# EASTBIO Annual Student Survey – RESPONSE

# EASTBIO Management Group – November 2023

## General

The Student Survey opened between 1st-28th May 2023 with three reminders sent out to current students - a total of one hundred and eighty students. We have received 100 responses in total, a response rate of about 40% based on the numbers of all four cohorts. Although the survey was anonymous, seventeen people shared their email address to be contacted for further feedback in the form of a focus group. The EASTBIO Training and Development Sub-Committee has met to discuss the survey responses and priority areas of intervention in the short and longer term. The Committee proposal, which was also shared with the EDI and the Industry Engagement Committees, was discussed at the 10 October 2023 EMG meeting where final decisions were made for implementation in the 2023/24 programme within capacity.

At the same time, EASTBIO DTP was discussing its response to the announcement by BBSRC, in September 2023, of supplementary funding; we welcomed this initiative as it complemented our response to the student input and measures to enhancing financial & other support to current students. Following a consultation with the EASTBIO Training & Development and EDI sub-committees and robust student engagement, the Management Group agreed on a proposal to the BBSRC that was submitted on the 12 October 2023. The proposed activities align fully with the review process behind this response and addresses student expectations. They will further enhance the objectives that underpin our core training with a targeted focus on student support in career preparedness, innovation, EDI, and cross-DTP collaboration. We will announce the outcome of this request for additional funds in November 2023.

Both files referred to above - the Student Survey and the EASTBIO Proposal to BBSRC for Supplementary Funding 2023/24 - can be made available upon request.

On behalf of the Management Group

Dr Maria Filippakopoulou (DTP Manager)

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| DTP Response |
| GOVERNANCE | ***You said…***Management Group and decision-making not always transparent***We listened…***The EASTBIO Management Committee set up 4 Sub-Committees with membership including academic and student reps, each responsible for a key part of the DTP Training Programme: Training and Development, Industry Engagement, EDI, Recruitment. Information about the membership is accessible via the EASTBIO website http://www.eastscotbiodtp.ac.uk/eastbio-dtp-committees and introduced in person at our Symposia and Induction Days from 2023 onwards. Any member can be approached by students and supervisor at any point for queries, clarifications or to report issues arising and a course of action will be agreed by the Committee in question. |
| GOVERNANCE | ***You said…***There is no complaint procedure***We listened…***The EASTBIO team has set up a formal process -- including guidance and an online form https://forms.office.com/e/rxe5LdcftM -- for recording complaints on any aspects of the programme. Depending on the nature and wishes of the individual submitting a formal complaint, the team will work with either the Management Group or the relevant academic lead to initiate an action that addresses the complaint in accordance with the UKRI Terms and Conditions and the policies and regulations of the relevant partner institution, as needs be. |
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| GOVERNANCE | ***You said…***Too much reliance on student reps for delivering aspects of student support***We listened…***EASTBIO calls for student reps at the Induction Day, following which new volunteers join the second-year reps in representing peers and also, optionally, sitting in one of the EASTBIO sub-committees. We encourage volunteers to speak with current student reps about their experiences and try to be clear about expectations. Student reps are required to voice student concerns and opinions to the EASTBIO Team and Management, attend the end-of-year EMG meeting (at Symposium), help organise the Symposium and other social meetups for local peers. If volunteering for one of the sub-committees, they are invited to attend regular meetings (or delegate to the deputy student rep) so that they can help with decision-making. Students can withdraw from their role at any point, either temporarily or permanently, at will.* We have asked current student reps for their opinions about how best to manage this role; we will use the input to inform the discussion around what are the expectations and benefits from being a student rep.
* We will publish a collectively agreed role descriptions for student roles (whether EDI or not), that will remain under review as each new cohort joins the programme. We will finalise the role description following a meeting with second- and (new) first-year students in October 2023.
* We will specify minimum expectations and consider recognition of services (currently, each student rep receives a bonus of 10 training points).
* We have offered student reps training on Mental Health and Inclusive Communication previously. We will identify further training for student reps that we will deliver to all our student reps who will register for it. Initially, we propose training on Active Bystander for all student reps and specific EDI training for EDI student reps. A further proposal is to have an informal discussion with the UoE SBS BioDocSoc Dr Adam Mol to cover a general introduction to the remit, management and benefits of being a student rep.
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| TRAINING | ***You said…***More Industry-based training options***We listened…***EASTBIO will run a number of training options focused on industry and entrepreneurial skills training in collaboration with DTP partners IBioIC and SULSA, as well as the UoE Edinburgh Innovations, the Alan Turing Institute and other stakeholders. EASTBIO will continue to highlight industry-based events and opportunities open to current students, such as BBSRC-led, provided by other DTP/CDT, or by partner institutions and their stakeholders.EASTBIO will ensure that enhanced industry engagement underpins our programme via invitations to EASTBIO alumni/ae with a career in industry (Placements Q&A session), and panels at other training events. Planned training for 2023/24 includes:* Short-term IBioIC-run training workshops on Working with Industry, How to Interpret a Patent, Marketing Yourself, Careers Opportunities after a Science Degree; confirmation of participation in the IBioIC Business game in 2024
* (TBC in autumn 2023) Edinburgh Innovation-run referral-based Engage programme; EI referral-based Enterprise team for students interested in a spin-off; short term placements at the EI Licensing team. These options will be restricted to students based at the UoE and we will coordinate with partner institutions to extend provision.
* SULSA-run opportunities for joining their 6-week Graduate Employability Masterclasses; signposting of their broad programme of activities for networking, Industry-focused conferences, Industry Engagement Ambassadors scheme, LinkedIn network, etc.
* Mini MBA with a focus on biological sciences, livestock and aquaculture.
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| TRAINING | ***You said…***Training information is not streamlined***We listened…***From 2023/24, the EASTBIO team will be using Eventbrite to monitor registration and attendance of training events and activities.A calendar of training events posted on the EASTBIO website at <http://www.eastscotbiodtp.ac.uk/training> to facilitate easy access to all training, whether mandatory and optional. |
| TRAINING | ***You said…***Travel to attend in person mandatory training acts a barrier for some of the students based at more remote partner institutions***We listened…***From 2023/24 forward, EASTBIO commits to implementing the following:* We aim to programme training events and activities 50% of in-person and 50% remote approximately.
* Improve guidance for students organising thematic sessions & encourage planning for hybrid events, when possible and within capacity.
* EASTBIO has established a process by which students may apply to get recognition for and/or training points for external (non-EASTBIO) training and development opportunities amounting to a maximum of 40 training points out of the total of 200 expected by end of second year (equal to 20% of the overall training credits expected). This measure seeks to address the reported issues of (a) barriers to accessing training; (b) recognition of advanced training not covered by the EASTBIO programme or not covered at the level required; (c) alleviating the pressures for students with additional care responsibilities, and (d) recognition of forms of skills development such as coaching/teaching work not covered by the DTP. The guidance and application for this is shared with all students looking to complete their training requirements.
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| TRAINING/ PLACEMENTS | ***You said…***PIPS guidance can be improved, especially for overseas students***We listened…***EASTBIO has finalised & circulated its advice and guidance for overseas students (especially in the 2021 cohort) who have limited access to the main PIPS scheme. The team is always available for one-to-one discussion with students (and their supervisors) for further advice.EASTBIO has finalised a review of the existing set of resources to streamline the process, simplify the guidance and support students during placements, and with their transition before and after a placement. Also, we are waiting on the outcome of the separate BBSRC-run review of the PIPS scheme over the spring/summer 2023. |
| INDUSTRY ENGAGEMENT | ***You said…***Students on Collaborative studentships need more engagement from their academic partners***We listened…***The EASTBIO Industry Engagement Committee has considered opportunities to improve the non-academic partners’ engagement with the project and the student’s development. To this end, the following were implemented:* the Committee has helped to update the PhD project guidance so that prospective academic with non-academic partners are asked, from early on, to provide specific information about (a) expected benefits and outcomes of the project; (b) non-academic partners’ estimated contributions; (c) a calendar of supervisor meetings, and (d) placement timings.
* The EASTBIO Welcome email to new supervisors has been updated to reflect these expectations, including explicit encouragement to discuss the PhD project proposal with the student recruited to it at an early stage.
* We have also proposed a Welcome Pack for the student onboarding, with key contacts, expertise, and resources committed to the project.
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| TRAINING/ EDI | ***You said…***More training options on wellbeing***We listened…***In 2023/24, EASTBIO will run (a) Neurodiversity Awareness for all current supervisors (b) Inclusive Communication for all new students and supervisors and (c) Where to Draw the Line? workshop for first and second year students. We will continue to run the PhD Resilience course for first-year students and we are open to specific suggestions for further training enhancement.The Mental Health First Aid group will also use the monthly Newsletter more consistently to advertise local wellbeing/resilience training, events and activities EASTBIO students can join. There will be 3 online drop-ins in 2023/24 (advertised on the new Handbook), aimed to informally bring students together to catch up and share experiences (First Aiders to chair these meetups): 2-4pm, 22 November 2023, 24 January 2024, 1 May 2024.We will continue to circulate/highlight a list of EDI resources & contacts accessible at each partner institution via the Handbook, the website and our monthly Newsletter.We are currently preparing bespoke training for EDI Student reps (see above) and we remain open to recommendations by students about what they find most useful. We have discussed this with student societies and we’re looking for ways to secure training access beyond students’ home institutions.We are planning to use the recently confirmed BBSRC Supplementary Funding for Supporting Students with specific additional needs (students with young families, caring responsibilities, managing chronic ill health, etc.) in 2023/24 (further guidance will be circulated in November 2023 or upon confirmation of funds from BBSRC). |
| EDI | ***You said…***More opportunities for networking and socialising opportunities both within the student cohort, and with alumni/ae.***We listened…***EASTBIO will provide catering funding for student reps to organise two social occasions at the start and the end of the academic year, whether as part of the Induction and Symposia events or separately (for example, as local meetups). Any of the suggested events may run with the participation of former EASTBIO students.We proposed that the BBSRC Supplementary funding be used for a Public Engagement event that will bring together EASTBIO current and former students, as well as undergraduate students looking to do a PhD in Life Sciences (or industry). |
| FINANCIAL SUPPORT | ***You said…***Lack of financial support from the DTP with the rising cost of living which affects some students more than others***We listened…***EASTBIO will increase our liaising with our partner support teams to improve signposting of available funding for hardship, support for students with young or larger families, managing chronic illness, etc.We proposed that the BBSRC Supplementary funding – announced in September 2023 - be used for financial support to students with young families, additional caring responsibilities, managing chronic ill health, etc. To note, the measure is short-term as the funding must be spent by the end of March 2024 (further details to be shared with student cohorts in November 2023). |