

“Doubling-up” PhD studentships by using GWR studentships

Great Western Research

Since 2006 the Great Western Research (GWR) consortium has been delivering collaborative doctoral training across the 13 Universities of south west England. The GWR project is a £14M five year programme funded by HEFCE, the South West Regional Development Agency, south west businesses and the larger Universities in the region. To date GWR has managed 130 innovative PhD projects by establishing a robust model, with each studentship involving 2 supervisors at different south west Universities and 2 funders (GWR and a business partner each commit 50%).

GWR has also invested in advanced video conferencing infrastructure to provide purpose built Access Grid based training suites at 5 Universities (Bath, Bristol, Exeter, Plymouth and UWE) from which a program of postgraduate training is delivered to support PhD students.

The original funding for the project is now committed and GWR is therefore seeking suitable external funders and other mechanisms to continue this successful initiative.

The Opportunity

Discussions with several Research Councils have indicated that one method to continue the very successful GWR studentship model would be to allocate Doctoral Training Account (DTA) awards (i.e. quota studentships) to part fund GWR studentships. In effect the DTA would replace the “GWR 50% funding” in the above model, provided that the standard Research Council terms and conditions are met, and in particular that for any individual studentship no less than 50% of the funding comes from the DTA. As all of the Research Councils have common terms and conditions, funding from any Research Council can be used in this way, and indeed in discussions with GWR both EPSRC and NERC have indicated that they view this as a very positive use of their DTAs. Thus a single DTA award from a Research Council to Exeter could be used to 50% fund each of 2 GWR studentships with the other 50% of the funding sourced from a suitable business partner.

GWR is therefore able to offer use of the existing studentship mechanism to effectively “double-up” Research Council PhD quota studentships. Similarly, the model can be applied to University or School-funded studentships.

Schools, Departments and indeed individual academics holding Research Council DTAs, or studentship funds from the University/Department/School can therefore elect to allocate these funds to the GWR studentship model.

For each one funded studentship equivalent allocated, GWR will then assist the academics and Business Support Offices at the University to identify potential business partners to award two GWR studentships back to the donor. GWR will also handle the contracting process, allocation of monies and management of the joint-supervision set-up.

Worked Example

A School at Exeter (e.g. Biosciences) has been awarded 4 BBSRC studentship DTAs for September 2010 start. The Head of the School agrees to allocate 3 of these DTAs to GWR studentships. Working with the School GWR then advertises to Exeter academic staff in the School that 6 GWR-BBSRC PhD studentships are now available to them for September 2010 start, and calls for project proposals from academics, which meet the general GWR scheme requirements. As all GWR PhD project proposals require a business

partner to provide the matched funding, and a second supervisor at a south west University, GWR will work closely with academics developing proposals to identify suitable partners. As in the existing scheme the submitted project proposals will be assessed by the Director of GWR for economic benefit, benefit to the business partner and overall impact, and by a GWR theme panel for academic quality and supervisory arrangements, and then the top 6 projects from Biosciences will be approved for funding.

Once awarded to individual projects these GWR-BBSRC Studentships will then be advertised both by the School/University as normal, and also by GWR through their website and in the press as part of the overall publicity for GWR studentships, in order to attract suitable graduate candidates. Contract arrangements will remain the same as for the exiting GWR scheme in that the business partner will enter into a contract with the University to provide funds to support the studentship project, the contract will specify how any IPR generated will be handled and GWR will facilitate the contractual and financial arrangements.

Thus the School which originally had 4 DTAs can now recruit 7 new PhD students, 6 of which will have strong links to business and involve projects of direct value to both the academic community and the business community, with positive implications for the REF and the impact agenda.

Capacity Capability

GWR is currently planning to manage around 60-80 new studentship starts per year with its existing staffing, which means it could potentially accept 30+ DTAs per year for doubling-up under the above scheme, from Universities across the south west. At present it is not envisaged that individual Universities will be capped in the number of DTAs they can allocate to this GWR scheme.

GWR is also currently seeking public funding to support blocks of studentships which will be available in competition to all Universities in the South West, in addition to the DTA allocation from the individual Institutional approach outlined above.

Contact Details

You can find out more about GWR at www.gwr.ac.uk and should you wish to discuss this opportunity, please contact:

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Please note that as the South West Regional Development Agency is no longer a funding partner in these studentships, business partners can now come from anywhere in the UK (not just the south west region) and international businesses may also be eligible on a case by case basis.

When Research Council DTAs are used in the scheme, the Research Council requirements as to the supported students qualifications and nationality/residence requirements will still apply.

The small overhead required to support the GWR infrastructure will be notionally charged to the business partners' contribution to the studentship.