

Forest Edge Doctoral Scholarships - Applicant guidance notes

About the Forest Edge Doctoral Scholarships Programme

Forest Edge Doctoral Scholarships Programme will offer 20 Leverhulme Doctoral Scholarships at the University of Birmingham (UoB), in 4 cohorts starting between 2018 and 2021. A minimum of five fully funded PhD scholarships will be awarded in round three (October 2020 entry). The Forest Edge programme runs within, and forms the flagship interdisciplinary element of, the [Birmingham Institute of Forest Research](#) (BIFoR). For administrative purposes, each scholarship is administered by the School of UoB in which the main supervisor resides.

The programme is partially funded by a £1,050,000 grant from the Leverhulme Trust. Each Scholarship covers maintenance costs (at Research Council levels), tuition fees, and research and training expenses for the doctoral student **over three years**.

Each doctoral student should be known as a “Leverhulme Trust Doctoral Scholar” for the duration of their studies and is expected to acknowledge the Leverhulme Trust and BIFoR in posters, talks, papers, etc. Scholars must be registered as full-time PhD students unless the Trust gives explicit permission for this to be varied. Scholars will be subject to the usual terms and conditions applying to doctoral students within the part of the University of Birmingham in which they are registered. Scholars may not receive funds which would duplicate those provided by the Leverhulme award, but they may apply for or receive additional funding for their research or training costs.

Our commitment to students and the Leverhulme Trust

Each doctoral project will identify a major theme and a dominant cross-link, binding it to other projects. Some projects will be multi-disciplinary, some interdisciplinary, and some transdisciplinary, but all will be **outside the research council norm**, challenging doctoral researchers (DRs) and supervisors alike. Through monthly **Exploration Meetings**, we will bring the cohort together to extend science and scholarship into entirely new areas

- (a) DRs and supervisors will engage critically with unfamiliar subjects without compromising their own expertise.
- (b) Through such critical engagement, DRs and supervisors will uncover implicit assumptions in their own work, and identify topics for collaboration.
- (c) By collaborating across disciplines, DRs and supervisors will explore new intellectual ground.

Forest Edge will follow the proven and successful template of the UoB-led doctoral training partnerships for induction and training. Enrolling students will attend an **Orientation Event** which will build a strong cohort affinity, deliver generic skills training, and familiarise the students with key issues for *Forest Edge*. Students will get to know their supervisory team better and choose a mentor, who will act as a pastoral point of contact. The cohort will meet approximately monthly at Exploration Meetings. Alongside peers from NERC doctoral training partnerships CENTA and ENVISION, Forest Edge Doctoral Researchers will organise an annual **Student Congress (the “DR**

Forest” conference), at which will DRs will present their project and network with their peers, academic colleagues, and stakeholders.

Forest Edge will offer a comprehensive training programme to develop DRs and prepare them for post-PhD life in industry, academia, and other sectors. Transferable research technique and soft-skills-based development provision is already available to us via existing doctoral training partnerships. To this broad palette will be added key *Forest-Edge*-specific development. Students will be expected to complete at least 40 credits of assessed training (out of a total of >320 credits available) predominantly in the first two years of study.

Scholarship value and duration

The award comprises:

- Full payment of tuition fees at Research Councils UK fee level for year of entry (£4,327 in 2019/20), to be paid by the University;
- An annual maintenance grant at current UK Research Councils rates (national minimum doctoral stipend for 2019/20 is £15,009), to be paid in monthly instalments to the Leverhulme Trust Doctoral Scholar by the University.
- All studentships will come with a minimum of £3,000 Research Training Support Grant. This can be increased, if there are justified project costs, up to a maximum of £12,000. Supervisors should indicate from where any further costs necessary for the project will be sourced.

Funding is available for UK or EU students only. Up to 12 Forest Edge PhD Scholarships will be advertised in round one. The tenure of the award can be for up to 3 years (36 months). Maximum registration for the PhD degree at UoB is four years.

Themes

Projects involving joint supervision across schools or colleges are encouraged. This Doctoral Scholarship Programme (DSP) will coalesce around a single Organising Principle:

‘to determine to what extent Forest existence, form, and function emerge from detailed interactions within and across scales, from molecules, to individual organisms, to communities and societies.’

Projects must align with one of the following themes:

- Values and meanings** – How (historically, currently, and in the future) do the ways we value forests influence their form, function, and, indeed, their existence?
- Change drivers and resilience** – Which ‘tipping points’ and ‘great leaps forward’ emerge from the adaptation of forests to changing environments? Can we design interventions to enhance forest resilience?
- Communication cascades** – How does communication at molecular, ecological, and social scales determine the functioning of forests? To what extent can we safely alter communication within and across scales to promote beneficial outcomes?

Cutting across these themes are two further, cross-linking, perspectives:

- I. **Scales of space and time** – How far must forests extend, and how long must they persist, to perform specific cultural, socio-economic, or ecological functions? How can human and forest time and space scales be reconciled?
- II. **Complexity:** how patterns emerge - Where and when do critical sites and situations appear in forests? How can models that embrace complexity enhance our understanding of ecosystem processes?

Each doctoral project proposal must identify a major theme (A-C) and a dominant cross-link (I-II), binding it to other projects. Some projects will be multi-disciplinary, some interdisciplinary, and some transdisciplinary, but all will be outside the research council norm, challenging doctoral researchers (DRs) and supervisors alike.

Terms and conditions

Full terms and conditions for the scholarships are available here:

https://www.leverhulme.ac.uk/sites/default/files/LDS_T%26C_2017.pdf

How to apply

Apply directly via the University of Birmingham Postgraduate application system, the Postgraduate portal, by clicking 'Apply online' on the relevant project listed here:

Within the application, at the 'Programmes open for Admission' page, please select 'PhD Forest Edge (Lever Trust).

Please detail the advertised supervisor and project title under the 'Research Information' section of the application form.

Please note, as a standard application process, you will be asked to submit a proposal as part of your application. Please complete " PhD Forest Edge: project title" for this section as you will be applying for an established project by the supervisor.

You can use our [advice and guidance pages](#) as you complete your application. Applications should include a statement of research interests. We encourage you to contact prospective supervisors informally to discuss the project.

Successful applicants are expected to start their research project from September 2018.

Forest Edge PhD Scholarships application timetable

Key Dates	Event
12 December 2019	Forest Edge PhD Scholarships projects advertised.
10 February 2020	Deadline for students to submit Forest Edge PhD application.
21 February 2020	Selection of candidates to be interviewed.
9-14 March 2020	Candidates interviewed.
19 March 2020	Offer acceptance deadline
1 October 2020	Successful candidates will commence PhD study.

Contacts

For enquiries about the scheme, please contact bifor@contacts.bham.ac.uk

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