

Supervisor Handbook

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General

Within the UKRI BBSRC overarching vision underpinning good supervisory practice, this resource aims to develop a benchmark for *consistency of experience* whilst acknowledging the foundational autonomy of partner host institutions. To this end, it formulates basic definitions behind the contractual relationship between the EastBio Partnership and EastBio supervisors. It also lists the means of support and guidance that should allow supervisors to fulfil the set of expectations within the UKRI BBSRC regulatory framework.

EastBio has been funded uninterruptedly by BBSRC since 2012, recruiting and providing excellent training to consecutive cohorts of doctoral students to enable them to generate positive impacts in research, industry and society. Academics based at one of our nine partner institutions – the East of Scotland Universities of Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh, St Andrews, Stirling, as well as Scotland’s Rural College, James Hutton Institute, Moredun Research Institute and IBioIC – join our community after successfully recruiting doctoral candidates via a competitive recruitment that is monitored by the EastBio Management Group. The studentships we award are predominantly co-funded by BBSRC and the host/partner institution, and are managed according to the UKRI Terms and Conditions - from stipend levels and bench fees to part-time study to regulations governing extensions, sick, maternity, paternity and adoption leave, disabled student allowance, etc. The primary remit of the EastBio programme involves, first, excellent life sciences research provision and, secondly, the training events and activities that we run centrally or in collaboration with stakeholders each year. EastBio provides support and guidance to students who join the programme so that they complete their PhD research and the EastBio training programme and professional placement and submit their PhD thesis within the funded 4-year period (or part-time equivalent).

Useful links

[About EastBio](#)

[UKRI Terms and Conditions](#)

[Student cohorts](#)

Governance

EastBio is governed by the Management Group (EMG) consisting of:

- the EastBio Director
- one academic lead per partner institution
- the EastBio professional team: the Partnership Manager, the Industry Engagement Manager and the Support Officer

They have the overall responsibility to conform with our commitments to BBSRC, as agreed by all partner institutions in a Memorandum of Agreement signed following the issue of the formal BBSRC DLA Grant Agreement. The EMG meets a minimum of three times per year, two of which in person at the Induction and the Annual Symposia, and on an ad hoc basis to address emerging issues. Four separate committees, each consisting of a management and a student rep chair, plus deputies, address key aspects of the programme: Recruitment, EDI, Training & Development, and Industry Engagement. Each committee has decision-making

responsibilities, can make recommendations and escalate issues to the EMG. The committee members are introduced to students and supervisors attending the Induction and the Annual Symposia events each year. Integral part of our governance are our student reps, who represent each partner institution but can also join a committee or become EDI student reps, serving for a minimum of 2 years; we acknowledge students for their contributions in that role through a training bonus or by counting symposium planning work as public engagement. Finally, the work of the Partnership is assisted and assessed, in terms of its broad direction, strategic rigour and horizon scanning, by our Advisory Board with senior representatives from external organisations and HEIs, other DLA partnerships, and industry. These governing mechanisms ensure that EastBio maintains a transparent, evolving and responsive approach to delivering its programme.

Useful links

[Programme contacts](#)

[Programme subcommittees](#)

[Student reps](#)

Recruitment

Academics are crucial to the success of the programme through the excellence of their research, supervision practice and engagement with the EastBio programme. In terms of the EastBio recruitment, run jointly across our partner institutions, we ask supervisors to submit a PhD project, including collaboratively with non-academic partners (CASE), and then nominate applicants for assessment by the cross-institutional EastBio selection panels. EastBio provides written guidance about the process, the criteria and the support provided to applicants to maintain standards of fairness, inclusion and transparency across each annual cycle and throughout the different recruitment stages. Prospective supervisors play a role at specific points in the recruitment timeline but are not directly involved after the nomination stage. This is to ensure competitive, equitable assessment, programme- and cohort-level consistency, and compliance with equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) priorities. EastBio acknowledges that nominating PIs may provide candidates with informal mentoring and complements this support by running online Q&A sessions, together with volunteers from current student cohorts. To counteract effects of bias in the selection process, we aim to enhance measures of support by additional guidance, especially for students who are external to the PI research group. Going forward, EastBio is committed to collecting evidence of underrepresented PI groups in the partnership in terms of either attracting or recruiting candidates and to explore mitigating measures to address such issues in future cycles.

Useful links

[Student Guidance](#) (reviewed annually)

[Supervisor Guidance](#) (reviewed annually)

Student onboarding

We acknowledge that supervisors are expected to conform to their institutional policies for student induction that may overlap to a degree with EastBio inductions activities. Please use

your discretion to balance these expectations as best suits the local institutional context. You may encourage your student to speak to an EastBio student rep and set up a social meetup so that they settle in well after starting (EastBio can support such social events with funding for catering).

We have developed an **Expectations Alignment form** (see Appendix) to help prepare for your first meeting with your supervisee: consider using it to discuss with your supervisee mutual expectations and agree on a set of principles you will both adhere to. The form should be filled by both you and the student and can be reviewed at later stages; it will not be assessed in any way by the EastBio team.

CASE student onboarding

In addition to the above, all CASE students must meet with their CASE supervisor as early as possible after starting their PhD, and no later than the end of their first term (December 2026). As the PhD supervisor who holds the relationship with the CASE supervisor, you are responsible for arranging or facilitating this meeting. This should be an informal introductory meeting, giving the student and CASE supervisor an opportunity to get to know one another, discuss the PhD project in more detail, and understand what they hope to achieve through the collaboration. Further meetings should take place as the studentship develops, including to scope and plan the CASE placement when appropriate.

Supervisor expectations

As a PhD supervisor in the EastBio programme, you are expected to:

- Attend the [EastBio Induction](#) to welcome your student and help them start their programme in the best way possible; this may be in addition to any local induction activities the student will also be attending; if you are unavailable, please recommend the project co-supervisor or a lab member to attend in your place.
- Build trust from the first day; discuss with the student their own expectations about the supervision, and how these can best be met, including the time, manner, frequency of contact and other requirements.
- Help and encourage your student to develop ownership of the project and personal agency in managing deadlines, reviewing progress, dealing with setbacks, interpreting feedback, asking for support and guidance, etc.; consider signposting any relevant services of support, as needs arise; for that purpose, refer to the [Eastbio Student Handbook](#) and [EDI support](#). (also <https://biology.ed.ac.uk/eastbio/training/professional-training>).
- Be aware that some people communicate differently, including those with a neurodivergent condition (whether diagnosed or not); consider asking the student what is their preferred communication style and try to agree on ways to build any such preferences into your communication 'contract'; consider attending the EastBio Neurodiversity Awareness workshop. Check out some resources such as the Personal Support Manual and Neuro-inclusion notes at the [EDI webpage](#).
- Be aware of cultural, identity, or linguistic challenges that come into play and ensure that support is provided to the student for managing those challenges;
- Consider making your own expectations about work-life balance explicit and make it safe for the student to express their own expectations so that a common ground can

be found.

- Introduce your student to the lab members and the supervisory team and ensure that they are settled well; ensure that they know and will have met all key support contacts in the department, research and administrative, including any [EastBio contacts](#), as early as possible (check the website or with the [EastBio team](#), if unsure); encourage them to approach these contacts with a query on stipend, or research costs, process for requesting sick leave, etc.
- Ensure that all members of the supervisory team, including the external co-supervisor or the industrial partner, are engaged according to their respective roles, and that they attend planning and review meetings as per the schedule agreed at the start; monitor whether their input is what is expected and make interventions when necessary; ensure good professional relationships are maintained amongst all members and help resolve any issues as they arise.
- Encourage the student to read the [UKRI Training Grant Terms and Conditions](#), the [EastBio Student Handbook](#), the [EastBio PIPS Student Guide](#), the [CASE Welcome Survey](#) and any other relevant materials to help manage their studentship.

Training & Development

EastBio Partnership is funded by BBSRC to deliver excellent training to funded students that will prepare them for careers in academia or industry, with the ability, resilience and skills to navigate evolving and shifting challenges and to create positive impacts. Our bespoke, comprehensive programme addresses both our commitments to the funder and the student professional development needs.

The programme is structured so that students can develop agency and shape their development plan by selecting training options whether delivered by EastBio or not. The overhauled programme from 2025 onwards is calculated to represent approximately 8 days of training per year. A further aim of the programme is to help students develop strong ties with their peers, network across our partners and alumni/ae, and produce lasting relationships. Finally, the programme seeks to provide concrete opportunities for students to develop skills in event, project and time management, leadership, knowledge exchange and public engagement. We respond to students who face additional challenges by applying flexibility in our requirements as necessary. As a PhD supervisor, EastBio expects that you will actively support activities within the EastBio training programme by a variety of ways:

- familiarise yourself with these expectations and the training elements
- provide your student(s) with advice, feedback and encouragement
- deliver to EastBio students a research or method workshop you hold expertise in
- become personally involved in a suitable training event or workshop
- engage with our Management Group at in person events, by contacting the professional team or responding to our impact and feedback surveys.

Useful links

[Training overview](#)

[Handbook 2025/26](#)

[Placements](#)

[Induction](#) and [Symposia](#)

Students

We expect supervisors to enable your students to successfully complete their PhD project within their funded 4 years and fulfil the EastBio programme requirements. Your support extends from participation to in-person induction and symposia, Q&A sessions on placements, and active engagement with several training strands, for instance:

- The three student-led Thematic sessions that are associated with the strategic area each project is assigned to. Student organisers develop project management and interdisciplinary skills.
- the Professional Internships for PhD Students (PIPS). Students receive guidance, information and support from EastBio to plan and carry out their 3-month placements in a non-academic context, but it is crucial that they receive your input, support and feedback. Students on a tier-4 visa may require additional support. If your project is CASE, your student must complete a placement at the CASE partner's premises for a period of 3 to 18 months maximum, according to the requirements of the project (separate advice is provided to CASE project supervisors).
- Volunteer to deliver training for EastBio students in your area of expertise, or on professional or entrepreneurial skills.
- Volunteer to engage in one of the student-led sessions at the Symposia or Induction, as a speaker, a panel member or a workshop facilitator/assessor.
- Apply as a Placement Host or Mentor to the new EastBio programme (inclusive of a summer UGR placement) delivered by our new partner In2scienceUK.
- Send EastBio your short profile for the [EastBio Research in Life Sciences Brochure](#) by completing this [annual survey](#) by the end of May 2027.

Useful links

[Training 2025/26](#)

[Handbook 2025/26](#)

[Placements](#)

[CASE Placements](#)

[Training flexibilities](#)

Supervisor Support

As supervisor training is provided by the host institution, we aim for consistency of experience across partner institutions:

- To boost our new supervisors' understanding of basic regulatory and governance aspects of the programme, we use the in-person events (induction, symposia) with dedicated Q&A sessions and informal opportunities to interact with the professional team, our Management and Advisory Board members.
- To enhance networking opportunities, we produce and maintain the [EastBio Research in Life Sciences Brochure](#); we run supervisor-dedicated networking sessions at our Symposia with experts from industry, IBiolC, and external stakeholders.
- Eastbio supervisors have access to expertise, facilities and resources held by any partner institutions and are encouraged to approach the local academic lead to inquire about potential research collaborations.
- The Industry Engagement Manager at the EastBio core team assists our supervisors

to access an extended pool of industrial partners, network and connect for impactful future collaborations.

- In 2026, we will pilot Action Learning Sets, a development programme run by our training partner Scottish Policy & Research Exchange (SPRE). The 4 x 2-hour peer-to-peer action-focused learning sessions over a 12-week period are designed to support supervisors to learn from peers' experiences in supporting students and then apply that learning to create opportunities for innovation, change and development.
- We also plan to enhance above opportunities via partnering with the [Next Generation Research SuperVision Project](#) in 2026 via our partner University of Dundee.

Acknowledging the UKRI distinction between pastoral 'care' and 'approach', EastBio assumes that development opportunities such as the above enable supervisors to adopt a positive, relational and reflective attitude in their practices. Through EDI training and practice, whether local or via EastBio, we aim to consolidate a supervisory practice that supports students towards successful careers and facilitates the student development in a professional, equitable and empowering manner.

Examples of opportunities in EDI support include:

- informal training on Neurodiversity Awareness
- Mental Health First Aid training
- Opportunity to join the EastBio EDI committee
- We actively seek feedback and recommendations from supervisors via at least two annual surveys: the post-recruitment survey (to both nominating PIs and shortlisting PIs) and the annual programme survey.

Useful links

[EastBio Research](#)

[Programme contacts](#)

[EDI support](#)

Impact

Funded students are encouraged to work towards developing the research and professional skills that will allow them to help address academic, commercial and societal challenges of the current day. EastBio seeks to capture such impacts during the student life and beyond graduation. We also capture and analyse data on the number of graduates who proceed to work in the industry that hosted their PIPS project, approximating one third of our students. Such records help with a number of key goals we are committed to: (a) allow the Management Group to monitor the efficiency of the programme and make purposeful adjustments; (b) conform to the funder's reporting requirements and other UKRI initiatives, as well as prep work for future funding applications; (c) create a pool of representative case studies in aid of our recruitment campaigns and outreach/Widening Participation schemes, such as the In2research programme.

For the above reasons, we request our supervisors and CASE partners to assist us by completing the EastBio Partnership Impact survey at [EastBio Partnership Impact Survey – Fill](#)

[out form](#)

Useful links

[EastBio News](#)

[Industry collaboration](#)

[Student placements experience](#)

Review and Evolution

EastBio is transparent with regards to the management of our programme:

- We have an open governance structure that includes 4 subcommittees and a student body that interacts with our management and our Advisory Board members. We encourage stakeholders to interact with these bodies in person during our core events, as well as at any other point by emailing any of the core programme contacts.
- Following supervisor feedback, we have streamlined our guidance and communication with a focus on the website and the Supervisor Handbook.
- We collect quantitative and qualitative evidence on our programme across all key aspects – recruitment, placements, training, student support and EDI.
- We request formal feedback from our students and supervisors on all aspects of our programme that gets discussed at committee and management levels; your feedback forms the evidence that allows us to proceed with targeted annual review. Examples of how your responses fed into the programme are shown in the published response to annual surveys at <https://biology.ed.ac.uk/eastbio/you-said-we-did>.

Within the constraints of our small team capacity, we continue to improve on means of capturing measures of success, examples of which are the broader partnership impacts and alumni/ae career destination data.

Communication channels:

- comprehensive welcome emails to supervisors of new intakes;
- in-person meeting with our supervisors at least twice per year at the Induction and Symposia (location rotating each year);
- streamlining the programme and recruitment information, mainly via the EastBio website and Handbooks;
- partner-held briefing sessions before the launch of each recruitment cycle
- shortlisting PIs drawn from partner institutions, making up the career and gender-balanced interview panels;
- post-recruitment surveys from both nominating and shortlisting supervisors;
- annual programme surveys that inform programme review process;
- Open-door policy - supervisors can contact your local academic or administrative leads, the Eastbio team, a subcommittee member, or the student representatives;
- the monthly EastBio Newsletter mailing list.

We aim to remain at the forefront of the consensus around excellent practice in researcher development. To this end, we reiterate the importance we assign to the proactive

engagement of our supervisors with the EastBio doctoral programme.

Useful links

[Programme survey](#)

[Eastbio contacts](#)

General email for EastBio queries: eastbio@ed.ac.uk

APPENDIX: Expectations Alignment Form

This form is designed to be completed by PhD Students - and their supervisors - funded by the EastBio DLA. Both Student and Supervisor should complete this form in advance of their first meeting (use at your discretion if this overlaps with local institutional guidance).

Date of Meeting	Click or tap to enter a date.
Student Name	
Supervisor(s) <i>Please include second and third supervisor (as relevant)</i>	
CASE Supervisor (as relevant)	

How this form works

The Expectation Alignment Form is designed as a **conversation-starter tool** aiming to help PhD Students and their Supervisor(s) discuss their expectations of each other in their respective capacities during the PhD programme.

The Student and Supervisor(s) should each complete a copy of the form, indicating whether they agree or disagree with the statements provided. There are no 'right' or 'wrong' answers.

The Form should be completed **in advance of the first meeting** between the Student and Supervisor(s), at the beginning of a Student's PhD. During the meeting, the Student and Supervisor(s) should discuss the statements of the Form and their answers. Through this discussion, Students and Supervisor(s) should arrive at a shared understanding of their respective expectations of each other in the context of the supervision relationship.

As the Form is designed to help establish expectations and improve understanding between Students and Supervisor(s), it can be used again at any point during the Student's PhD if required or, for example, if a new Supervisor joins the supervision team. This should also be beneficial if the supervisory team includes supervision from across the EastBio partnership, or a non-academic supervisor.

Student/Supervisor responses are confidential. The EastBio team will *not* check, review, or record completed forms.

Expectations Alignment Questions

	Completely Agree	Somewhat Agree	No Opinion	Somewhat Disagree	Completely Disagree
It is the Supervisor(s) who decide which theoretical framework and/or methodology is most appropriate.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Supervisor(s) should direct a PhD student in the development of an appropriate plan of research.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Supervisor(s) should ensure that the thesis is finished within the funded period of 4 years (full time).	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Supervisor(s) should terminate the PhD if they believe the student will not succeed.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Supervisor(s) should check constantly that a PhD student is engaging with the project, is on track and working consistently.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Supervisor(s) should initiate frequent meetings with their PhD student.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Supervisor(s) should be available to assist the PhD student any time, also outside working hours.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
It is up to the Supervisor(s) to maintain an effective working relationship between Supervisor and PhD student.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Supervisor(s) should direct the PhD student in the development of an appropriate professional development plan, with training that is beneficial both for the project and the PhD student's professional development.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Supervisors should encourage a PhD student to comply with their EastBio training requirements.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
It is the responsibility of the PhD student to plan for their EastBio Professional Placement.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Supervisor(s) should be responsible for the smooth management of the supervisory team, especially if the team	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

consists of PIs from other EastBio partner institutions, and/or an industrial (CASE) partner.

The Supervisor(s) is responsible for ensuring that the PhD student aware of appropriate support services, especially in case of additional challenges the PhD student may face.

☐
☐
☐
☐
☐

Supervisor(s) should be available to help the PhD student with personal problems that arise during the course of study.

☐
☐
☐
☐
☐

Supervisor(s) should help the PhD student develop (or have access to) a network of fellow students or staff.

☐
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☐

Supervisor(s) can contribute to the direct writing of manuscripts/papers as a co-author.

☐
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☐

Supervisor(s) should insist on seeing drafts of every section of the thesis to ensure that it is flawless.

☐
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The research is owned by the PhD student and he/she/they can decide on research questions and directions.

☐
☐
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☐
☐

Supervisors should be able to contact students at any time (i.e., beyond 9-5, Monday-Friday).

☐
☐
☐
☐
☐

The PhD student should rely on the Supervisor(s)' support for development opportunities additional to their research, such as science communication, public engagement and outreach, non-academic networking, etc.

☐
☐
☐
☐
☐