



Natural
Environment
Research Council

Welcome to CENTA's Prospective Applicant Webinar

centa.ac.uk

Webinar outline



- What is CENTA & how does a Doctoral Training Partnership work?
- Application process, timeline, and tips
- What does CENTA training look like?
- Words of wisdom from current CENTA doctoral researchers
- Open Q&A



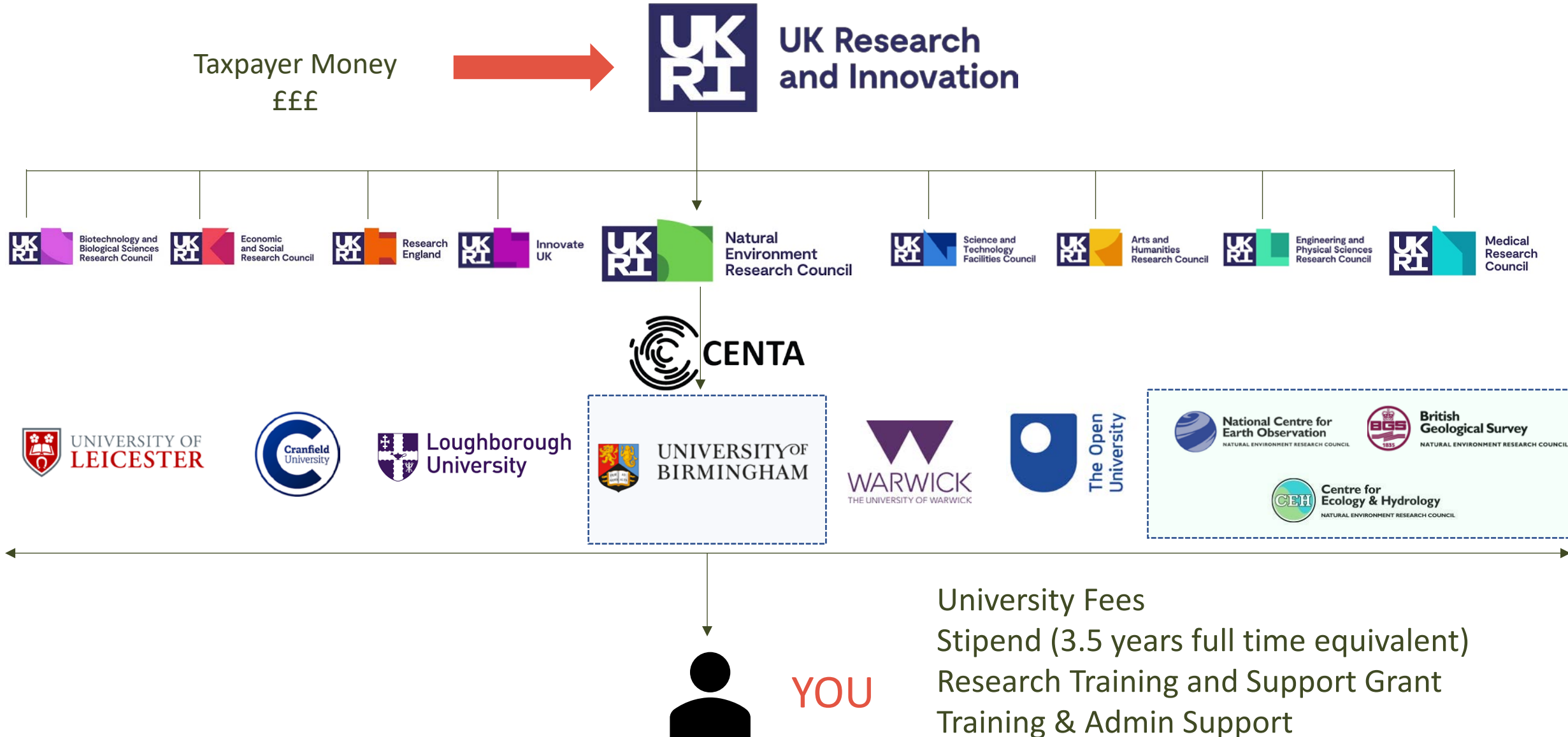
What exactly is CENTA?



- **C**entral **E**ngland **N**ERC **T**raining **A**lliance
 - A Doctoral Training Partnership (DTP) / Doctoral Landscape Award (DLA)
 - Comprised of six university partners, three research centres, ~17 external partner organisations (industry, government, and third sector)
- Our primary functions:
 - Award PhD funding to postgraduate researchers (PGRs) / doctoral researchers (DRs)
 - Design and deliver a training programme and provide administrative support to CENTA PGRs
- Currently, we are in our third iteration (CENTA3) – first CENTA3 cohort (of a planned five) started last month.



How CENTA is funded:



Taxpayer Money
£££



UK Research
and Innovation

- Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council
- Economic and Social Research Council
- Research England
- Innovate UK
- Natural Environment Research Council
- Science and Technology Facilities Council
- Arts and Humanities Research Council
- Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council
- Medical Research Council



- UNIVERSITY OF LEICESTER
- Cranfield University
- Loughborough University
- UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM
- WARWICK THE UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK
- The Open University
- National Centre for Earth Observation
- British Geological Survey
- Centre for Ecology & Hydrology



YOU

- University Fees
- Stipend (3.5 years full time equivalent)
- Research Training and Support Grant
- Training & Admin Support

CENTA Science Themes



- **Climate and Environmental Sustainability**
 - Climate, Air Quality, Water, Soil, Pollutants, Atmosphere
- **Organisms and Ecosystems**
 - Palaeobiology, Evolution, Ecology, Biodiversity, Microbiology, Environmental Modelling
- **Dynamic Earth**
 - Natural Resources, Energy, Surface Processes, Solid Earth Processes, Palaeoclimates, Palaeoenvironments

Who does **CENTA** fund? How does it work?



CENTA Admissions Ethos:

- We aim to identify research potential, rather than simply scoring prior access to opportunity.
- We are firmly committed to equity, diversity, and inclusion, and shape our admissions practices accordingly.

CENTA Funding pathways



- **CENTA Science Opportunity Scholarships (CSOS)**
 - Ringfenced for minority ethnic ‘home’ applicants
 - Successful applicants choose a supervisor/develop a project supported by CENTA management board.
- **Project-based studentships**
 - Projects advertised by CENTA supervisors
 - Only one studentship may be awarded per project; not all projects will be funded
- If eligible, you can apply for both pathways.

Who does **CENTA** fund? How does it work?



Project-based studentship admissions process:

- Contacting lead supervisors pre-application is strongly recommended
- CENTA supervisors review applications for their project and choose ~1-2 candidate(s) to recommend for interview
- Written application (CENTA 'form') scored centrally to yield interview shortlist
 - We are looking for personalized, thoughtful answers. ChatGPT or similar will not score well.
- Standardised interviews with a short presentation and 'seen' questions.
 - Same as above.
- Combined written application and interview scores determine who gets funding*

Other odds and ends



- Some advertised projects badged as ‘CASE studentships’, meaning they include an external partner who provides co-supervision, hosts the PGR for 3-18 months for a CASE placement as part of the PhD, and provides the extra financial support to enable this placement.
- We abide by UKRI’s Terms and Conditions. This means:
 - They set the annual stipend
 - All PhDs offered full or part time
 - A Disability Support Allowance (DSA), covering expenses related to support, adjustments, etc. identified through a needs analysis.
 - Guaranteed sick pay, parental leave, etc.
- Some complications for international students
 - We have a government-imposed maximum quota of 30% international PGRs per year.
 - English language proficiency – each university has its own admissions standards.
 - Our funding does not cover university fees, but our university partners offer fee waivers for international CENTA PGRs.
 - Visa constraints can unfortunately make some opportunities unworkable
 - Expect some extra startup costs – e.g. for visas, NHS surcharge, moving expenses

Other application info



- CSOS studentships: Different schedule to maximise time for project development
 - Apply directly to CENTA
 - Deadline: **23:59 GMT on Monday 5th January 2026.**
 - Interviews in mid Jan.
 - Conditional offers within ~1 week
- Project-based studentships:
 - Apply directly to the lead university via their application portal*
 - Deadline: **23:59 GMT on Wednesday 7th January 2026.**
 - Interviews ~early Feb.
 - Initial offers late Feb. to early March, additional waitlist offers made as soon as offers are declined.
- NERC has a universal acceptance date: **11:59 GMT Wednesday March 18th 2026**

What CENTA PGRs do during their PhD



- Do some research → write a dissertation → earn a doctorate
 - Disseminate your work – formally (publication, conference, policy document), and informally (outreach, blog, podcast, news)
- Undertake various training courses
- Complete a placement in industry, policy, or elsewhere outside academia
- Gain some teaching experience
- You want to pursue an academic career path – great! If not – also great! Unsure? Change your mind? Totally fine!
 - There is no right path – use the time, opportunities, and the budget to explore, find new passions, and keep your options open for next steps after PhD

Aims of CENTA's Training Provision



1. Provide an innovative, high quality and comprehensive training programme that equips PGRs to work across disciplines and sectors - benefitting future science, policy and the economy;
2. Evidence-based and responsive to 'most wanted' skills, maximising PGR employability and impact;
3. Build relationships and networks – between PGRs, cohorts, academics, institutes, and partners;
4. To be accessible, inclusive, and responsive to feedback.

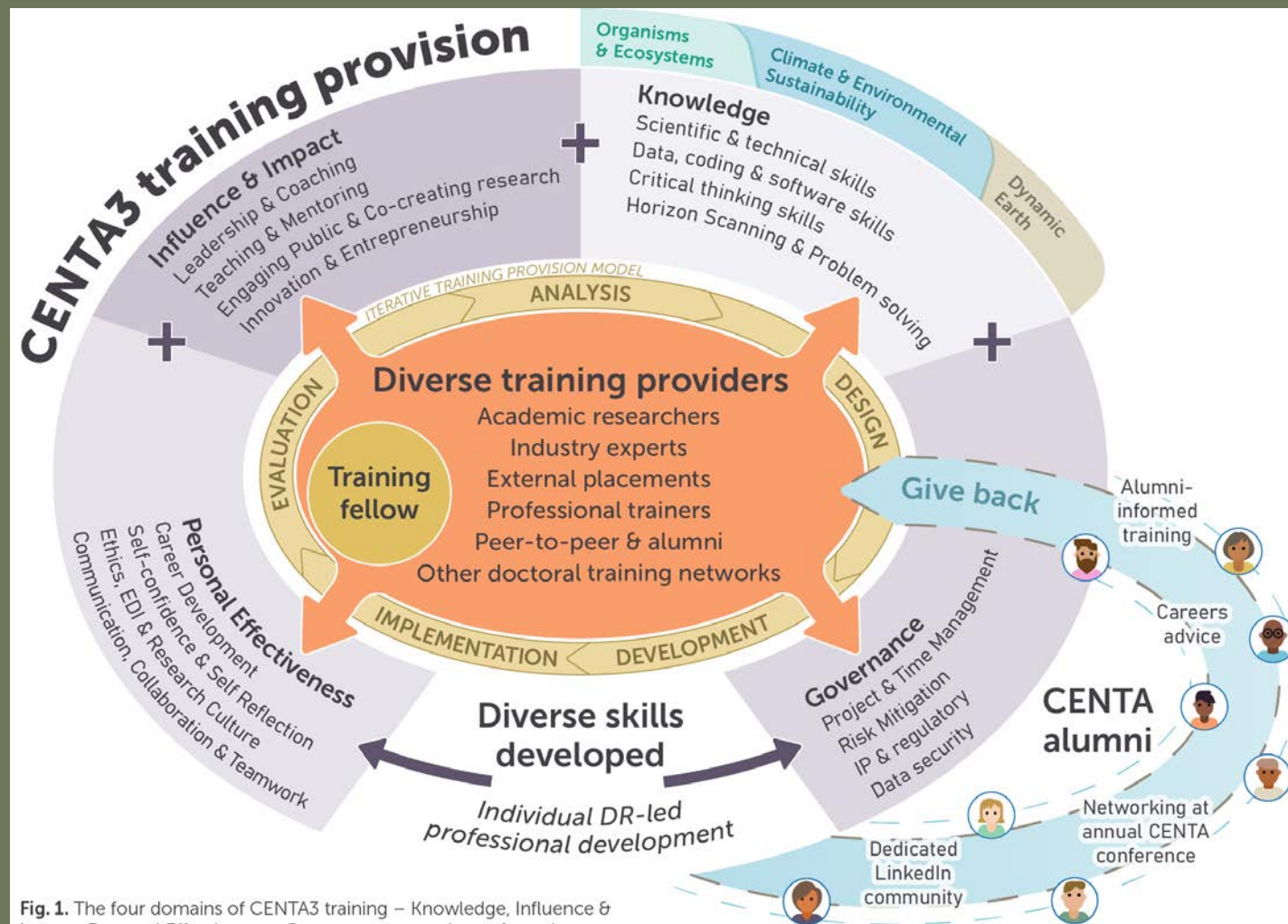


Fig. 1. The four domains of CENTA3 training – Knowledge, Influence & Impact, Personal Effectiveness, Governance – are drawn from the established Vitae Researcher Development Framework (vitae.ac.uk).

CENTA Training Highlights



- **CENTA Field TRIPP (Training Residential In Publishing & Policy)**
 - Designed to facilitate cohort identity and camaraderie.

Learning Outcomes:

- Time management and project management
- Rapidly assimilating information
- Teamwork and shared goals
- Producing written work to fixed regulations
- Communicating science to different audiences in innovative ways



TRiPP 2024, Cheltenham & The Cotswolds

CENTA Training Highlights



- **CENTA Placements**

- Fantastic (funded!) opportunity to experience life in another sector (& a big highlight on a CV)
- Has led to some great opportunities and even future careers for CENTA students
- Industry & Commercial, Government & Policy, Not-for-Profit, Schools, Learned Societies & Journals, Media & Public Engagement...
- Student-led; can be done in pairs or teams

Anna McGairy @palaeo_anna · Sep 8
I am just over halfway through my @CENTA_NERC placement with @spacecentre where I have been getting involved in all things #scicom - from workshops to photography and videos 📷 Here are a few highlights so far (including a sneak peek #BehindTheScenes of a very fun video **)

National Space Centre

What if you could combine your passion with work? For Stacy Phillips (@Shtacy_Phillips), this meant doing a CENTA placement on science communication. Stacy is a 4th year PhD student at the Open University, and shares her placement experience here with us.

Velislava Ilieva @IlievaVelislava · Aug 23, 2022
Had a fantastic time at my @CENTA_NERC funded placement at Rawwater Engineering. Learned so much about microbiological oilfield reservoir souring and even got to run high pressure bioreactors!

rawwater
Certificate of Appreciation
This Certificate of Appreciation is awarded to:
Veli Ilieva
who successfully completed
A Summer Placement in
Industry
With Rawwater Engineering Company Limited
From: Monday 18th July 2022
To: Friday 26th August 2022
Verified by:
Matt Streets
Head of Division – Scientific
www.rawwater.com specialists in oilfield reservoir souring

Example CENTA Placement Highlights

CENTA Training Highlights



- **CENTA Student Conference**

- A student-led conference
- Attendees get the opportunity to showcase their research
- Organisers get a valuable training opportunity and an output that shows demonstrable skills in Project Management
- Also it is just fun!



CENTA Conference 2023, Warwick

CENTA Conference 2024, Birmingham



Is this the right university for me?

Do other students like it here?

What training is offered?

Would I like to live here?

YES

NO

Will mentoring be supportive?

Will this DTP/Project give me the right skills?

What university services/facilities are there?



Further **FAQs**



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STUDENTSHIP FAQs

Follow up Questions?



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