

## **BBSRC, EPSRC and MRC CASE PhD Studentships – A Summary**

### **Purpose**

This document provides an overview of BBSRC, EPSRC and MRC CASE PhD Studentship strategy and provision.

### **Vision and Strategy**

The CASE scheme forms an integral part of each council's research, training and skills strategy. It fits with EPSRC, BBSRC and MRC's ambition to address skills gaps in key sectors of the UK economy as well as to encourage and facilitate collaboration between academia and industry, through cross-fertilisation of training and ideas.

The councils have agreed a shared vision for CASE studentships:

### **BBSRC / EPSRC / MRC Vision of CASE Studentships**

CASE awards will provide PhD students with a first-rate, challenging research training experience, within the context of a mutually beneficial research collaboration between academic and partner organisations e.g. industry and policy making bodies.

**Benefits to the student** – CASE provides outstanding students access to training, facilities and expertise not available in an academic setting alone. Students benefit from a diversity of experimental approaches with an applied/translational dimension. Students have an opportunity to develop a range of valuable skills and significantly enhance their future employability; many will become research leaders of the future.

**Benefits to the academic / partner organisations** - CASE studentships encourage productive engagement between partners who benefit from a motivated, high-quality PhD student undertaking cutting-edge research relevant to the organisations' priorities and objectives. CASE provides opportunities to explore novel research collaborations and strengthen current partnerships.

#### **Defining an excellent CASE Studentship :**

**High-quality project** – A challenging, feasible and realistically achievable PhD project which stimulates excellent hypothesis-driven research. Through a truly collaborative approach, it provides tangible benefits to all partners.

**High-quality training environment** – Through access to distinctive but complementary environments, partners provide a stimulating framework for research training in the proposed field. Joint supervision gives a unique and broadening perspective on the impact of collaborative research.

**High-quality student experience** – An enriched integrated training experience allows the student to acquire novel skills and expertise. The student gains a wider understanding of, for example, applied research or policy development that will enhance their future career prospects.

## Eligibility

The councils have also agreed a common eligibility statement for partner organisations submitting CASE applications, in collaboration with an academic organisation:

### **BBSRC/ EPSRC / MRC Non-Academic Partner Eligibility**

UK-based organisations can be considered as the non-academic partner if they can provide students with distinctive research training and experience not available in an academic setting. Organisations eligible for Research Council funding cannot act as a non-academic partner<sup>1</sup>. Where the non-academic partner is a company, it must have an established UK-based research and/or commercial production capability. In exceptional cases, organisations based overseas may be eligible, but only where they can provide the student with an opportunity to gain skills not currently available in the UK. If eligibility remains unclear, applicants should make contact before submitting a proposal.

<sup>1</sup> A list of organisations eligible for Research Council funding can be found at:  
<http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/research/Pages/Eligibilityforrcs.aspx>

## **How to Apply for a CASE Studentship**

Council's work together to ensure that where we offer common mechanisms to support CASE studentships, this is reflected in harmonised application processes as far as practicable. An overview of BBSRC, EPSRC and MRC CASE studentship schemes is provided below. For more detailed information please refer to the individual web pages.

### **1. Applications for Individual CASE Studentships**

- Available from BBSRC and MRC

#### Detailed Scheme Info

- BBSRC Industrial CASE Awards:  
<http://www.bbsrc.ac.uk/business/training/industrial-case.aspx>
- MRC Industrial CASE Studentships:  
<http://www.mrc.ac.uk/Fundingopportunities/Studentships/IndustrialCASE/MRC004608>

#### Common Features

- Max of 1 studentship per application
- Submitted by at least 2 supervisors (one academic, one industry)
- Can be led by either the industry or academic supervisor
- Open competition
  - o Applications from SMEs encouraged (through targeted communications and financial incentives<sup>1</sup>)

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<sup>1</sup> Financial incentives provided by MRC scheme only

- Based on a collaborative PhD project proposal
  - o Student does not need to be identified prior to application
- Submitted via the Joint electronic Submission (Je-S) system ( <https://je-s.rcuk.ac.uk> )
- Harmonised joint annual deadline (in ~ July each year)
- Awards made in December for students starting in the following academic year
- Applicants submit to appropriate Council (depending on scientific remit (health = MRC, underpinning biology = BBSRC)
  - o Possible to transfer between councils post-application if essential
  - o e.g. in 2010 MRC accepted 11 out-of-remit BBSRC CASE studentship applications, of which 2 were awarded. Prior to harmonisation such applications would have been rejected without review.

## 2. Block Awards for Multiple CASE Studentships

- Available from BBSRC and EPSRC

### Scheme Info

- BBSRC Industrial CASE Partnerships:  
<http://www.bbsrc.ac.uk/funding/studentships/allocations-3.aspx>
- EPSRC Industrial CASE  
<http://www.epsrc.ac.uk/funding/students/coll/ibase/Pages/default.aspx>

### Common Features

- Awards made directly to company for multiple studentships
- Company responsible for identifying student and academic partner(s)
- Allocations made either by:
  - BBSRC
    - o Scheme – based on company’s training strategy, its approach to student support and the additional training opportunities it will make available to students.
  - EPSRC
    - o Strategic - allocated to companies based on their participation in EPSRC-funded research (algorithm based on their financial contributions over the last 3 years) and other strategic considerations.
    - o Through Industrial CASE ‘agents’ (mainly knowledge transfer networks in 2011) to help involve small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the scheme.

## 3. Other Opportunities for academic-industry collaborative PhD studentship training

Each council also offer wider opportunities for PhD studentship provision within joint academic-industry collaborative environments. For example:

- EPSRC Industrial Doctorate Centres:  
<http://www.epsrc.ac.uk/funding/students/coll/Pages/idc.aspx>
- EPSRC also actively encourages industrial collaboration through the Doctoral Training Account route by setting research organisations a target of converting 10% of its (DTA) funds into CASE awards.

- BBSRC Doctoral Training Partnerships:  
<http://www.bbsrc.ac.uk/funding/studentships/doctoral-training-partnerships.aspx>
- MRC Integrative Toxicology Training Partnership:  
<http://www.mrctox.le.ac.uk/home/ittp/>
- MRC clinical pharmacology and pathology fellowship programmes where clinicians undertake a PhD fellowship programme incorporating joint supervision with industry.

### **Ongoing Council Collaboration**

The councils continue to meet on a quarterly basis to facilitate collaboration and ongoing strategic discussion of CASE studentship provision. Ongoing work includes development of a harmonised JeS application form.

The remit of the cross-council CASE collaborative working group was recently extended to include the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC).

BBSRC are currently undertaking an evaluation of its Industrial CASE studentship scheme. See Terms of Reference included in *Annex 1* below. The evaluation is expected to report in Summer 2012. Lessons learned from this exercise will be shared by the councils.

## **BBSRC INDUSTRIAL CASE SCHEME EVALUATION**

### **TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE REVIEW PANEL**

1. The task of the Review Panel is to conduct an independent evaluation of the training supported through BBSRC's Industrial CASE scheme, with a focus on studentships with start dates between 2004 and 2010. The evaluation will cover standard Industrial CASE and Industrial CASE Partnership studentships.
2. Specifically, the Panel is asked to review the information presented and to:
  - a. assess the quality of the training supported through the Industrial CASE scheme, with a particular emphasis on the training provided by industry partners:
    - i. the industry placement
    - ii. training in skills not typically acquired through an academic setting
  - b. assess the outcomes and achievements of the postgraduate research and training including, where appropriate, any economic or societal impacts
  - c. identify the benefits from supporting postgraduate training through the Industrial CASE scheme in comparison to non-CASE, considering the benefits to students, industry and academia
  - d. examine the drivers and barriers which influence industry, academia and student participation in the schemes
  - e. consider whether the current requirements for financial contributions from industry are appropriate
  - f. comment on the balance and coverage of the Industrial CASE scheme portfolio, including the extent to which the scheme is supporting training and research across BBSRC's remit and strategic priority areas
  - g. comment on the range of industry partners that participate in the scheme (e.g. sectors, SME representation)
  - h. comment on the scheme's application and administration processes
  - i. identify any examples of best practice in the provision of collaborative training with industry
  - j. identify strengths, gaps and weaknesses in the scheme's support for postgraduate training; comment on ways to build on successes and ways to address any identified gaps and issues