

NERC / BBSRC / MRC

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Introduction



- Background and Current Approaches
- Differences ... with reason?
- Current Issues

- **NERC:** Invests around £410M (08-09) in environmental research – including ecology, population genetics, systematics and taxonomy
- **BBSRC:** BBSRC invests around £430M (08-09) in basic and strategic **non-medical life-sciences** and biotechnologies
- **MRC:** The MRC invests around £605M (08-09) across a broad spectrum of **medical research** from more fundamental studies to more applied clinical research

- We work with Councils to ensure that applications for funding for research close to remit boundaries are addressed by the most appropriate Council.
- For example:
 - BBSRC funds human physiology, cell biology, and genetics and genomics research relevant to understanding normal human function
 - but does not fund research focused on specific human diseases and disease processes or abnormal conditions, which fall within the remit of MRC

BBSRC Delivery Plan: Delivering Excellence with Impact

- ‘Skills and Training’ positioned under Economic Impact
- Warry Report: “.. the output of highly educated people rather than research results is widely regarded as the most effective knowledge transfer mechanism.”

Studentship Funding	Previous (07-08)		2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
NERC	£23.0M		£24.0M	£24.0M	£24.0M
BBSRC	£42.0M		£43.7M	£47.0M	£51.1M
MRC	£42.0M		£42.0M	£42.0M	£43.0M

See NERC, BBSRC and MRC Delivery Plans on web for further info

Policy Landscape for the Skills System



- Roberts Report 2002 has dominated the recent landscape
 - Strengthening the skills pipeline into research careers
 - But also preparing students and early career researchers for different career paths
- This has now evolved:
 - Warry Report 2006
 - Leitch Review of Skills 2006
- **Economic Impact** and **Demand-led Training** are now central to the high-level skills landscape

NERC, BBSRC and MRC approaches



- Use of Doctoral Training Grants (DTGs)
 - Devolves greater autonomy to departments
 - Enables flexibility to tailor funding to student / project needs
 - Facilitates joint funding, including inter-disciplinary funding
 - All Councils have agreed to move away from direct student payments as part of convergence for the Shared Service Centre

NERC, BBSRC and MRC approaches



- A “dual support” approach
 - **Large DTGs for flexibility** – to give autonomy to institutions to respond to skills needs, collaborate, tailor to needs of project and student, etc.
 - Smaller number of studentships allocated via **directed** competitions
- Can be compared to Responsive Mode vs. Initiative funding balance
- See NERC, BBSRC and MRC websites for further info

Some Differences



- BBSRC uses a notional 4-year studentship funding period as standard
- Why does BBSRC retain a competition approach as opposed to an algorithmic allocation of DTGs?
- Why Doesn't BBSRC Fund Studentships on Grants?

BBSRC's 4-Year Studentships



- All PhD studentships are **4-year** duration
 - 4-year duration allows for broader based, interdisciplinary training
 - This can be a formal 1+3 (but student needs to complete within 4 year total)
 - Or can be a 'standard' PhD with time for broader scientific and professional skill development
- But any DTG approach allows a more flexible approach to PhD duration

Competition vs Algorithm



- Why retain a competition approach as opposed to an algorithmic allocation of DTGs?
 - Rewards training quality on a competitive basis
 - Allows periodic monitoring of training provision
 - Helps institutions and departments take a strategic approach to internal allocation of studentships
 - Helps BBSRC drive strategic change in training provision
- But does this increase administrative burden on universities when the ‘usual suspects’ end up getting all the funding?

- **PhD Research + ‘Core Bioscience Skills ‘**
 - Mathematical skills
 - Computational and data handling skills
 - Multi-disciplinary approaches to biological systems
 - Public engagement and outreach opportunities
 - Ethical awareness training
 - Awareness of the social context of biological research
 - Commercial awareness
 - Business and management skills
 - Entrepreneurial awareness

Studentships on Grants



- Why Doesn't BBSRC Fund Studentships on Grants?
 - Studentship project is a training vehicle and should not be linked too closely to objectives of grant
 - Student needs to have freedom to take project in new directions as the project develops
 - Risk that student becomes a 'pair of hands' on the grant when deadlines for the PI are looming
 - Linking studentships to grant may lead to PI having a student when the department would rather they did not...!
- But does this cause difficulties in meeting the full economic cost of expensive bioscience research?

Some future issues



- Roberts Training – Innovation Training
- How to provide PhD students with professional experience
- Awarding additional funding to support experimental costs in particular high-cost areas

Discussion



Questions or comments?