Doctoral
Training
Partnership

TMRP DTP Student Handbook 2026-2027

If you require this document in an alternative format please contact:

kerrie.mcgiveron@liverpool.ac.uk

Introduction

I am delighted to welcome you to the Trials Methodology Research Partnership (TMRP) Doctoral Training Partnership (DTP). This programme was established in 2022 and is funded by the MRC, led by the University of Liverpool, alongside our partner institutions: University of Aberdeen, Bangor University, University of Birmingham, University of Cambridge, University of Glasgow, Institute of Cancer Research (ICR), University of Leeds, University of Newcastle, University of Plymouth, Queen Mary University London (QMUL), and University College London (UCL). Our overall aim is to provide excellence in doctoral training in the biological, medical and health sciences. You are joining the programme, forming part of a larger community of MRC-funded students, who support one another through the various events offered by the TMRP DTP.

Studentships are available across the full range of scientific disciplines, and students have access to research expertise across the 12 constituent Universities.

This handbook includes all of the information that you will need to get started with the TMRP DTP, including details of the TMRP DTP structure, conditions of your studentship, financial details and key contacts.

I would like to wish you every success in your doctoral studies and hope that you enjoy the challenges and rewards of the experience.

Professor Paula Williamson, Director, TMRP DTP

Dr Kerrie McGiveron, Manager, TMRP DTP

Contents

Section 1: About Us **4**

The TMRP and Working Groups 4

The DTP Leadership Team and Advisory Board 6

Buddy Scheme 6

Student Support 7

TMRP DTP Induction, Training, and Annual Symposium 7

Section 2: Key conditions of a TMRP DTP Studentship **8**

Financial details 8

Disabled Student's Allowance (DSA) 8

Supervision 10

Ethics 10

Part-time and Full-time Study Arrangements 10

Change to Project Details 11

Employment during the Studentship 11

Sick Leave 13

Compassionate Leave 13

Suspensions and Extensions 14

Thesis Submission 15

Acknowledging the Grant 15

Equity, Diversity and Inclusion 15

Research Training Support Grant 16

The Flexible Supplement Fund 16

Section 4: Expectations of TMRP DTP Studentship Holders **18**

Researchfish® 18

TMRP DTP Induction 18

Section 5: Key Contacts **19**

TMRP DTP Contacts and Academic Leads 19

Social Media and Communications 20

TMRP DTP Postal Address 20

Section 1: About Us

The TMRP and Working Groups

The MRC-NIHR Trials Methodology Research Partnership began in June 2019 following funding awarded by the MRC-NIHR Methodology Research Programme. The Partnership is led by Professor Paula Williamson, previously chair of the MRC HTMR Network.

The TMRP brings together a number of networks, institutions and partners working in trials and trials methodology research.

The TMRP partner networks who will join the five Hubs within the MRC HTMR Network include:

- The Global Health Network (TGHN)
- Health Research Board – Trials Methodology Research Network (HRB-TMRN)
- Health Data Research UK
- UKCRC Registered CTU Network
- UK Trial Managers' Network (UK TMN)

The TMRP offers an opportunity to build on the achievements of the MRC HTMR Network while exploring new collaborations and avenues to make continued progress in advancing trial methodology, developing capacity and further reducing research waste.

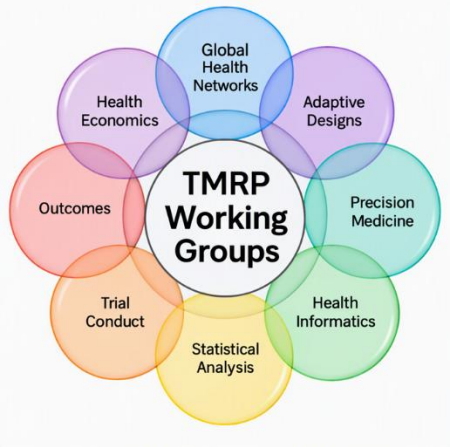
The TMRP DTP is a doctoral training programme which started in 2022 to provide excellence in doctoral training. The DTP is funded to recruit over three years from 2022- 2024 and two further years have now been awarded.



TMRP Partner Institutions:

University of Aberdeen
Bangor University
University of Birmingham
University of Cambridge
University of Glasgow
Institute of Cancer Research (ICR)
University of Leeds
University of Liverpool
Newcastle University
University of Plymouth
Queen Mary University London (QMUL)
University College London (UCL)

Eight working groups also specialise in specific areas relevant to trial methodology. We encourage all TMRP DTP students to join at least one working group.



You can see the remit of our working groups on our website, where you will also find an Expression of Interest form for joining. Many of the working groups use distribution lists for communication as well as meeting face-to-face and online. More recently, working groups have been using Base Camp as an online communication tool (see section 5 'Social Media and Communication', for more information.)

The DTP Leadership Team and Advisory Board

The DTP Leadership Team oversees the TMRP DTP's efficacy and collaborates with MRC to further enhance the program. The team convenes every three months and holds responsibility for ensuring the quality of students recruited, delivering relevant skills training, and organising activities to foster a cohesive cohort.

Membership of the DTP Leadership Team include the DTP Director, Professor Paula Williamson; the DTP Manager, Dr Kerrie McGiveron; Leads for the 12 institutes; our PPIE representative, Emily Lam, and three student representatives.

Details of the DTP student representatives for 2027-2028 are here should you wish to contact them.

Each institution Lead within the DTP Leadership Team serves as a part of the TMRP DTP Advisory Board. This broader board incorporates professionals from various DTP programs, partnerships, and industry. Their annual meetings are dedicated to deliberating the strategic course and future direction of the TMRP DTP.

The MRC monitors the TMRP DTP programme via an annual report submitted in August and a mid-term review of the DTP. Representatives of MRC will meet with members of the Leadership Team each year and occasionally request to meet with students. The MRC values your feedback to help inform programme development.

Buddy Scheme

The TMRP DTP runs a buddy scheme for new-starters and you will all be linked up with a

'buddy'. Engaging in a mentorship can greatly assist in navigating the initial challenges of starting a PhD. Mentors play a crucial role in aiding your transition at the outset and extending continuous support. Additionally, we encourage your active participation as a buddy, offering peer support to incoming DTP students. Your experiences hold immense

value, offering invaluable guidance to newcomers as they embark on their own academic journey.

Student Support

As a DTP student, who to approach if you need advice or someone to talk to in confidence can be confusing. If you are experiencing health or personal problems that are affecting your PhD, it is advisable to speak to your supervisor, the DTP Cohort Lead or the DTP Manager in the first instance.

Periodically, you will be sent an email from the DTP Manager checking in on your welfare and an informal meeting will be offered. This is a good chance for you to update us on your progress and to help us to help you.

In situations where students face health issues or extraordinary circumstances affecting their studies, they can request a pause in their academic studies. Typically, this request is handled through the school administrator, although it's essential for the DTP Manager to be informed about any alterations in your circumstances. Timely communication regarding any challenges is crucial so that we can provide you with the utmost support possible.

TMRP DTP Induction, Training, and Annual Symposium

The TMRP DTP offers an online introductory session in October/November for each new intake, and all students are expected to attend. This will b an opportunity for you to meet the TMRP DTP Leadership Team, network with other DTP students and ask any questions you may have.

In addition to this, we hold regular training sessions throughout the year on subject-specific topics. These will be funded for you from our Flexible Supplement Fund (see Section 3). We are always open to hearing more from you about what training you have identified and will always listen to feedback.

The TMRP organises the International Clinical Trials and Methodology Conference (ICTMC) every other year, and all students should use their RTSG to attend this as their annual event. In the year where ICTMC is not on, a face-to-face symposium will be organised for you to attend and will be a mixture of training and networking opportunities.

Section 2: Key conditions of a TMRP DTP Studentship

Financial details

A full TMRP STP Studentship comprises:

- A maintenance stipend, at the UKRI recommended rate
- Payment of tuition fees at the Home rate*
- RTSG

The MRC award to the TMRP DTP includes £5,000 per student per annum for a Research Training Support Grant (RTSG) and £300 per student per annum for travel for conference attendance.

*All 12 of the partner institutions have committed to waiving additional fees for international students who are funded by the MRC. Tuition fees will be charged at a Home rate, which is then funded by the studentship. International Students will not need to pay additional Tuition Fees themselves.

Disabled Student's Allowance (DSA)

Disabled Students Allowances (DSA) are intended to help with additional expenditure for the costs of study-related requirements that may be incurred as a result of disability, mental health problems or specific learning difficulties that means additional support is needed to undertake a UK Research and Innovation funded studentship. The allowances can cover the

cost of non-medical personal assistance, items of specialist equipment, extra travel costs and general expenses.

The Research Councils have adopted a harmonised approach to DSA. Additional guidance is available on the UKRI website (https://www.ukri.org/publications/disabled-students-allowance-dsa-claims/)

Universities will undertake the assessment of need and provide costs for the student when they are required. The University will then claim back eligible costs at the end of the academic year from the MRC by submitting a completed DSA claim form to the individual research councils via the TMRP DTP Manager by 31 October.

Students should contact the Disability Adviser or named contact on disability matters at their University for advice:

- University of Aberdeen: student.support@abdn.ac.uk
- Bangor University: disabilityservices@bangor.ac.uk
- University of Birmingham: disability@contacts.bham.ac.uk
- University of Cambridge: disability@admin.cam.ac.uk
- University of Glasgow: disability@glasgow.ac.uk
- Institute of Cancer Research (ICR): studentsupport@icr.ac.uk
- University of Leeds: disability@leeds.ac.uk
- University of Liverpool: disteam@liverpool.ac.uk
- Newcastle University: disabilityadvisor@ncl.ac.uk
- University of Plymouth: studentservices@plymouth.ac.uk
- Queen Mary University London (QMUL): dds@qmul.ac.uk
- University College London (UCL): disability@ucl.ac.uk

Supervision

TMRP DTP students identify an appropriate primary supervisor at the point of application. Applicants should have been in touch with the supervisor **prior** to submitting the funding application, to discuss their project and the supervisory fit. The fit of the supervisory team is assessed as part of the application process, and as such it is crucial that any potential changes to supervision during the studentship are highlighted to the TMRP DTP.

Any requested changes in supervision will need to be approved by the student's Head of Department, School or Faculty, who has the right to turn down a supervisor if they are not deemed suitable/appropriate or have insufficient experience. Similarly, the TMRP DTP may intervene if suitable alternative supervisory arrangements are not made.

Ethics

As an important source of public funding for postgraduate training in the sciences, the TMRP DTP has an obligation towards the general public and academic community to try to ensure that such training is conducted in a professional manner and will not give rise to distress or annoyance to individuals. TMRP DTP students are expected to follow their institution's ethics approval process.

Part-time and Full-time Study Arrangements

TMRP DTP Students can undertake their programmes on a part-time or full-time basis. Stipend payments will be pro rata for part-time students.

It is possible for a TMRP DTP student to apply to transfer between part-time and full-time studentship award, or vice versa. Students need to apply via the transfer of registration process at their home institution. The TMRP recommends that, where possible, changes of mode of study should take effect from the beginning of a quarter (i.e. 1st October, 1st January, 1st April, or 1st July).

Whilst it is expected that permanent transfers would only occur once during the life of an award, it is recognised that there may be exceptional circumstances, such as changes to

domestic arrangements, where a student needs to revert back to their original status. Such fixed-period transfers will be considered on a case by case basis.

Change to Project Details

Minor changes to thesis titles and research outlines do not need to be referred or approved by the TMRP DTP. Significant changes to the title and/or focus of research need to be approved **in advance** by the TMRP DTP. Such approval will not be given unless a clear justification is provided.

Employment during the Studentship

TMRP DTP studentship award holders are permitted to undertake a certain amount of paid teaching or other research work during their studentship provided that they spend a minimum of 1,800 hours each academic year on their doctoral research and research training. Their programme of postgraduate training must be compatible with such work and their primary supervisor must formally approve this.

Where TMRP DTP students undertake demonstration or teaching, or other types of employment at their home institution, they should be paid for this in addition to any stipend they receive from the TMRP DTP. It should not be treated as a compulsory element of the award or of any research training.

Students may undertake a small amount of other paid work either in term time or during holidays, but the TMRP does not encourage such work, especially during the times when students are expected to be fully engaged in research training and thesis preparation.

Full-time studentship award holders cannot hold either a full-time job, or a permanent part-time job, during the period of their award. Part-time TMRP studentship award holders cannot hold a full-time job.

Full-time studentship award holders cannot change to part-time for reasons of employment during the final six months of their studentship.

Pregnancy

Please check UKRI training grant T&Cs about absences with paid leave and extensions (including, for pregnancy-related illness, antenatal appointments, fertility treatment (where medically advised).

Unfortunately, the DTP is unable to support students financially or with an extension where their pregnancy dates are outside of the funding duration and UKRI T&Cs. Please liaise with TMRP DTP Manager at an early stage to get DTP support e.g. planning and calculating leave payments.

Potential discrimination

Pregnancy and Maternity is covered as one of the nine protected characteristics by the Equality Act 2010. This means students and applicants who are currently pregnant or have given birth within the last 26 weeks are protected against any form of discrimination covered by the Act. Also, students who are breastfeeding are explicitly protected from discriminatory treatment in education and service provision.

Non-work provisions for pregnancy and maternity are set out in UK law. Non-work provisions apply in education settings. Further information is available through the Equality Advisory and Support Service (EASS) – see the Maternity section.

Risk assessments

Risk assessments must be completed to ensure a safe working environment for all individuals associated with any research activity funded by UKRI – both on and off-site. UKRI states that individual risk assessments must be completed for a student who has informed the DTP or a third party (e.g. internship host) that they are (i) pregnant (ii) breastfeeding or (iii) have given birth in the last 6 months. This applies to all students in all

locations, not just those undertaking wet lab projects. Please liaise with your supervisor (and third party host, if applicable) for support.

Keeping in touch (KiT) days

TMRP DTP encourages students on maternity leave to arrange KiT days with their supervisors. Please see the UKRI training grant terms & conditions for further details, and liaise with TMRP DTP Manager to arrange payment (where applicable).

Return to work arrangements

Please discuss these with your supervisor to ensure that you are supported and your requirements met on your return.

Sick Leave

UKRI funded doctoral students can access up to 28 weeks of paid medical leave within any rolling 12-month period, with an overall cap of 52 weeks across the entire length of the studentship. You will continue to receive your full stipend throughout any authorised periods of sick leave.

This eligibility runs from the very first funded day of your PhD until the final day of your funded period, though it is worth noting that this funding does not extend into any unpaid writing-up periods. The policy covers both physical and mental health conditions, pregnancy-related illnesses, chronic disabilities, and necessary medical appointments. To formalise your leave, you will need to provide medical certification, such as a fit note from a GP, in line with your specific university's requirements.

Compassionate Leave

The TMRP DTP recognises that there may be occasions when students will need to request time away from their studies to deal with domestic emergencies or bereavement regarding a close family member or dependant. If you need support, please contact the TMRP DTP Manager, Dr Kerrie McGiveron at kerrie.mcgiveron@liverpool.ac.uk – or ask your supervisor

to get in touch – and we can discuss the best way forward, which may include a period of paid compassionate leave where appropriate.

Suspensions and Extensions

Studentships are intended to be held on a continuous basis. Sometimes, however, a student may need to interrupt their studies, for example as a result of their own persistent health problems or those of dependants, or to take up the opportunity of a temporary, short-term post which can be justified as being highly relevant to their thesis or research training.

Please note that suspensions can only be considered during the funded period of the studentship. If a student interrupts their registration after their TMRP DTP funding has finished a suspension cannot be considered.

Approval for the suspension must be obtained from both the student's supervisor and, in iCASE Studentships, the supervisor from the non-HEI partner. Additionally, the student's supervisor must affirm that the interruption in studies will not cause a delay in the submission of the final thesis beyond the suspension period. Please note that requests for retroactive suspensions cannot be accommodated. The period of suspension cannot exceed one calendar year in any one instance, and the total periods of suspension should not exceed one calendar year during the lifetime of the award. Approval for the suspension must be obtained from both the student's supervisor and, in iCASE Studentships, the supervisor from the non-HEI partner. Additionally, the student's supervisor must affirm that the interruption in studies will not cause a delay in the submission of the final thesis beyond the suspension period. Please note that requests for retroactive suspensions cannot be accommodated.

Withdrawals and Terminations

Studentship funding will cease with effect from the withdrawal date. The DTP will require all advance payments and/or payments made in error to be returned.

Grievance procedures or termination before a student’s end-of-funding-date must follow

relevant procedures at a student's primary institution. Students must be dealt with in a manner that is transparent and fair; written records and records of communications and meetings must be maintained by the institution; and a student must be allowed a companion at any grievance meeting, where appropriate. The DTP is required to inform MRC/UKRI of withdrawals.

Thesis Submission

All students are encouraged to submit their thesis at the end of the three-year funded period. Students can no longer access RTSG expenses, or apply for additional DTP funded opportunities, after the end of the studentship. Students will have to pay for any fees, including Submission Pending fees, incurred after the studentship ends. If a student submits their thesis before the end of the studentship, the date of submission will become the studentship end date and no further payments will be made. Any overpaid maintenance will be reclaimed.

All full-time students must submit no later than one year after their funding end date and part-time students must submit within two years of their funding end date.

Acknowledging the Grant

Published work should formally acknowledge the support of the TMRP DTP and quote the TMRP DTP Grant Number **MR/W006049/1**

Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

The TMRP DTP values and promotes equity, diversity and inclusion. The practices and procedures of the TMRP DTP are designed to provide equality of opportunity, to promote harmonious relations between colleagues and to eliminate all forms of discrimination. The 12 Universities in the partnership are individually and collectively committed to fulfilling their obligations under the Equality Act 2010. The TMRP DTP encourages applications from

individuals from all backgrounds and provides flexible in-programme support that caters for a community of researchers with diverse needs.

We recognise the need to recruit postgraduate and postdoctoral candidates from a broad applicant pool and value the benefits that attracting a diverse population of researchers can bring. This commitment is made with specific reference to a person's age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religious belief and non-belief, sex and sexual orientation.

The TMRP DTP actively encourages its researchers to consider a wide range of career choices and is supported by guidance from experts at careers and employability centres at HEIs within the partnership. The TMRP DTP is committed to providing an environment which recognises and values people's differences, maximises on the strengths that those differences bring and supports all staff and students to fulfil their potential.

Section 3: Additional Funding Opportunities

Research Training Support Grant

TMRP DTP students have access to a Research Training Support Grant (RTSG) of £5,000 per year, which can be used for a number of research related purposes including conference attendance, UK fieldwork and the purchase of books or other key resources. All TMRP DTP-funded students can access this fund, including iCASE students. Funds are handled by individual Research Organisations, and you must consult with your supervisor to ensure that the expenditure is appropriate. (These are funds cannot be used for publishing or laptops for example). Do ensure that you contact the DTP Manager if you are uncertain about what the RTSG can and cannot be used for.

The Flexible Supplement Fund

In addition to the funding listed above, the TMRP DTP students will benefit from the Flexible Supplement Fund. This will be used for cohort training, including any bespoke training aimed at the whole DTP, such as attendance at ICTMC and the annual DTP symposia.

The Flexible Supplement Fund can also be applied to for individual exceptional training opportunities, such as overseas fieldwork. This fund is limited to £5,000 per student (or 12 weeks' stipend if greater) and is awarded on a competitive basis. We accept applications all year round, and the application form and guidance can be found on our website.

Section 4: Expectations of TMRP DTP Studentship Holders

Researchfish®

Researchfish® is the system that the UK Research Councils use to gather feedback from all Research Council funded researchers about the outcomes from their work. The Research Councils agreed that it was important for Research Council funded doctoral students to also be able to report on their activities and successes, how they contribute to their respective areas of research and how they engage with partner organisations and communities.

TMRP DTP Students are responsible for providing information about the outcomes from their studentship. Please email the TMRP DTP Manager, Dr Kerrie McGiveron with details of any outputs.

The Submission Period falls between early February and mid-March each year. Research Councils will not use Researchfish® data to assess the performance of individual students or review the progress of individual studentships. In addition, there is no expectation that doctoral students will necessarily have specific outcomes or outputs to report.

TMRP DTP Induction

Each year, during October/November, the TMRP DTP organises a compulsory induction session for new starters and serves as a chance to learn more about the opportunities and expectations of being a TMRP DTP-funded student, as well meeting the team behind the TMRP DTP, and networking with postgraduate students from across the DTP.

Attendance at the induction session is mandatory for new TMRP DTP-funded students when they commence their studentships.

Section 5: Key Contacts

TMRP DTP Contacts and Academic Leads

The University of Liverpool leads the DTP, and as well as this, each institution within the TMRP DTP has its own academic Lead.

The institutional supervisor should be contacted with any queries about institutional-specific matters (e.g. annual progression or university policies), or about maintenance stipend or fees payments, as these are handled locally.

DTP Contacts		
Professor Paula Williamson	DTP Director	prw@liverpool.ac.uk
Dr Kerrie McGiveron	DTP Manager	Kerrie.mcgiveron@liverpool.ac.uk
Institution Leads		
Professor Katie Gillies	University of Aberdeen	k.gillies@abdn.ac.uk
Professor Dyfrig Hughes	Bangor University	d.a.hughes@bangor.ac.uk
Professor Simon Gates	University of Birmingham	s.gates@bham.ac.uk
Professor Sofia Villar	University of Cambridge	sofia.villar@mrc-bsu.cam.ac.uk
Professor Rod Taylor	University of Glasgow	rod.taylor@glasgow.ac.uk
Professor Christina Yap	Institute of Cancer Research (ICR)	christina.yap@icr.ac.uk
Professor Rebecca Walwyn	University of Leeds	r.e.a.walwyn@leeds.ac.uk
Professor Catrin Tudor Smith	University of Liverpool	cat1@liverpool.ac.uk
Professor James Wason	Newcastle University	James.Wason@newcastle.ac.uk
Dr Joanne Hosking	University of Plymouth	joanne.hosking@plymouth.ac.uk
Dr Clare Robinson	Queen Mary University London (QMUL)	clare.robinson@qmul.ac.uk
Professor Claire Vale	University College London (UCL)	claire.vale@ucl.ac.uk

Social Media and Communications

Our website is https://mrctmrpdtp.com/

BlueSky @mrcnihrtmrp.bsky.social

Linked In www.linkedin.com/in/trials-methodology-research-partnership-82b139303

We also use an online communication platform called Base Camp https://basecamp.com/ Base Camp enables us to share documents, ideas and conversations outside of email and keeps everything in one place. The DTP has its own Base Camp platform and you will be invited to join and participate.

TMRP DTP Postal Address

TMRP DTP

University of Liverpool,

Block F

Waterhouse Building,

1-5 Brownlow Street,

Liverpool,

L69 3GL

Further Information

Doctoral Training Partnerships (DTPs) are expected to manage grant funding, and meet grant expectations and requirements, as set out by UKRI:

- UKRI Terms & Conditions for training funding
- MRC Funding: Additional Terms & Conditions

We would encourage UKRI-funded students to read through these UKRI & MRC Terms & Conditions (T&Cs) and associated guidance for training grants, as these look at many aspects of your award and training from the funder's perspective. Any additional guidance and funding provided by UKRI will also impact DTP administration and decision-making.