants are paid to award-holders by their host institution’s relevant Finance Office.

COMMENCEMENT OF AWARDS

9. All awards made by BISCOP CTP during this studentship competition will commence at the start of the 2025-26 academic year (October 2025), unless there are exceptional circumstances affecting a successful candidate, which should be raised with BISCOP CTP following the issuing of the candidate’s official award notification.

10. Studentships cannot normally be deferred or started before 01 October 2025.

ELIGIBILITY FOR FUNDING

11. BISCOP CTP’s studentships are available to both Home and International students. This is in line with the UKRI student eligibility criteria, as detailed in the UKRI Postgraduate Funding Guide:

<https://www.ukri.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/UKRI-030221-Guidance-International-Eligibility-Implementation-training-grant-holders-V2.pdf>

12. Eligibility rules for defining eligibility for Home or International studentships are defined in the link shown. Research Organisations bear full responsible for appropriately identifying the correct fee and eligibility status for their candidates.

13. All BISCOP CTP studentships will be awarded at the full UKRI studentship rate, comprising tuition fee, stipend and additional research funding at the established UKRI studentship rate. For candidates who qualify as Home students, the award will cover all tuition fee costs; for International students, only the home fee level can be claimed from the training grant or other UKRI funding. UKRI funding may not be used to cover the difference between the home and international fee rate. Alternate funds will need to be sourced to cover the difference between the home and international fee rates. The difference may be met with contributions from the institution, co-funding partners on collaborative awards, or from the candidates directly.

14. In keeping with UKRI rules, a maximum of 30% of all studentships awarded can be awarded to International Students. This cap applies to each cohort, (not including associated or integrated studentships). Given there are 8 BBSRC-funded candidates in each intake, this means for these posts we are limited to 2 International Students across the cohort of 8.

15. Candidates awarded part-time studentships are required to commit at least 50% of their standard working week to their postgraduate studies and are not permitted to hold employment for more than 50% of the time whilst studying. As noted in Paragraph 3, BISCOP CTP will liaise closely with all part-time award-holders to ensure their package of support is most appropriate to their needs and individual circumstances.

16. University departments must ensure they are aware of these eligibility rules and ensure they have reviewed their nominees against the requirements. The BISCOP CTP will perform light-touch checks on eligibility decisions, and may approach departments for further information if necessary; however, it should be noted that the Research Organisation bears sole responsibility for conducting all eligibility checks.

SUPERVISION

17. The BISCOP CTP is committed to supporting students and to encourage collaboration across the cohort and institutions and to allow students to experience a diversity of advisors, each student will be assigned two academic (one lead and one supporting) and at least one industrial supervisor.

The candidate will be registered at the host partner institution of the leading academic supervisor and their tuition fees will be charged at that institution.

While BISCOP CTP does not require the second academic supervisor to be cross-department or cross-institutional (i.e. second academic supervisor coming from a different department or University), we do seek to encourage it to: i) pool expertise and ensure our award-holders are supervised by the most qualified team; ii) build capacity and spread good practice; iii) build collaboration within the partnership; iv) build research networks that might also be generative of other research collaborations. In addition, applications to the BISCOP CTP Studentship Competition can be strengthened, and thus score more highly, where supervisors have sought to fill possible gaps in supervisory expertise by engaging with colleagues in another institution.

Part 2 - Process

SUBMITTING APPLICATIONS

18. The research proposal will be submitted by the prospective industrial and academic supervisors to our Science Advisory Board. The proposals will be judged versus the below criteria (the EDI board will assess the Supervision scores and the Science Advisory board the other four criteria).

**(a) BBSRC and CTP Remit.** *Pass/Fail.* Only those projects that fall within the agreed topic areas of the CTP will be considered.

**(b) Feasibility** *(30% weighting).* Is the project technically feasible with a high likelihood of yielding results worthy of a PhD?

**(c) Supervision** *(15% weighting).* Does the joint supervisory team have the skills and capacity to provide the required level of support and training? Does the supervisory team demonstrate best practice for student health and wellbeing, and equality diversity and inclusion (EDI)?

**(d) Novelty** *(30% weighting).* Does the project involve exciting science that is likely to be publishable in a quality journal? Will there be significant opportunity for the associate to demonstrate creativity and inventiveness?

**(e) Potential impact** *(25% weighting).* Is the project likely to deliver tangible and significant results that will support the bioscience industry and the environment?

Based on this assessment the Science Advisory Board will recommend which projects to put out to advertisement. The management board will make the final project selection based on this recommendation while ensuring a diverse set of supervisors and projects with a reasonable split between institutions and across the research topics of Industrial Biotechnology, Synthetic Biology, Structural Biology, Microbiology, Technology development and non-food aspects of Diet & Health.

Only projects that have passed this suitability assessment will be advertised to students.

19. Candidates wishing to apply for a studentship must apply directly to this E-mail address biscopctp.im@pg.com by the date detailed in the competition timetable (see Appendix 1 for a full timeline of the competition, for this fourth cohort this date will be 22th November 2024).

20. Candidates need to submit items to the E-mail address biscopctp.im@pg.com:

a) Current CV [maximum 2 pages] – this needs to include qualifications & two references.

b) A personal statement (maximum 500 words).

c) A completed BISCOP CTP Equal Opportunities Monitoring form.

d) A cover note indicating which project within CTP they are applying for as their first choice and whether interested in any of the other projects.

21. Candidates should avoid nominating referees who are named as their potential supervisors in their application; however, if this is not possible a justification of their use as a referee should be provided within the body of the reference.

NOMINATING CANDIDATES

22. Each University will submit the selected nominated candidate for each of the lead projects advertised.

23. Owing to the UKRI cap on the number of awards that can be made to International candidates, each University may only submit a maximum of two International candidates.

24. All supervisors must submit the applications they wish to nominate for consideration for awards electronically by the deadline as noted in Appendix 1 (see Appendix 1 for a full timeline of the competition). For this fourth cohort this will be December 13th, 2024.

ASSESSMENT PROCESS

25. Throughout the assessment process, all eligible candidates are assessed and graded against the BISCOP CTP’s Studentship Assessment Scheme. All interviewers should study this Scheme carefully and will follow it to conduct their selection processes.

26. Eligible nominations received by the BISCOP CTP will be reviewed and assessed in the following three stages:

* Stage 1 Interviews and submission of recommendation on lead student candidates
* Stage 2 Assessment and any recommendations by EDI Board.
* Stage 3 Final Decision by Management Board on who to offer final posts.

MAKING AWARDS TO SUCCESSFUL CANDIDATES

27. Following the meeting of the BISCOP CTP Management Board, the BISCOP CTP Operations Group will process and issue award notifications to successful candidates, whilst also informing the partners of the status of all other candidates, which includes candidates placed on the reserve list and those that have not been successful. Feedback will not be provided by the Board directly to students and will only be available through prospective supervisors.

28. Prior to the issuing of award notifications to successful candidates, an internal memorandum will be circulated to all partners confirming the candidates that have been successful and those on the reserve list. If there are any specific issues and/or questions affecting candidates following the deliberations of the Management Board, these will be followed-up in the run-up to the issuing of this internal memorandum and any further contact with the candidates.

29. In cases where a successful candidate decides not to accept the offer of a BISCOP CTP studentship, the next highest-ranked candidate on the reserve list will be contacted and made an offer of an award. Where a partner is aware that a nominated candidate has decided to withdraw from the competition it should be reported to the BISCOP CTP immediately to ensure such decisions are communicated and appropriate action taken.

30. In the event there are no applicants or no suitable applicants for an advertised post and no other candidates from the reserve list of other CTP projects who take up the offer of the post, the next best-ranked project on the list will then be advertised.

31. The decisions regarding awards and the issuing of results will take place by the date noted in appendix 1. (See Appendix 1 for a full timeline of competition). Students are be expected to respond within 1 week to accept or decline an offer. This offer will be contingent on completion of the online application form for the host University to allow student details to be registered with their host institution and confirm they meet the required standard entry requirements.

Please note eligibility requirement:

* Academic excellence of the proposed student *i.e.* 2:1 (or equivalent GPA from non-UK universities [preference for 1st class honours]); or a Masters (preference for Merit or above).
* Appropriate IELTS or equivalent score, if required.
* Applicants cannot apply for this funding if currently engaged in Doctoral study.

32. Following the announcement of the competition’s results and the subsequent final confirmation of candidates in receipt of funding, de-briefing sessions will be held within the CTP to consider the outcomes of the process and address any relevant academic and operational issues arising.

Part 3 - Further Information

36. If students or staff need any further information about the BISCOP CTP’s annual studentship competition please contact their local administrator:

* Durham – Emma Robinson (emma.robinson@durham.ac.uk)
* Newcastle – Michelle Palmer (michelle.palmer@newcastle.ac.uk) or Nicky Houghton (Nicky.Houghton@newcastle.ac.uk), Craig Hinds Craig Hinds Craig.Hinds@newcastle.ac.uk
* Northumbria – Paul Agnew (paul.agnew@northumbria.ac.uk)
* Procter & Gamble – Anne-Marie Clarke (clarke.am.1@pg.com)

**Appendix 1 – Application Process and Timetable**

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| **Student Recruitment Process** | **Activity** | **Responsible** |
| **October 25th, 2024** | Adverts have to be ready | Academic & Industrial supervisors |
| **October 30th, 2024** | Adverts to be posted for the selected projects | Operations Group |
| **November 22nd, 2024**  | Student applications close | Applicants |
| **November 27th, 2024** | Packs to be given to the interview teams (CVs, application forms) | Operations Group |
| **November 27th - December 11th**  | Select candidates for interviews and conduct interviews.  | Academic & Industrial supervisors |
| **December 4th 2024** | Please send by Sunday December 4th your selection of who you have short-listed to interview (this will allow EDI team to cross-reference with relevant EDI data). | Academic & Industrial supervisors |
| **December 11th 2024** | Student interviews to be completed  | Academic & Industrial supervisors |
| **December 13th 2024** | Final selection of students to be offered | Management Board |
| **December 16th, 2024** | Offers can be sent  | Management Board |