



**The Central England
NERC Training Alliance
(CENTA)**

**Doctoral Training Partnership
Student Handbook**

2018 Entry

Please note that this handbook should be read in conjunction with your host institution's handbook and the RCUK harmonised postgraduate terms and conditions - <https://www.ukri.org/files/legacy/news/training-grants-january-2018-pdf/>

Welcome from the Director

A warm and cordial **Welcome** to our Doctoral Training Partnership CENTA. You are now part of one of the most exciting training frameworks and doctoral research environments in the UK and internationally. You are in the centre of our activities.

If you completed an undergraduate or master's degree this summer, I congratulate you on your success. If you are returning to academia after a period away, then I hope it proved to be a valuable experience and further inspired your interest in the natural and environmental sciences.

Your supervisory teams, my CENTA colleagues and the current doctoral researchers across our ten partner institutions look forward to meeting you at the beginning of what we hope will prove to be an exciting, enjoyable and rewarding time for you.

The Central England NERC Training Alliance (CENTA), is a consortium of six research intensive Universities and four research centres that are working together to provide excellence in doctoral research training.

CENTA will provide an innovative, high quality and comprehensive training programme to equip you, our Doctoral Researchers (DRs), with knowledge, skills, and expertise to identify and address complex environmental challenges and cut across traditional disciplinary boundaries. Excellence in research, directly informed by knowledge exchange with end-users, will underpin a multidisciplinary training environment that will support the development of skilled scientists to benefit future science, policy and the economy.

You will enter CENTA at the very exciting time, where we start our preparations of the delivery of CENTA2 our next 5 year programme, which will see further improvements in our training environment, supported by 19 end-user partners. You will see more of the enrolment of CENTA2 in year two and three of your time here in central England.

Currently, CENTA encompasses research activities within four broad themes:

- Anthropogenic Impact
- Evolution & Ecosystems
- Dynamic Earth
- Biogeochemistry

These themes cut across about 20 academic departments within CENTA, and reflect both the multidisciplinary nature of much of our research and the critical mass of researchers in central England who span the breadth of the NERC remit. A critical mass of researchers in close geographic proximity is one of our great strength. It facilitates shared access to facilities and training and helps build a strong cohort identity.

Dr Gregor C Leckebusch
Director of NERC CENTA DTP

Key Contacts

- Dr Gregor Leckebusch CENTA Director
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- Mica Jones CENTA Manager
m.jones.14@bham.ac.uk 0121 414 6171
- Ella Young CENTA Training Fellow
e.young.2@bham.ac.uk 0121 414 6171

General email address to be used for any requests: centa-admin@contacts.bham.ac.uk

CENTA Partner Points of Contact/Management Board members:

- Prof Mark Purnell CENTA Deputy Director, University of Leicester
map2@le.ac.uk
- Dr Dave Ryves Loughborough University
d.b.ryves@lboro.ac.uk
- Dr Joshua Larsen University of Birmingham
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Student representatives

- Cohort 1 – Lucy Garrett LJG478@student.bham.ac.uk
 Cohort 2 – Milly Bulcock A.Bulcock@lboro.ac.uk
 Cohort 3 – Amy Jones APJ527@student.bham.ac.uk
 Cohort 4 – Richard Bufton RDB781@student.bham.ac.uk

The CENTA Management Board meets regularly during the academic year.

Twitter: @CENTA_NERC
Facebook: CENTA.NERC
Website: <http://www.centa.org.uk>

Training Programme

Overview

A major aim of NERC Doctoral Training Partnership is for students to go on to become future sector leaders, with specialist skills in their research field, as well as the ability to translate research into impact and address society's complex environmental challenges. There are many career paths beyond a PhD, thus NERC expect that DTPs should provide students with multi-disciplinary training alongside supervisor-led training in specific research and technical skills.

During the course of the 3.5 year PhD, students must complete 35 days training. This includes 30 days of compulsory training provided by CENTA during year 1 and 2 made up of:-

- 18 days in year 1 (13 CENTA training days and 5 days in Tenerife)
- 12 days in year 2 (9 CENTA training days and 3 days *CENTA Theme Science Masterclass*)
- 5 further days of training from: the CENTA programme (*Theme Science Masterclasses* taken during years 2 and 3); NERC training courses; or recognised (and approved) training offered by home institutions or external providers. This training cannot be used as a substitute for CENTA training days.

Please note that:

- Informal, supervisor-led 'on the job' training cannot be included in the 35-day requirement.
- Students will also be given credit towards their 5 extra days training by participating in the governance of CENTA, by acting as a student representative or leading on the CENTA summer conference (up to a maximum of 2 days).
- There is potential for students to catch up on any compulsory sessions missed due to extenuating circumstances in years 2 and 3.
- A training day should involve a minimum of 5 hours contact time.
- The majority of training will take place October/November and June to avoid clashes with Northern Hemisphere fieldwork where possible.
- Fieldwork and lab work should be planned *around* training sessions wherever possible.

Programme Structure

Training is organised into three overarching training groups:

1. **Research Excellence: 8 compulsory sessions focussed on 'generic' research skills (plus a 5-day Tenerife residential in year 1).**
 - Four sessions in this theme will be provided in both year 1 and year 2, focussing on the general topics: communication with peers; engagement and non-academic impact; personal effectiveness; and research governance.
 - The Tenerife residential uses Vitae's 'Speed-PhD' as its base, adapting it for a field setting and tailoring the programme to environmental science students.

2. Enabling Science: 10 sessions focussed on practical introductions to scientific skills with broad relevance in environmental science.

Five sessions will be provided, focussing on the general topics: numerical modelling of environmental processes; acquisition and analysis of geospatial data; statistical analysis; field and lab skills; and data management.

3. Theme Science: Focussed training in scientific skills pertinent to CENTA's four themes (Anthropogenic Impact and Environmental Sustainability, Evolution of Organisms, 'omics and Biogeochemistry). This will consist of:

- Four sessions in year 1, comprising an introductory session for each research theme. Expose students to broad and important environmental science methodologies addresses NERC's requirement that we encourage multidisciplinary and produce well-rounded, adaptable scientists.
- In year 2, students must choose 3 out of 12 *Theme Science Masterclass* sessions. Three sessions will be offered for each of the four research themes.
- Further sessions may be taken in year 2 or 3 to make up part/all of the additional 5 days of training.
- Sessions with small numbers will run at the discretion of the provider, and we cannot guarantee that all student preferences will be accommodated (some sessions may have participant caps and preference will be given to students in year 2 and from a relevant theme).

Records and Compliance

Students who have not met the training requirements at the end of their 3.5 years will have missed out on valuable opportunities and could jeopardise CENTA's future funding through the DTP scheme. Therefore, it is important that students and CENTA work together to maintain a complete and accurate record of student training and that CENTA works with students and their supervisors to overcome legitimate difficulties that may arise (see provisions laid out for missed CENTA training, sections 6 and 7 below). However it is also important that sanctions are in place to discourage poor training attendance.

- Registers will be taken at all training sessions.
- Students must ensure that they send the Training Needs Analysis (TNA or DNA) completed at their host institution to centa-admin@contacts.bham.ac.uk
- Students should use the RDF planner to keep a personal record of their training (CENTA staff cannot access these records).
- Students should report any training (outside of the 30 CENTA compulsory days) to centa-admin@contacts.bham.ac.uk so that an official record can be kept.
- If a student fails to complete a minimum of 35 days training OR fails to complete 30 days of CENTA training.

Standard provision for missed CENTA training:

Students might miss CENTA training days, for example because of serious ill health, because fieldwork must be completed at certain times or because a lab experiment cannot be completed without intersecting a training day. Students must inform centa-admin@contacts.bham.ac.uk in advance if they cannot attend a session. The following rules will normally apply in these circumstances:

- a. Missed training opportunities must be regained by submitting alternative CENTA training days. Non-CENTA training cannot be substituted for missed CENTA training.
- b. Every effort should be made to substitute a missed session with a session in the *same year and training group* (Research Excellence, Enabling Science or Theme Science), but replacement with exactly the same session is not necessary.
- c. Regaining days from particular years and groups will be possible by: (i) revisiting missed Year 1 training in Year 2; (ii) revisiting missed Year 1 or Year 2 training in Year 3; (iii) attending Year 2 Theme Science sessions in addition to the compulsory requirement.
- d. Wherever possible, Year 1 and Year 2 training will be staggered across different dates and Theme Science sessions will be spread across different dates to maximise the opportunity to regain missed sessions.

Exceptional provision for missed CENTA training:

Under exceptional circumstances a more relaxed set of rules might be applied to the provision for regaining missed CENTA training days. A student and their supervisor can make a case to CENTA Management Board for the application of one or more of the following relaxed rules. These cases will be judged on the legitimacy of the arguments presented according to the criteria below.

- a. Relax a): substitute missed CENTA training with alternative formal training, e.g. NERC and ITN training, up to a maximum of 15 days
- b. Relax b): substitute missed CENTA sessions with any other CENTA sessions.
- c. Any application to apply these rules would be judged against the following criteria:
 - i. There were exceptional circumstances that affected the student's ability to attend the CENTA training sessions in the past;
 - ii. There are exceptional circumstances which preclude the student from regaining all missed days according to the provisions laid out above
 - iii. The student has made every effort to regain missed training days within the provision laid out in the above
- d. Applications for exceptional provision would normally be considered by the Management Board at the end of the Year 2 training programme, such the students could demonstrate their efforts to make up any missed sessions.

Financial Matters

Research Training Support Grant

A Research Training Support Grant (RTSG) of £8,000 is awarded to each project to support fieldwork, project consumables, and conference attendance and non-CENTA provided training. RTSG accounts are managed by host institutions and they will provide RTSG account codes.

Both the students and their supervisory team jointly manage the RTSG and they are responsible for ensuring that all RTSG spend is in conjunction with the rules for eligible expenditure and host institution.

Funding for CENTA training days

An advance payment of £300 will be made into personal bank accounts to fund travel and subsistence for CENTA provided training. This is separate from RTSG funding.

Students can claim for travel costs and subsistence (up to £7 for subsistence) per CENTA training day by completing the CENTA claim form FIN7N (see pages 8 & 9) and returning it, along with receipts to the CENTA Manager at the below address.

Claims forms must be submitted within three months of the event and you must send original documents as electronic copies of claim forms and receipts will not be accepted.

Only itemised VAT receipts will be accepted. This is particularly important when using contactless payment as you may need to request a VAT receipt.

It is recommended that you take a personal copy of any forms and receipts that you submit for your records. Please note that any alcohol drinks will be removed from your claim/will not be deducted from your advance.

Bank details are **not** required on the FIN7N form when the expenses are to be deducted from your advance payment.

Mica Jones
CENTA Manager
SG18, Bio Sciences Building
University of Birmingham
B15 2TT

You must keep a spreadsheet of all expenses claimed from your both your RTSG and CENTA training advance.

If you have any finance queries, contact the CENTA Manager: m.jones.14@bham.ac.uk ,
0121 414 6171

Placements

All students must complete a minimum of 10-day placement with an external organisation during their PhD (this is NOT included within the 35 days training described above). CENTA will provide up to £1,000 to fund the placement upon submission and approval by the Management Board of the Placement Nomination form on page 11. Please allow 6 weeks for approval and payment of your placement.

CASE Studentships

CASE (Collaborative Award in Science and Engineering) studentships are delivered in collaboration with non-academic partners from the private, public and third/civil sectors. They provide the PhD students with enhanced training opportunities by ensuring they spend between three and eighteen months in total with their CASE partner in a workplace outside the academic environment.

CASE studentships provide outstanding students with access to training, facilities and expertise not available in the academic setting alone. The CASE partners benefit from self-motivated, highly capable PhD students undertaking cutting-edge research relevant to their organisation's priorities and objectives.

CASE partners are required to:

- Provide financial support of a minimum of £1,000 per annum for a minimum of three years to supplement the maintenance grant for the student;
- Host the student for between three and eighteen months during their PhD, where they will undertake work outside the academic environment. This placement need not occur in one single period;
- Meet the extra expenses incurred by the student when visiting and working within their establishment;
- Contribute in cash or in kind towards necessary materials and/or facilities not possessed by the Research Organisation concerned that are required by the student to undertake research integral to their CASE studentship.

Student representation and feedback

Student representatives from each cohort will be invited to attend the monthly Management Board meetings.

The current student representatives are:

Cohort 1	Lucy Garrett	LJG478@student.bham.ac.uk
Cohort 2	Milly Bulcock	A.Bulcock@lboro.ac.uk
Cohort 3	Amy Jones	APJ527@student.bham.ac.uk
Cohort 4	Richard Bufton	RDB781@student.bham.ac.uk
Cohort 5	Jonathon Slessor & Amy Gray	J.Slessor@lboro.ac.uk V.A.Gray@lboro.ac.uk

Students will be consulted throughout the academic year for feedback on the training programme and will be asked to complete an annual questionnaire for feedback to NERS as part of the DTP Annual Report.

Leave of Absence and PhD Suspensions

Research Councils expect students to complete their training in a single continuous period and do not encourage the suspension of awards. CENTA will consider periods of paid leave or suspensions for periods of genuine absence e.g. for maternity leave, shared parental leave, adoption leave, extended absences covered by a medical certificate, extended jury service etc. Generally, for time beyond an initial 3 months a 'leave of absence' must be granted. This is subject to finding the necessary funding from CENTA or CENTA partner budgets and the PhD student's supervisors must consult with CENTA PoCs and a solution must be discussed and agreed at CENTA Management Board.

Where leaves of absence or suspensions are agreed, total periods of suspension must not normally exceed one calendar year during the lifetime of the award. Sympathetic consideration will be given to requests for absence due to personal or family reasons. The

studentship end dates and expected submission dates should be amended on Je-S to reflect periods of absence.

PhD/Stipend Extensions

It is recognised that, during any PhD, some unexpected delays will occur and an allowance for these should be made when completion schedules are drawn up at the start of studentships. It is important that the remit of studentships is appropriately specified by the supervisory team from the outset to allow timely completion.

The expectation of NERC and CENTA that theses should normally be submitted within 3.5 years of the commencement of studentships. Hence applications for support via the additional NERC stipend will only be considered in cases where considerable delays that could not be anticipated or planned for have taken place. Examples of such situations could be extended sick leave (see section above), the unexpected failure of a large experiment (for example, a crop dies or a machine malfunction takes place resulting in the loss of samples or data), the unexpected closure of a facility that was to be used by the student, or a significant delay or failure in the provision of crucial materials, data, or analytical facilities by a research partner.

An unrealistically high workload in the remit of the studentship or the occurrence of minor delays or those which could have been anticipated and for which provision could have been made would not be qualifying criteria for the allocation of the stipend.

Extension requests must be submitted within the first 3 years of the PhD (or as soon possible). The CENTA Management Board will require evidence from official progress reports/ boards. The decision will be at the discretion of the management board.

Budget Centre Purchase Order No	Finance Office Ref
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REFER TO NOTES OVERLEAF AND COMPLETE IN BLOCK CAPITALS GIVING DETAILS OF EXPENSES BEING CLAIMED
PAYMENT WILL BE MADE TO THE BANK ACCOUNT GIVEN BELOW IN ALL CASES

Surname	Person ID No (Finance Office Use Only)	
Forename	Email Address	
Department	Bank Name	BANK DETAILS ARE NOT REQUIRED WHEN THE EXPENSES ARE TO BE DEDUCTED FROM YOUR ADVANCE
Student ID No	Sort Code	
	Account No	

Home Address	FOR FOREIGN BANKS ONLY	Account No	
		IBAN (if applicable)	
		SWIFT/BIC	

Purpose for which expenditure was incurred:	Account Codes	£ Amount	p
			-
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	Total		-

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Total Claimed								

<p>DECLARATION OF CLAIMANT I declare that the expenses claimed were duly incurred on University business, have not been previously claimed, and will not be claimed from any other agency, and are in accordance with the University's Rules and Procedures.</p> <p>Signed</p> <p>Date</p>	<p>CERTIFICATION BY AUTHORISED OFFICER I certify that the expenses claimed are due to be paid, were necessarily incurred and that the calculations have been checked for accuracy and compliance with the University's Rules and Procedures.</p> <p>Signed</p> <p>Date</p>
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NOTES FOR COMPLETING FIN7N (REQUEST FOR PAYMENT OF NON STAFF EXPENSES)

1. Please complete all of the section showing personal details and bank details (IBAN, SWIFT/BIC is required for foreign banks only). Should any information be omitted, the Payroll Office may have to return the form to the department and your payment may be delayed.
2. Copies of the University's Manual of Financial Rules (MFR) are available in all Budget Centres and are accessible through the intranet
<https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/finance/manual/index.aspx>

All staff claiming expenses must ensure that they are familiar with the appropriate section and that claims are made in accordance with the MFR.
3. It is essential that the correct forms are used when claiming expenses as different information is required depending upon who is making the claim. Completed and authorised forms should be sent to the Payroll Section of the Finance Office.
4. Where students of this University are claiming expenses their Student I.D. Number must be included in all cases or payment cannot be made.
5. Please use a separate claim form for each activity where expenses have been incurred.
6. All expenses paid to individuals who are not members of staff at this University will be paid into the claimants personal bank account, the details of which must be provided on the front of this form.
7. The approval of your Head of Budget Centre must be obtained before expenses are incurred and Staff are required to exercise economy, taking advantage of special travel facilities whenever possible.
8. Special rates of reimbursement apply to particular activities and such rates are notified in the Expenses section of the Finance Office Website
<https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/finance/payroll/Expenses.aspx>.
9. Where Budget Centres wish to operate commitment accounting for expenses, the Budget Centre Purchase Order Number box on the front of this form must be completed.
10. The University has a dispensation from the Inland Revenue to reimburse the majority of expenses claimed without the deduction of income tax at source or the need to include the details within year end returns **provided that receipts are obtained in all cases.**

Placement nomination form

Student Name	
Supervisor	
PhD title	
CENTA Partner Organisation	
Suggested placement partner	
Suggested placement period	
Rationale for placement (max 350 words) Host organisation background/description (compulsory) What the placement is likely to involve (compulsory) What you hope to contribute to the organization What you hope to achieve in your own personal development	
Potential to convert to CASE?	
Breakdown of indicative costs Travel, accommodation, subsistence if required etc.	