

Guidance: Harry Smith Vacation Studentships

The Microbiology Society Harry Smith Vacation Studentship scheme enables undergraduate students studying microbiology to work on microbiological research projects during the summer vacation. It is a competitive scheme that sees an average of fifty students set out each summer to work on projects across the breadth of microbiology, and gain essential insight into the world of research. Harry Smith students also benefit from access to a grant to attend the Annual Conference or the ECM Forum Summer Conference, and are awarded a year's free membership of the Society.

The scheme also enables supervisors to gain essential supervision experience. Harry Smith supervisors will have the opportunity to develop their grant writing technique and gain experience monitoring expenditure from laboratory budgets. By mentoring an undergraduate over the summer period, supervisors will develop their project management and leadership skills, and at the end of the studentship gain valuable evaluation and reporting practice.

Applications to this grant scheme should be made on behalf of the student by the supervisor. If you have any questions about the scheme or the application form, please contact the Grants Office and we'll do all we can to help you.

Who can apply?

Any PhD-qualified Full or Full Concessionary members in the UK or Ireland who have made a minimum of two consecutive membership payments may apply for the scheme. This includes (but is not limited to):

- Established and newly appointed Principal Investigators;
- Postdoctoral researchers and Fellows who would like to gain experience of supervision;
- PhD-qualified team leaders in biotechnology companies or similar Small or Medium Enterprises.

We recommend that principle investigators encourage early-or-mid-career laboratory members (i.e. postdoctoral researchers and new lecturers) to apply for studentships independently in order to gain vital supervision experience.

If you're an undergraduate student interested in the scheme, you could use the Member Directory to find someone who is a member of the Society who may be able to supervise you.

The application

All applications should be made online via the website. The application portal includes specific information about how to complete the form so please do read it carefully before starting your application. **Please also note that we have implemented name-blind applications.** This means your application should not include any references to your name, gender, age, ethnicity or any other protected characteristic. While we require letters of support from the student's mentor and your institution so that we know your application is supported, the Grants Office will not send these items to reviewers in order to retain relative anonymity. In the same way, we require the details of your student's name for administration of the grant if your application is successful; however the reviewers will not be provided with these details. **Please remind the student to not refer to their personal identifying information in their statement.**

The form will take you through the information that we require, which is organised in two sections – the Project and the Student – to enable referees to assess the application in two broad sections – Scientific merit and feasibility as an undergraduate project; and Educational value for the student.

Remember: the information you provide in the online application form is the only information that the reviewers and award panel have to make a funding decision. Be clear and concise and make sure the application gets your points across.

The project

The project section is divided into several parts. You will have to detail the rationale for the project, the results you will obtain and the methods you will use. Often a lack of detail regarding the methods is where applications fall short. The fields in the form are listed below, under the sections that are used in this document.

Project information

- Project title
- Project location
- Project host (the supervisor)
- Project host institution
- Project start and end date
- Project duration (in case of holidays between start/end date)

Rationale and objectives

- Project justification
- Project description
- Aims and Objectives

Methods and outcomes

- Methodology
- Expected research outcomes
- Benefits to professional development

Student experience

- Supervision
- Education Value

The student

- University
- Degree title
- Degree start and end dates
- Student Statement

Costings

- Expected Costs
- Breakdown of Costs

Rationale and aims

This should set the scene for the current project. First and foremost, the project should be relevant to microbiology, and be underpinned by good scientific reasoning. It should give the student scope for innovation and provide an experience they will not get from their degree course. The aims of the project should be clear and realistically achievable. Include references if you need to, but make sure you use your character limit appropriately. Key questions to address include:

- Is the project clearly related to microbiology?
- What gap in knowledge will the research fill?
- Is the project of interest to the student and the wider microbiology community?
- Is the project feasible for an undergraduate student?

Methods and outcomes

This section should include all information about the techniques and methods that the student will employ to obtain their results. Key points to cover include:

- Are the methods an appropriate level of interest and complexity for an undergraduate student at this level? Referees often look favourably on projects which use a variety of methods which are not the same as those they encounter in practical sessions – for example, six weeks spent only running western blots will not necessarily be the best for the student's development. The best projects use techniques and methods that are challenging for the student, but are not overly ambitious.
- Be clear as to why you have used this experimental approach, how it will help you achieve your aims and also be realistic about how much time the work will take. It can be useful to upload a Gantt chart to show how the time will be used, which parts of the project are dependent on others, and how you will deal with setbacks if they occur – for example if a technical challenge is anticipated give a backup line of investigation.

This section also asks for information on how the project will benefit you and/or your student's professional development, and for the expected research outcomes from the project.

The student

The student section is also divided into two sections – one asks for a description of the experience you will provide for the student, and one asks for a description of the student including their grades, a statement from someone who knows the student well, and a personal statement from the student.

Student experience

We want to know that Harry Smith students receive pastoral support during their projects. Therefore, in this section, referees want to know how the student will be supported, and who will be providing supervision. If you are a PI who will ask a postdoctoral researcher or final year PhD student to directly supervise the student, this is not unusual and you should state it in your application. If you already know who the lab member will be, state their name.

A summer studentship is often the first opportunity for the student to have a real experience of academic life, therefore use this section to detail how you are providing this – will they be involved with journal clubs, present at a lab meeting, or contribute to a journal article? These all enhance the experience for the student and give them a good insight into how labs work.

The student

The last section asks for information about the student themselves, and gives the referee insight into how the student will excel under your supervision.

We ask for the student's recent grades to be able to make a judgement, together with the supporting statement, on how they are doing in their studies so far and determine if the student has the theoretical underpinning and academic abilities to understand and apply the experimental approach. Please provide clear, accurate and the most up to date information possible.

The supervisor supporting statement can come from you if you know the student well, however if you are not very familiar, this can come from their personal tutor. It should outline how the student is coping with their studies and their motivations for undertaking a summer project. Finally, the statement from the student should be clear as to why they are interested in microbiology, research, and working on this particular project, to determine how the undertaking fits with their career aspirations.

Costings

In this section please provide details of the cost of any consumables (up to £400) for which you wish to apply. Not all applicants will require funding so if you don't require any consumables budget please enter "not applicable". If you do need support please provide a breakdown of the costs required.

The review stage

Once submitted online, the application will be sent to reviewers who will score the application. The scoring criteria are available to download separately from the Harry Smith Vacation Studentship grant page. The reviewer scores are collated and submitted to an Award Panel, formed of members of the Professional Development Committee.

Applications suitable for the partnership grant will be shortlisted during the Award Panel before being submitted to a joint Award Panel, comprised of the Microbiology Society President, Chair of the Professional Development Committee and a trustee of the Lister Institute.

The outcome

Supervisors will be notified of the outcome of the application within three months of the deadline, and should tell the students as soon as possible. We ask for details to enable the transfer of the bursary to be submitted ahead of time so that the student will be paid in a timely manner. You will also be sent a form for the student to provide a lab report and reflect on what they have learned during the project. We also ask for reflection from the supervisor if you are an early- or mid-career researcher.

If you have any questions about the Harry Smith Vacation Studentship scheme, don't hesitate to get in contact with the Grants Office. We look forward to receiving your application, and hope that this guidance has been of use. For inspiration from previous grant recipients, check out our website.

Good Luck with your application!