

## MRC Doctoral Training Partnership in Biomedical Sciences (DTP)

# Values and Expectations

The [MRC DTP in Biomedical Sciences](#) at King's is funded to provide training that addresses MRC Strategic Priorities. The philosophy of the programme is that training and development are student-led, whether they choose a 1+3 MRes-PhD or 0+4 PhD; and the programme aims to provide the following opportunities:

**High-quality student experience** - the primary objective of the PhD is to provide exceptional training and support so that students from a range of backgrounds learn and develop into highly skilled and independent researchers prepared for their next career stage, whether in research or outside.

**High-quality projects** - projects should be a truly collaborative, challenging, and realistically achievable, exposing students to fundamental and translational sciences, which must be available as a MRes rotation research project and a full-length PhD project.

**High-quality training environment** - this provides the capacity and capability to perform high quality research enhanced by the complementary interests and experience of the research groups and the wider health faculties research community at King's.

### Training Programme

The MRC DTP is a structured training programme. Students will either complete a MRes in year one, and then select one of their rotation projects as the basis of a 3-year PhD or elect to go straight into a PhD pathway (4 years funded).

The MRes requires students to attend at least 8 workshops and other events in addition to their research project. Supervisors must support students who are away from the research project when attending such events.

During the PhD phase DTP students will spend most of their time on the PhD research but are required to attend training and other events as necessary defined by the DTP (at least 2 DTP training workshops each year), department, faculty and KCL.

### Cohort Building and Networking

Belonging, training, and socialising within a cohort of student peers undoubtedly enhances student experience and helps develop broad-minded and interactive graduates. Prior experience indicates that student cohorts are a powerful driver of novel collaborations between research groups. The MRC and other funders place strong emphasis on cohort building in PhD programmes. Networking commences at recruitment and continues in year 1 through the Core Research Skills training provision, along with a major introductory social event. Throughout their studies DTP students will be engaged in cohort activities including entrepreneurship training, public engagement etc. and supervisors are required to support this engagement.

### Creating a Positive Student-Supervisor Relationship

All research on PhD student experience identifies the relationship between student and supervisor as a major determinant of the quality of the PhD and its success or failure. This relationship is, however, complex and evolving, as the supervisor fulfils several different functions: instructor, assessor, mentor, counsellor, careers adviser etc.

**Styles of Supervision** - Not surprisingly there are many different styles of supervision, these can vary between different fields, but mostly it is informed by the supervisor's own experiences as a developing researcher. Although it is possible to identify certain styles as poor practice (e.g. student as cheap labour/technician, the student sinks or swims on their own merits, student competes with other students), there is no one style that can be considered to be the best, it is dependent on the unique relationship between each student and supervisor (see [here](#) and [here](#) for a couple of articles on this). What is clear is that mutual respect, ownership of the project and the PhD by the student, and effective communication are fundamental to a positive relationship and success.

**Expectations of DTP Supervisors** - Below are some guidance notes and expectations of supervisors on the MRC DTP.

**Firstly**, it is required that you know and comply with King's College [Academic Regulations for Research Degrees](#) which now encompass the previous Core Code of Practice. The regulations specify expectations and responsibilities of the student, supervisor, department, faculty, and university. Additional documents and regulations guidance is provided by the [Centre for Doctoral Studies](#). Each Health Faculty will have additional requirements that must also be followed, for example: student-supervisor agreement, frequency of supervisor-student meetings, regular Thesis Progress Committee meetings,

**Secondly**, to be eligible to supervise DTP students you must have completed a supervisor development course at King's, this includes supervisors who have completed such training at another institution. Information on courses for new or experienced supervisors is available on the [CDS website](#).

**Thirdly**, as well as the opportunity to provide supervision to MRes and PhD students, the DTP expects that all PIs who submit projects will support the programme by assisting with recruitment, providing workshops, assessment of rotation projects, and membership of Thesis Progress Committees.

### **What do PhD candidates and the DTP expect from supervisors?**

Quite a lot, however, these are not unique to the programme and should be universal expectations.

1. The importance of communication cannot be overstated, a breakdown in communication is often the main cause of a failing student-supervisor relationship.
2. The student-supervisor relationship should be geared to a process of learning, both intellectually and emotionally.
3. The PhD is a training process, and it is necessary to be aware of expectations and evaluating those regularly. Students are not employees. We expect a student to be a fully independent researcher before completion of the PhD – when they reach this point varies for individuals.
4. Supervisors should be friendly, open, and supportive, employing a positive approach to confidence building, not undermining or micromanaging. They should also be role models, constructively critical, ethical, with a good knowledge of the research area and a willingness to share their knowledge. Putting the interests of the student ahead of their own research priorities.

5. Supervisors should make time available for discussion, with a good balance of group meetings and 1:1 meetings.
6. It should be made easy to exchange ideas, both informally and formally, at regular student-supervisor meetings and at Thesis Progress Committees; and a supportive approach to attending meetings, collaborations etc. and presenting results. These should be coupled with attention for the individual needs of the student and encouraging additional activities that broaden experience and employability (within reason).
7. Supervisors are required to support and encourage students to participate in training events (such as those described above) as they are a core component of their development. It is expected that students will inform supervisors of their schedule for these events at the outset of a rotation project during the MRes, and in student-supervisor meetings during the PhD.
8. Many PhD candidates expect their supervisors to guide them on career planning.
9. The DTP is committed to providing and promoting a positive environment which is free from all forms of prejudice, discrimination, harassment and bullying and requires its supervisors to uphold this commitment.
10. The most important action for each supervisor is being a good researcher and sharing their expertise and experiences in a positive way.

---

By submitting a project to the DTP, you are committing to promoting and upholding the values and ethos of the programme. Fundamental to these values is the understanding that PhD supervision is a privilege, and the supervisor's responsibility is to prioritise the best experience for scientific training and development of the student. In return students will thrive and enhance the quality of your research and the environment of the group.

---