 

2025 Annual Programme Survey - Management Response

# General

For a third year, we asked our students to comment on all aspects of the programme, from training options to barriers to training, events for cohort-building, placements, transitions, governance and support. The anonymous survey was open from the 16 April 2025 -19 May 2025. The response rate was 21%, representing responses from 61 out of 290 current students.

In addition to individual feedback on training courses and events we also collect, the survey is a key channel for the actual student experience reaching our committees and Management directly. Together with student reps who sit at the Training and Development, EDI and Industry Engagement committees, we analyse your feedback and decide together on areas of priority to be implemented in the following year. The table of actions, below, represents the Management response to student views and the programmatic commitments to UKRI BBSRC for the renewed funding we were awarded under the Doctoral Landscape Awards 2025, launched on the 1st of October 2025.

# Actions

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Category** | **Description** | **Actioned by** | **Completion Date** |
| Induction | Additional online induction/Q&A for students with a later start date | EastBio team | October 2025 |
| Training | To address student concerns around the management of the combined training impact:   * Remove training points from 2025/26 intake onwards * Simplify/reduce ‘essential’ (mandatory) courses and offer ample options at different levels (EastBio-run and local or in collaboration with external partners) * signpost local training options (all cohorts) or in collaboration with other DLAs such as the Doctoral Landscape Training Network (DLTN) and the NorthWestBio Partnership. | EastBio team | From October 2025 |
| Training | Reduce thematic sessions to total of 3; the final session to run with SPRE at the Symposium (2025 intake onwards)  Reduce the thematic groups to 3 from 5 to allow for tighter cohort-based interactions. Groups based on BBSRC impact areas are:   * Healthy people, animals, and plants * A resilient bioeconomy * Sustainable agriculture and food systems | EastBio team | From October 2025 |
| Training | Team to request more feedback on whether training surgeries worked for students | Student volunteers/ EastBio team | October/November 2025 |
| Training | Offer a new suite of training in collaboration with new EastBio partner Scottish Policy and Research Exchange (SPRE) to enhance career-preparedness opportunities; introductory session to run at Induction 2025 | EastBio team/SPRE | From October 2025 |
| Cohort-building | * Team to encourage and facilitate regular social events, local and central with financial support from EastBio * Team to facilitate more opportunities to engage with local postdoc societies | Institutional student reps/ EastBio and partner admin teams | From October 2025 |
| Cohort-building | * More opportunities to engage with alumni/ae, active in academia or industry | EastBio team | From October 2025 |
| Placements | Team to run drop-ins for students submitting their PIPS plans (Y1/Y2) and PIPS Q&A open to further-year students | EastBio team | From October 2025 |
| Placements | Minimum of 2 soft online check-ins with students on their placement (end of first and second year) | EastBio team | From October 2025 |
| Placements | SPRE to run a post-placement day with an opportunity to run an informal student-run session to safely discuss placement experiences | SPRE/Student reps/volunteers | From October 2025 |
| Placements | Additional flexibility with the PIPS timeline (currently, PIPS to be completed by end of year 3) | EastBio team | From October 2025 |
| Governance | To make the work of subcommittees clearer at the in-person events, the team will be publishing committee minutes or reports on the EastBio Newsletter | EastBio team | From October 2025 |
| Training/EDI Support | Promote the Expectations Alignment as an onboarding tool (Handbook, Induction, website) | EastBio team | October 2025 |
| Industry/Business skills | To increase networking opportunities with Scottish and/or national industries, the new EastBio Industry Engagement Manager, Ms Lizzie Leigh, joined the EastBio team on the 1st of October | EastBio Management | From October 2025 |
| EDI support | Informal online sessions for Y2, Y3, Y4 in early autumn, refreshing information about support and programme requirements | EastBio team | From October 2025 |
| EDI support | Clear information on student entitlement and DSA, especially at times of crisis or acute need:   * Dedicated session at the Induction * Post-induction drop-in session (20/10/25, 10:00-12:30) * Review of all guidance for ease of access and practicality   DSA info: <https://www.ukri.org/publications/disabled-students-allowance-dsa-framework/ukri-disabled-students-allowance-framework-dsa/> | EastBio team | From October 2025 |
| EDI support | * Update all EDI resources & Statement, including actions, with accountability to the EastBio EDI committee (before escalation to the Management). * Team to make sure that EDI Statement is updated with a clear description of the value of EDI and specific examples of benefits * Share an (optional) Personal Manual on how to get support for reasonable adjustments throughout the PhD | EastBio Manager | October 2025 |
| EDI support | Team to facilitate informal student networks, e.g. Women in STEM, to contribute to a respectful and positive lab culture | EastBio team and student reps/volunteers | From October 2025 |
| EDI support | Team to open the Neurodiversity Awareness training to Management and students (currently opent to EastBio supervisors only) | EastBio team | From October 2025 |

# Summary of Survey

Training Provision

Generally, students felt positively about EastBio training provision, and are able to access a wide range of training to develop their research skills, transferable skills, EDI and wellbeing knowledge. They do not find it difficult to meet the EastBio training points requirements and acknowledge that thematic sessions are a useful learning experience, although some did discuss that thematic sessions can be irrelevant to their research. Some students also face barriers to attending training, particularly due to diary conflicts, geographical location/budget restrictions, and a preference for local or more relevant trainings. Students did however recognise that it would be very difficult for EastBio to cater to all training niches/requirements with such a broad cohort and range of projects.

Other feedback on the training and events provision included:

* Some training either too general or too technical to be useful
* Could be delivered with shorter primers followed by more advanced courses
* Signpost advanced options at partner institutions
* Not enough computational options
* Encourage more exciting/hands-on thematic meeting options for future years (like those in 2024-5 compared to previous years)
* Ensure distribution of training across geographical locations
* Could cluster training to avoid repeated travel
* Scientific writing training

Events and Cohort Building

Most students felt they had opportunity to meet other students and supervisors, although less so alumni and industrial partners/external stakeholders. They feel part of an EastBio community and able to access the EastBio staff and management group.

Further activities to improve the community could include:

* Events involving alumni and industry reps
* EastBio social events at partner institutions
* EastBio Christmas social
* Residential community event

Placements

Of those who have engaged with their placement so far, most felt supported thoughout their placement and know where to seek further support if needed. They also generally felt there is clear guidance and resources for placements, to equip them in finding and starting their placement.

Areas for improvement include

* More support for transitioning back from placement
* Flexibility on PIPS requirement for those who have professional experience already
* Alter PIPS timeline to allow more time to consider what sectors may be useful
* Open Q&A to year 2 students

Responses regarding CASE placements were similarly positive, although one comment was made regarding the additional costs of a CASE placement.

Transitions

Whilst some students do not feel well prepared for their future careers, some commented that they do not expect to yet due to being in their first year of study, and others suggested it is not the responsibility of EastBio to provide tailored careers advice.

Further suggestions include:

* Make clear how to stay in touch with EastBio post-graduation
* Career-preparedness related training
* Bring in alumni as speakers
* Highlight career opportunities
* Provide opportunity to network with Scottish industries

Governance

Most students know the role of the management group and subcommittees and know where to find relevant information about the groups. They feel that the management group takes account of student feedback, although some commented that they don’t entirely know what the subcommittees male decisions on/discuss. Students felt positively about the EastBio support teams and generally knew how to contact their local administrative team.

Suggestions for improvement include:

* Make the work of subcommittees clearer to students (standing item in newsletter, could be added to website)
* Representation of subcommittees at symposium

Support

Regarding material support, students know how to access their RTSG. They know where to find information about their studentship, and are happy with the support from both local and central EastBio teams. When discussing wellbeing and mental health support, students knew where to find relevant information, and who they can contact (including the mental health first aid team, and how to access the DSA.

most students felt positive about the support they receive from their supervisory team, and that their supervisors are well equipped to support them and understand the commitment required of students by EastBio. They also know how to seek help if faced with sipervisory issues.

* Continue to make clear how students can access their RTSG, DSA and mental health resources
* Provide a simple resource to help supervisors understand the amount of EastBio trainings students will be attending each year

General

Students outlined some of the most positive aspects of EastBio including:

* feeling like part of a community of research and meeting other researchers
* the training courses and events (including organising thematic sessions, being inspired by the Science Communication workshop)
* carrying out a placement
* being funded to carry out research
* support from the EastBio team

Areas of improvement included:

* review of the training programme with a focus on transferable skills and optional advanced methods courses
* rethink of training points and length of engagement
* more support for finding PIPS and transitioning back from PIPS
* more support for career preparation for final years
* regular formal social events to strengthen community
* support to avoid overstimulation at events
* re-run the Anti-Racism course by Paul Reddish

# Contact

Email enquiries@eastscotbiodtp.ac.uk or Maria.Filippakopoulou@ed.ac.uk if you have any questions or comments about this document.