

Plant Health Undergraduate Studentships 2025

Essential Information

The Royal Society of Biology (RSB) invites applications from researchers wishing to host undergraduate studentships in plant health over the summer of 2025.

These guidelines describe the Plant Health Undergraduate Studentships programme for 2025. Please read the website and this guidance before making an enquiry or completing an application form. This information can be downloaded from www.rsb.org.uk/plant-studentships

The closing date for applications is **11 March at 23:59**.

We expect a significant number of applications; receipt of completed applications before the deadline is essential.

Core funding from [Defra](http://www.defra.gov.uk) supports the delivery of the programme and funds a number of summer placements, in addition to which the Society invites sponsor organisations to support further student projects. In 2024, RSB partnered with the [British Society for Plant Pathology](http://www.bspp.org.uk), [Association of Applied Biologists](http://www.aab.org.uk), [SCI Horticulture Group](http://www.scihorticulturegroup.co.uk) and [Colegrave Seabrook Foundation](http://www.colegrave.co.uk) (in partnership with the Crispa (Richard Cahn) Charitable Trust) to fund twelve student projects. The RSB is seeking additional Defra funding to support the delivery of the programme to 2029.

Purpose

The Plant Health Undergraduate Summer Studentships programme aims to:

- Address skills and capacity challenges in plant health science by providing attractive opportunities for research experience to suitable undergraduates, offering them the opportunity to undertake supervised research with leading research groups.
- Facilitate training of undergraduates in research practice.
- Encourage research proposals and generate research outcomes in areas relevant to Defra's plant health priorities.
- Build networks of research groups, emerging scientists and employers with a focus on plant health.

Application criteria

Successful applicants must have both research expertise and offer a high quality research experience for the student. Applicants will also be asked to indicate the level of supervision the undergraduate can expect to receive during the placement. Projects in which the student will be supervised remotely are eligible for this award.

Researchers must have the backing of their institution to apply.

The proposed research project must address at least one of the following research priority themes in plant health identified by Defra, listed below. Applicants are encouraged to look at the risk register of current pests and pathogens at:

<https://planthealthportal.defra.gov.uk/pests-and-diseases/uk-plant-health-risk-register/>

Priority themes in plant health

The future research required to support delivery of Defra's policy objectives and statutory responsibilities in plant health are captured as 6 interlinked 'themes'. For each theme, high-level needs are described. These can be further explored in Defra's [Plant Health Research & Development Plan](#).

1. Risk assessment and horizon scanning

Understanding pest and pathogen biology, risk factors and pathways, climatic modelling, and host vulnerability to allow us to better understand likely impacts and behaviours of known pests and novel threats and to prepare for them.

2. Inspections, diagnostics and surveillance

Detecting, monitoring and modelling the distribution and spread of newly emerging and existing pests and pathogens. New approaches to surveillance such as remote sensing, exploration and validation of new detection and diagnostic methods and use of modelling to optimise sampling.

3. Management of pests and diseases

Better management of pests and diseases, including integrated pest management, nature-based solutions such as biological control, guidance and toolkits for landowners and data management tools.

4. Resilience and Adaptation

Improving diversity, health, condition and connectivity of plants and ecosystems, understanding genetic variation and the genetic basis for plant tolerance to pests and diseases, enabling the planting of more resilient populations.

5. Plant Health Behaviours

Understanding what motivates and constrains individuals and groups to achieve positive plant health outcomes and good biosecurity. Overcoming the knowledge to action gap and improving our knowledge of the economic, environmental, and social and cultural values of healthy plants.

6. Evaluation

Developing evaluation frameworks, indicators and metrics to help us measure the effects of our plant health policies, programmes and projects.

Adjudication

Adjudication will be by the Selection Panel appointed for this purpose. The scheme is competitive. Applications will be judged on the scientific merit and suitability for an undergraduate studentship (40%), the level of supervision and research experience the student can expect to receive (40%), and the relevance of the research to priority themes (20%).

About the awards

The awards provide support for the student at a rate of £400 per week for a studentship period of 8-10 weeks. The bursaries produce no National Insurance contribution liability. Each award also includes £500 towards costs to run the research; further research expenses are not offered under this scheme.

If successful, supervisors will be required to advertise their studentship to eligible undergraduate students nationally in collaboration with the RSB (see 'Eligibility', below).

The RSB is committed to ensuring equal opportunities in the life sciences, and supports diversity throughout the pipeline; at school and higher education, in the workplace and training.

Awards are not offered directly to individual researchers but to the institutions at which they are employed.

By submitting the application form, the applicant signifies that they:

- 1) have obtained approval from their Head of Department for the award to be administered by their department, and have the support of their PI if the applicant is a postdoctoral researcher,
- 2) agree to the conditions of award set out in these guidelines, and to the terms of the [RSB Privacy Policy](#),
- 3) agree to the requirement that the student participate in an online mini-symposium hosted by RSB, to present their project to other students in the programme, and that the student produce, on completion of their placement, a poster about their research project that may be included in relevant RSB and member organisation publications,
- 4) Agree to complete a short online feedback exercise on completion of the studentship.

Awards are made formally to the institution on the understanding that the research conducted by the student complies with the safety and ethical regulations of the institution, and that the institution will ensure that the requirements of all relevant regulatory authorities will be met before the work commences.

Supervisor eligibility

- Researchers at universities and research institutions within the UK are eligible to apply to host a Plant Health Undergraduate Studentship.
- Post-doctoral researchers with the support of their PI may apply to host a Plant Health Undergraduate Studentship. PhD students/candidates are not eligible for this award.
- Supervisor applications from within the membership of the RSB, and our member organisations, are encouraged; those who are not RSB members are encouraged to consider the [member application process](#) (not obligatory). The successful supervisors will each receive 50% off their RSB membership fee for the following year (this will apply to the initial year of membership for newly-elected members).
- Successful supervisory applicants are encouraged to join the [Plant Health Professional Register](#).
- Only one application should be submitted per supervisor.
- Projects in which the student will be supervised remotely will also be considered for this award.

Successful projects will be widely advertised to students by the RSB at the beginning of April 2025.

Supervisors will then be able to select an undergraduate student, however, the RSB can provide support in the student selection process if requested by the supervisor. The Royal Society of Biology will offer all successful students one year's free [student membership](#).

Eligibility requirements for students seeking a Plant Health Undergraduate Studentship are as follows:

- Students will normally take up the award during the summer vacation in the middle years (i.e. 2/3, 2/4 or 3/4) of their degree but final year undergraduates intending to continue to Masters or PhD may also be considered.
- Mature students are eligible to apply.
- Students must be registered at a UK institution for the majority of their undergraduate science degree.
- Bursaries will not be awarded for projects that take place overseas for more than 50% of the studentship period.

Royal Society of **Biology**

Timeline

The closing date for applications is **11 March at 23:59**.

All applications will be acknowledged by email to prospective supervisors by 12 March at 17:00. If you have not received an acknowledgement by this date, please contact the RSB as soon as possible on: registers@rsb.org.uk.

The decision of the Selection Panel will be communicated to all prospective supervisors individually at the end of March 2025.

Students' applications for successful projects will be available for successful supervisors to review from 29 April 2025, and each studentship must be offered to a student by 20 May 2025.

The deadline for receipt of student posters and supervisor and student online survey responses following completion of the placement is 17:00 on 30 September 2025.

If you need to withdraw your application, you must let us know as soon as possible via email to registers@rsb.org.uk. Please bear in mind that we are a small central team and that processing each application takes time.

If you receive alternative funding for your project, please let us know immediately so that, if necessary, we can re-allocate our funds accordingly. We will receive more applications than we can fund, so please help us to use our resources in the most effective way.

How to apply

The application must be made by the person who will supervise the research and not by the student.

To apply to host a Plant Health Undergraduate Studentship, please complete the application form, [available here](#), outlining your proposal by **11 March 2025 at 23:59**.

Contact information

For queries, please contact us:

- Email: registers@rsb.org.uk
- Tel: 020 3925 3449