

# ***In Vivo* Strategic Skills Awards**

## Guidance for Applicants (2013)

### **What the Awards cover**

1. The Strategic Skills Awards (SSAs) provide additional funding to cover the costs of integrative *in vivo* mammalian research training in BBSRC and MRC PhDs. They are intended to encourage supervisors to consider student projects involving *in vivo* research training who might otherwise be put off by the cost.
2. The funding is only available to supplement **studentships funded by BBSRC and/or MRC** Doctoral Training Partnerships (DTPs) awarded by competition and automatic allocation.
3. The SSAs are intended to provide *additional* funding towards the high costs of training and do *not* replace normal studentship funding from training grants. Standard studentship costs (i.e. student stipend, fees, etc.) should be drawn from the DTP as normal.
4. The funding provided will be a *contribution* to the full costs of the research training, at either a Lower Level of up to £5,000 or a Higher Level of up to £10,000 per year for each year in which *in vivo* research is undertaken.
5. The level of award given, if any, will be dependent on an assessment by the award panel of the justification made for the resources required **above and beyond** the support given through the standard Research Training Support Grant (RTSG) (currently £5k per year for both BBSRC and MRC).

### **Eligible PhD Projects and Institutions**

6. Applications are welcome from any research institution, provided the studentship is **at least 50% funded** through a DTP from the BBSRC or the MRC. Studentships funded mainly or wholly from other funding bodies or by institutions directly are not eligible to apply for SSAs.
7. Proposals are invited for SSA funding where PhD projects aim to provide high quality *in vivo* training and research which will enable students to acquire **advanced** technical skills that are needed for research careers in industry or academia. (Also see Annex 2: Assessment criteria)
8. Proposals should relate to student research projects which the university department is seeking to start in the coming academic year (i.e. October 2013). This may be for either (i) three or four year BBSRC or MRC studentships where the department is recruiting a student to start the research project in the coming academic year *or* (ii) where a student has already started but is on a four year BBSRC or MRC PhD with a rotation or taught first year, so that the research project will start in the coming academic year.
9. Applications are particularly welcomed from early career academics who may not otherwise have the funding available to cover the research training costs for an *in vivo* PhD student project.

10. Studentships funded through DTPs in collaboration with external industrial partner organisations are eligible for SSA awards **only** in those instances where the Project Partner is a Small or Medium-sized Enterprise (SME). Studentships awarded through BBSRC or MRC annual CASE studentship competitions are not eligible to apply.

11. MRC *in vivo* Capacity Building awards that commenced in 2009 and 2010 are not eligible to receive a SSA.

12. Applicants based in MRC Centres, Units and Institutes will not normally be eligible to receive a SSA and should consult the MRC (see contacts below) before considering submitting an application.

13. Applicants with eligibility queries should refer to the appended Q+A document at **Annex 1**.

#### **How many awards are available?**

14. BBSRC and MRC are each providing a total of up to £200,000. The level of award made to each project will be recommended to the Research Councils by the British Pharmacological Society (BPS) Panel, and therefore the precise number of awards made will depend on the funding levels recommended.

#### **Assessment Process**

15. The BPS will provide a panel of experts in *in vivo* research and education to assess which of the project proposals meet the criteria outlined in **Annex 2**. The panel includes representation from industry, academia and the National Centre for the Replacement, Refinement and Reduction of Animals in Research (NC3Rs).

16. The panel will make recommendations to the Councils regarding those project proposals qualifying for an SSA. The Councils will then inform applicants of the provisional outcome of their application.

17. It is **not necessary to have named students in place or institutional/departmental DTP allocations assigned at the time of making an application for an award**.

18. Research Organisations should report on the progress of the project, the training given and the *in vivo* techniques acquired. This will usually be done by providing information on students and their training programmes through the Je-S Studentship Data Portal for inclusion in the Research Council's Management Information Systems. However, BBSRC and MRC reserve the right to request the completion of interim reports and surveys as required.

#### **How to apply**

19. Proposals should be submitted by means of the [Strategic Skill Awards application form](#). The application should be limited to three pages, and be typed in Arial (minimum 10 pt) throughout. Page widths, box widths and margins must not be altered from the default settings. The BPS panel reserves the right to exclude any proposals from consideration which do not conform to these requirements.

20. The proposals should be submitted with the approval of the holder or coordinator of the DTP, **citing the reference number of the DTP** which will be used to fund the proposed studentship. **If the correct DTP number is not provided then the Council is unable to process the application further.**

Applications for SSAs require approval by the holder or coordinator of the DTP to ensure that the project has been through their standard selection process.

21. Applicants are advised to read the full assessment criteria in **Annex 2** to ensure that the PhD projects submitted meet the **advanced** skills remit and strategic aims of the scheme.

22. Applicants are also reminded that the **projects must be within the scientific remit of the Council to which they are applying**; for [BBSRC](#), the projects must deal with the normal function of organisms. For [MRC](#), the projects must be within the spectrum of basic or applied medical research.

23. Proposals should be sent by email as a Word Document to the email addresses below.

#### **Deadline**

24. The deadline for the receipt of proposals by BBSRC and MRC is **20 May 2013**. This deadline is deliberately late in the academic year to allow for projects to be planned and agreed for students who are currently on a rotation or taught first year.

- Proposals for SSAs relating to BBSRC studentships should be sent to: [postgrad.studentships@bbsrc.ac.uk](mailto:postgrad.studentships@bbsrc.ac.uk) with 'BBSRC Strategic Skills Award Application' clearly marked in the subject line.
- Proposals for SSAs relating to MRC studentships should be sent to: [Fellows@headoffice.mrc.ac.uk](mailto:Fellows@headoffice.mrc.ac.uk) with 'MRC Strategic Skills Award Application' clearly marked in the subject line.

**Research Organisations wishing to submit multiple proposals MUST simultaneously send all proposals via one email.**

#### **Contacts**

25. If you have any queries please contact BBSRC or MRC as appropriate using the email addresses above. Again please use 'Strategic Skills Award' in the subject line.

## Annex 1: Eligibility Q+A:

Why can't DTP studentships in collaboration with large organisations/companies apply?

- The Strategic Skills Awards are designed to support *in vivo* training for DTP studentships where other sources of supplementary funding are unavailable. Large companies should have sufficient resources to support the *in vivo* costs of their studentships, and so it is appropriate to target the Strategic Skills Awards at SMEs only.

Why can't studentships awarded through BBSRC or MRC annual CASE studentship competitions apply?

- In applying to the BBSRC or MRC annual CASE studentship competitions, academic and partner organisation supervisors have already committed to the proposed project, including a financial commitment from the non-academic partner organisation<sup>1</sup>. Therefore it is appropriate that studentships that already benefit from supplementary funding are not eligible for additional Strategic Skill Awards.

Why aren't MRC *in vivo* Capacity Building awards eligible to apply for SSA funding?

- MRC *in vivo* Capacity Building award holders are able to apply for extra funding for *in vivo* projects from the BPS Integrative Pharmacology Fund. Those that were not able to win funding through this mechanism would also not qualify for an SSA.

Can I apply if the studentship project has already started?

- No. The aim of the Strategic Skill Awards (SSAs) scheme is to ensure that research organisations (ROs) do not feel under financial pressure to keep students away from high-cost research training which is strategically important for the UK. Therefore, taking into consideration the funds available, SSAs are awarded prospectively before the commencement of the student's research project, as an incentive to ensure projects incorporating advanced *in vivo* skills are actively supported within ROs. Therefore it is appropriate that projects that are currently on-going are not eligible for an SSA.

If the project I propose is deemed not to fit the remit of the sponsoring Research Council can I resubmit with a new proposal?

- A resubmission is not required, however, applicants will need to provide a DTP reference number for a training grant awarded by the relevant Research Council before the SSA can be processed. **If the correct DTP number is not provided then the Council is unable to process the application further.**

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<sup>1</sup> Such funding may also be provided by MRC, where the collaborating partner is classified as a Small to Medium Enterprise (SME).

## Annex 2: Assessment Criteria

The BPS committee will use the following criteria to assess and prioritise the bids:

- The primary consideration is the extent and quality of *in vivo* training and research in the project, so that the student can acquire important high-level skills that are transferrable into their future career (i.e. useful in future research careers in industry or academia).  
**Advanced *in vivo* skills are defined as:**

*Research skills training where a major component of the work involves developing and applying sophisticated physiological, immunological, pharmacological, behavioural observation or experimentation in whole, living non-human mammals in order to understand normal and abnormal biological / psychological mechanisms. Research projects must provide significant hands-on in vivo skills training, including (but not limited to): surgical and pre-clinical skills, complex experiments, novel imaging technologies and/or other innovative techniques. Research training which is predominantly focused on the generation of transgenic lines; model systems lacking clear novelty; or the use of animals primarily as sources of DNA, cells, tissues or biological fluids, are not included in the priority area.*

- Projects must also propose investigations in fundamental and/or translational science which are of merit (i.e. that underpin medical, veterinary or agricultural research)
- The research proposal must require the use of small or large non-human mammals, and *in vivo* research must form a significant component of the project.
- The research question must be one that cannot yet be answered by using alternatives to animals. The project must involve measurements made from intact live animals.
- All projects must be [3Rs](#) compliant.
- Preference will be given to those applications that make use of novel or advanced methodologies that maximise data quality and quantity and/or minimise disturbance to the animal.
- Projects in which the *in vivo* component comprises of the generation of a transgenic line or the use of animals solely as sources of tissues or biological fluids will not be considered for funding, as they do not provide a sufficient level of advanced *in vivo* training.
- Justification of resources required **above and beyond** the support given through the standard Research Training Support Grant (RTSG) (currently £5k per year for both BBSRC and MRC) will be taken into consideration in determining the level of award, if any, recommended.