SoCoBio studentship competition for October 2020 entry
Guidance for applicants

1. What is SoCoBio?
The South Coast Biosciences (SoCoBio) Doctoral Training Partnership is a new collaboration of four leading Universities and an independent research Institute providing doctoral training in Biosciences across the South Coast.

The partners are:
• University of Southampton
• University of Kent
• NIAB EMR
• University of Sussex
• University of Portsmouth

The consortium is supported by the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC) and provides PhD students with a unique opportunity to be funded to undertake exciting bioscience research and training in the following BBSRC themes:
- Understanding the rules of life (~11 scholarships available)
- Bioscience for sustainable agriculture and food (~5 scholarships available)
- Bioscience for renewable resources and clean growth (~8 scholarships available)
- Bioscience for an integrated understanding of health (~3 scholarships available)

2. What is the SoCoBio Programme?
SoCoBio is a broad 4-year research training programme providing students with the skills they need to develop into future bioscience leaders in academia or in industry.

Our list of projects offered for the 2020 cohort is available on the How to Apply section of our website, but most students are recruited initially to the four-year programme, rather than to a specific project. Once accepted to the programme you will have the chance to choose the projects you are interested in from the portfolio of projects provided here. In year one, after two four-month laboratory rotations in projects of your choice (this would normally be at the same institution, but could be at a different one), you will finalise your PhD project choice.

A key feature of the programme is the cohort training. As a SoCoBio student, you will be based at the institution of the main supervisor of your chosen project, but you will also be trained as part of a cohort with students from the partner universities. This means that you will:
- Attend induction, training and summer schools with other SoCoBio students;
- Benefit from input from a co-supervisor at another partner organisation;
- Follow compulsory taught courses (online and in person) in Data Management and Business Skills, Entrepreneurship and Science Communication;
• Undertake a 3-month internship outside academia – for example in a biotech, agritech or pharmaceutical company or in a science communication setting.

3. **What do the scholarships cover?**

Awards are offered for 4 years (48 months) full time.

The scholarships cover:

- PhD fees at the Home/EU level (£4,327 pa for 2019-20)
- The UKRI maintenance allowance (£15,009 for 2019-20)
- A research and training allowance

Part time awards are available

4. **Am I eligible to apply for a SoCoBio award**

SoCoBio is seeking excellent prospective research students regardless of their particular scientific background. We are keen to recruit students from a wide diversity of academic backgrounds: those with creative drive in both Physical (for example, Maths, Computer Science, Engineering) as well as the Life Sciences (for example, Biology, Biomedicine, Chemistry, Biochemistry, Biotechnology). We aim to recruit the best students to a broad training programme rather than to fill particular projects.

**Minimum Academic Eligibility Criteria**

Candidates should have a BSc/MSci 2:1 and/or Masters (MSc or MRes) at Merit/Distinction level (>60%) and/or evidence of significant relevant professional experience equivalent to Masters level. SoCoBio welcomes applications from candidates with sustained experience beyond their undergraduate degree level that is specifically relevant to biosciences research. This includes students with degrees in science or engineering-disciplines outside of biology.

**Nationality and Residency Criteria**

As the scholarships are funded by BBSRC, the partnership has to observe the [UK Research and Innovation Training Grant Terms and Conditions](#) and so the following eligibility conditions apply:

1. Overseas students (i.e. students charged overseas tuition fees) are not eligible for BBSRC funding;  
2. To be eligible for a full award (stipend and fees) and Student must:
   - have no restrictions on how long they can stay in the UK and
   - have been ordinarily resident in the UK for **at least 3 years** prior to the start of the Studentship (with some further constraint regarding residence for education).
3. To be eligible for a **fees only** award, a Student must be ordinarily resident in a member state of the EU, in the same way as UK Students must be ordinarily resident in the UK.

Further guidance on residential eligibility is provided in Annex B of the [UKRI Training Grant Guidance](#) but please contact a.d.britt@sussex.ac.uk or c.r.beeching@kent.ac.uk if you are not sure about your eligibility.
Four-year scholarships
SoCoBioco will not fund a PhD you have already begun so is not suitable for students looking for one or two years of funding. All SocoBio students will follow together the four-year training and research programme so that they have the necessary range of skills required for their future careers.

5. What are iCASE projects and how do they work?
Industrial CASE (Collaborative Awards in Science and Engineering) projects are those where the research involves a joint project with non-university partner (a company, charity or government body). For the iCASE projects, students will have a co-supervisor at the partner organisation and will spend at least 3 months working on their premises – which will count at their internship. iCASE students will follow the same training programme as other SoCoBio students. Some iCASE studentships are jointly funded by industry – Industry Co-funded Projects on our website - and students who have chosen these projects will embark on their research project with the partner from the beginning, rather than after the two rotations.

6. How do I apply?
Complete the online SoCoBio Application Form A and Application Form B by 23.59 on January 28th 2020.

We also advise you to apply at the same time for a PhD place at your preferred host institution so that they are aware of your interest in the scheme.

7. Notes on completing the application form

Section A
This section is not part of the selection process and will not be passed to the reviewers.

Applicant Reference
We are anonymising the forms, splitting parts A and B, so please include the same reference code (we suggest your initials and house number) on Parts A and B.

Personal Details:
We require information on your nationality and residency to check that you are eligible for BBSRC funding.
Please use an email address that we can contact you on during February 2020 when we are selecting candidates.
English Language Qualifications:
If English is not your first language, we need to be sure that you have the required level of English for doctoral study – normally an IELTS qualification with a minimum score of 6.5 in all sections or proof of a previous degree taught in English or substantial work experience in the UK.

Funding:
See Section 3 – eligibility. EU nationals who have been living in the UK for the three years preceding October 2020 will be eligible for the full award, whist EU nationals who have been in the UK for under three years, are eligible for a Fee Waiver and research costs only. Overseas students are not eligible for BBSRC funding.

Referees:
We will contact your referees to email their reference by February 25th 2020. At least one of your referees should be able to comment on your capacity for undertaking a research project. Referees should not be family members or friends and can include previous tutors or supervisors or employers.

Equality diversity and inclusion monitoring questions:
This sensitive data will be anonymised and used for reporting purposes only. All sensitive personal data will be held securely and used in accordance with the Data Policies of the partner Institutions. Applications are particularly welcomed from candidates with protected characteristics – e.g. from black and minority ethnic minorities – who are under-represented in postgraduate research at our Institutions. We also welcome candidates who would wish to consider pursuing a PhD part-time. We will offer support to any students with carer responsibilities to enable them to pursue their PhD research (including rotations and placements) plan on an equal footing with others. Students with a disability will be eligible to receive additional funding via the Disabled Student Allowance.

Section B
Applicant Reference
We are anonymising the forms so please include the same reference code (we suggest your initials and house number) on Parts A and B.

Themes and Projects
You do not need to commit to a particular project at application stage, but we would like to have an indication of your interests to ensure that we recruit students with a variety of interests. You can express an interest in one or more themes and one or more Industry Co-funded Projects. For Industry-co-funded Projects, students are matched with their PhD project from the start, while most SoCoBio students are matched after the rotations.

Your Education
Please list your most recent University qualifications first. In the Education Summary you can list other relevant qualifications including your A levels.

Your Work Experience
Please list your work experience, using the following format:
- Employer/Organisation
- Position held
- Start and end dates
- Responsibilities
- Experience that you have gained through your work experience that is relevant to your application

The work may be paid or unpaid and may or may not be related to biosciences research, but may demonstrate qualities required of a PhD researcher

8. **Who can help me with my application?**

For queries on the application form or your eligibility, contact a.d.britt@sussex.ac.uk or c.r.beeching@kent.ac.uk.

To discuss a particular project that we are advertising, please contact the supervisors listed on the website.

9. **How will applications be assessed?**

The SoCoBio Recruitment Committee will shortlist candidates according to the following criteria:

- Qualifications and academic ability – as demonstrated by your qualifications and references;
- Preparedness for research training in biosciences including research or other work/professional experience, and personal qualities such as independence, initiative, problem solving and teamwork skills as demonstrated by your personal statement;
- Your motivation and commitment to doctoral research including career plans - as demonstrated by your personal statement;
- Coverage of SoCoBio themes and priority areas

The Recruitment committee will assess candidates according to the following criteria:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Selection criteria</th>
<th>ESSENTIAL</th>
<th>DESIRABLE</th>
<th>Evidence</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Qualifications</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s in relevant scientific discipline showing strong potential, particularly in research components</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Application Form, references</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master’s or research experience relevant to SoCoBio research, if Bachelor’s is in a less closely related scientific area</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Application Form, personal statement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candidate is well-prepared for research in terms of motivation, resilience, and independence</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>References, interview, personal statement</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Fit to the Programme</td>
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The candidate has a genuine interest in making full use of the rotations, summer schools, placements and training for developing a wider skillset

The candidate’s interests and future plans are a good fit with the SoCoBio theme

Willingness to proactively engage in seminars, training, student-led activities and a positive research culture

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<th>Grade</th>
<th>Descriptors</th>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>An outstanding candidate who convincingly meets all the essential and desired criteria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>An excellent candidate who meets the essential criteria but doesn’t excel beyond them</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>A good candidate who is capable of completing a PhD, but is weak in some areas (e.g. narrowly falling short of some essential criteria)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>A weaker candidate who is perhaps not yet ready for PhD study, or who has produced a weak or inappropriate personal statement</td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Unsuitied to the programme</td>
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Shortlisted candidates will be invited to attend an interview on February 26th or February 27th at the University of Southampton. The day will consist of a number of short interviews and some group tasks/problem solving.

Successful candidates will be asked to confirm their top three choices of rotation and to formally apply for a PhD place at their chosen host university when they accept their scholarship.

**10. Timeline**

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<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>Deadline for emailing applications</td>
<td>January 28th 2020</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deadline for references</td>
<td>February 25th 2020</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interviews at Southampton</td>
<td>February 26th and 27th 2020 (one day only)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Open days/evenings at host Institutions</td>
<td>February 2020</td>
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<tr>
<td>Offer made to successful candidates</td>
<td>March 6th 2020</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deadline to accept SoCoBio offer naming 3 preferred project rotations</td>
<td>March 20th 2020</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deadline for an offer a PhD place at preferred host institution</td>
<td>March 31st 2020</td>
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