Postgraduate Researcher Experience Programme (PREP): Guidance for applicants

The Postgraduate Researcher Experience Programme (PREP) enables you to engage with activities that enhance your career development. It supports you to get experience, training, advice or insights so that you can make career decisions, broaden networks, explore career ideas and develop additional skills and attributes. You get to create your own experience.

The guidelines and scope of the PREP scheme have changed for the 2019/20 academic year. Do ensure you are familiar with all aspects of the revised scheme before you apply.

PREP is for all PGRs regardless of whether you are exploring career ideas beyond academia or plan to develop an academic career. However, the purpose of PREP is to encourage knowledge exchange therefore experiences must take place outside of academic institutions or be provided by organisations or individuals that are not solely based in Higher Education. The scheme aims to fund opportunities that add to your experience as a PhD student and therefore will not fund work or training that is integral to your PhD research. In particular, we are looking for opportunities that develop your links, knowledge and networks with organisations and individuals beyond academic institutions and show reciprocal benefits.

What is Knowledge Exchange?

Knowledge Exchange (KE) is about developing partnerships with people and organisations beyond academia. It is a two-way process and values insights to and from partners so that real questions and challenges faced by modern society can be tackled. PREP contributes to KE by enabling researchers to apply existing skills, knowledge, insights or networks beyond academia or develop new skills, knowledge, insights and networks from non academic settings and individuals. PGRs will eventually work in all areas of society including organisations, businesses, charities, industry and government, as well as academia, and therefore their skills, experience and knowledge need to be multi-sectoral. KE is regarded as a strategic need for the university and is therefore a key priority.

Why add to your experience?

Work experience can offer a range of benefits and take a variety of forms. It provides learning, insights and increased awareness in ways that suit you, your needs and your availability. At any stage of your research, whether you are enhancing your career, looking to develop yourself, or exploring self-employment, you could benefit. Consider this list of possible gains:

- Build professional experience and exposure
- Develop specific 'commercial awareness' or sector knowledge
- Enhance your self-awareness, self-confidence and self-esteem
- Experience fresh perspectives
- Apply your skills in a different setting and learn new ones
- Expose your research knowledge to a wider audience
- Meet new people and develop professional networks
- Learn about your preferences and the options and opportunities available to you
- Understand your value in a different environment
- Demonstrate your enthusiasm and commitment to working in a particular role or field

What do we mean by work experience?

We encourage you to be **creative and open minded** about what this experience could include and how you mix opportunities together. The fund could enable you to undertake;

- A period of work experience alongside your PhD on a full or part-time basis
- Industry or organisational visits to discuss career paths, develop collaborations or build networks
- Development activities for a business you have already established
- Professional skills training and development activities
- Consultancy or project work
- Work-shadowing (observing) in one or more organisations or with one or more people doing a similar role
- Visit days or site tours advertised by employers or arranged yourself
- Information interviews one to one discussions or meetings with people doing a role, or working for an organisation, that interests you
- An internship or placement

What activities can PREP fund?

- Placements and internships
- Work-shadowing, visits to employers, networking opportunities
- Professional conferences (the scheme does not fund academic conferences)
- Training courses (the scheme does not fund academic summer schools, training needed for your research, or courses you could access through the University of Sheffield researcher development training programmes or via other university training programmes)
- Time to work on your own business venture if it is already established in the UK, can raise an invoice and pay you a salary through a payroll system.
- Formal volunteering programmes with registered charities.

What costs can I apply for through PREP?

Awards of between £100 (minimum) and £1000 (maximum) can be made through PREP. This can pay for expenses incurred in undertaking the activities including travel, accommodation and course or event fees. It can also be used to fund a placement host to provide you with a salary for a placement. A placement host would need to invoice the Careers Service so that we can pay the amount required to fund the salary. You can apply for funds to cover both salary and expenses up to a maximum of £1000. The rate of pay for placements is £14.64 per hour plus £1.77 per hour for holiday pay. This is a total of £16.41 for each hour worked.

The Careers Service does not endorse unpaid placements and will not fund expenses for unpaid placements with organisations unwilling to invoice us for a salary payment. You can apply for expenses to undertake a formal volunteer programme with a registered charity. Expenses can not be claimed for meals or refreshments.

What is the difference between a placement and work-shadowing? Can I apply for a salary for these activities?

For the purposes of PREP a placement is an activity where you are undertaking work activities or duties for an organisation or individual in return for a payment. We expect a placement to be a minimum of 14 hours and a maximum of 60 hours. Your placement host must agree to invoice us for the amount of your salary and then to pay you directly through their payroll system. We set the rate of pay and this is the amount that you will be paid by your placement host. Placements will be paid at a rate of £14.64 per hour plus £1.77 per hour for holiday pay. This is a total of £16.41 for each hour worked. Information on this process is available for placement hosts.

Work-shadowing is where you are observing what happens in a workplace or are shadowing an individual in the settings in which they undertake their role. You are not undertaking any specific work responsibilities or duties. We would usually expect work-shadowing to be a minimum of 1 day and a maximum of 3 days with one individual or organisation but you can apply for a series of work-shadowing opportunities across a number of different organisations or locations. You can't apply for a salary for this activity but you can apply for expenses including travel and accommodation costs.

Can I do my activity outside the UK?

Placements and internships must take place within the UK. We would expect other activities to take place within the UK unless you are located in another country for aspects of your PhD research activity and at the time your experience(s) takes place. If you have another reason for undertaking your activity outside the UK email prep@sheffield.ac.uk for advice before you apply.

Do I need to have my experience organised before I apply?

Details of your proposed experience are required on the application form. If you are applying for a training opportunity or professional conference you will need to provide specific details of the opportunity, location, dates and expected costs. If you are applying for workshadowing or a placement you will need to provide contact details for your host(s) as well as details of the opportunity, location, dates and expected costs. If your application is successful you will need to pay your own fees and travel costs and then claim them back through our expenses system. You can submit claims as soon as you incur the expense. You do not need to wait until after the activity takes place.

Who is responsible for arranging the activity?

It is the responsibility of the PGR to organise or create the opportunities or to find suitable courses or events. The Careers Service is not responsible for organising or booking any aspect of the activity.

What criteria will be used to assess my application?

PREP is a popular scheme and receives many more applications than can be funded each year. It is a competitive process and you should approach your application with the same care, attention to detail and preparation you would make for any funding or grant application.

In particular you will need to;

- Ensure that what you apply to do fits the scheme criteria. Activities or training that are required for your PhD, academic conferences, academic summer schools and placements in other universities are not eligible for funding.
- Complete each question with a comprehensive answer that addresses every aspect
 of the question and provides specific evidence, examples or details required. If the
 application is incomplete, or full details haven't been provided, your application will
 be deemed unsuccessful.
- Show how you expect this activity to contribute and add to your career development, career decision making, skills, knowledge and experience and how you plan to apply the learning and insights you gain from it.
- Outline in what ways your activity will enable and enhance knowledge exchange.

Can I do my activity during a Leave of Absence or after my PhD?

PREP bursary recipients must be registered students at the time of their application and during the activity. It is therefore not possible to fund activities which will be undertaken during an official Leave of Absence or after the final submission of your thesis.

Am I expected to do anything if I receive funding?

Researchers who receive an award will be expected to complete reflective activities following their experience. All recipients will complete a 500-1000 word reflective learning log. In addition, those receiving an award of £500 or more will also create a resource based on their reflection to highlight the benefits of the scheme to other researchers. This could be in the form of a case-study, blog-post, 3 minute video, poster or presentation.

Can I get support and advice on finding an opportunity?

Yes. You can book an appointment to discuss any aspect of your career development whether you are exploring career ideas, looking at ways to enhance your skills and experience, making decisions, developing a career strategy, finding or creating opportunities or applying for jobs and schemes. You can book appointments via Career Connect in MUSE. You will also find resources and information on networking, creating opportunities and making a speculative approach to potential employers on the Careers Service website.

Can I apply again if I have received PREP funding previously?

If you have already received a PREP bursary you can apply again as long as your application is received in a subsequent academic year. Preference **may** be given to those who have not received PREP funding before. If you have applied previously and not been successful, you are welcome to apply again with a revised application before the next closing date.

Is there a closing date?

There will be three closing dates in the 2019/2020 academic year.

- Round 1 closes Thursday 13th February
- Round 2 closes Thursday 19th March
- Round 3 closes Friday 17th April

Applications received by the closing date will be assessed during the two weeks following that closing date. You should receive an email with the result of your application within two weeks of the closing date. If you are not successful you can apply again in the next round with a revised or different application.

How do I apply?

Please complete the Application form in full at https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/careers/prep

PREP briefing workshops will be offered whilst the scheme is open for applications. You are encouraged to attend, both to hear more about the scheme and ask questions.

This is a competitive process so you are encouraged to do everything you can to make the most of the scheme and complete an eligible and comprehensive application.

How will a decision be made on whether I am successful?

Decisions will be made based on how well the criteria for the scheme are met and how clearly the benefits and rationale for undertaking the opportunity are outlined in the PREP Application Form. In particular we will be looking for evidence of knowledge exchange beyond academia. All applications will be reviewed by a panel and a decision communicated by email. We aim to respond to your application within two weeks of the closing date.

What happens after I receive an award?

You will need to provide evidence of your planned activity. If undertaking a placement, you will need to sign a pre-placement briefing document and your placement host will need to sign a letter of expectation before funds are released to you.

Researchers must submit all documentation requested by the PREP team to enable payments to be authorised. There is a final deadline for the return of documentation and expenses of the **30**th **June** to enable financial transactions to be completed before the end of the financial year.

What do I need to do after I have completed the activity?

Researchers who receive an award will be expected to complete reflective activities following their experience. These should be submitted within 4 weeks of completing the experience.

All those who receive PREP funding will complete a 500-1000 word reflective learning log. In addition, PGRs who receive an award of £500 or more are asked to create a resource based on their reflection to highlight the benefits of the scheme to other researchers. This could be in the form of a case-study, blog-post, 3 minute video, poster or presentation.

The application process

You may apply for PREP funding in order to enable you to:

1) Undertake a placement at a UK-based organisation (see Section 1)

or,

2) Undertake another type of development activity (see Section 2)

Section 1

Placements

If you wish to undertake a placement, and apply for PREP funding to **pay you a salary**, please note the following points:

- If your application for PREP funding is successful, the placement host will pay you
 a salary, for which they will be reimbursed by PREP. This will be at an agreed rate
 and for a specified number of hours.
- The placement host must be UK-based and have the infrastructure in place to make salary payments.
- Before applying for PREP funding you must have agreed a potential work project with the placement host and have a clear outline of duties, responsibilities and activities you intend to undertake.
- If your application is successful, we will require evidence from the placement host, confirming the arrangements and the placement host will be required to sign and return a letter of expectation. The placement is not approved until we have received the required evidence and signed letter of expectation.
- We will need to set up the placement host as a 'vendor' on University finance systems, if they are not already, in order to be able to pay them the agreed amount for a salary.
- In addition to a salary for the hours you undertake on placement, you may apply for PREP funding for expenses related to the placement, such as travel costs. If approved, these costs must be paid upfront by you and you must then submit receipts as soon as possible, and before the end of June 2020, in order to be reimbursed.
- You will be asked to sign a pre-placement briefing document before the placement is approved to begin.
- After the placement, you are required to complete and return a reflective log to the PREP team, for which you will be sent guidelines.
- If you are awarded an amount over £500, you will also be required to create a reflective resource, following guidelines.
- PREP funding is not available for unsalaried placements. For work shadowing, see Section 2.

Section 2

Non-placements (e.g. training courses, work-shadowing)

If you wish to undertake any other type of development activity that is not a placement, please note the following points:

- The opportunity must take place in the UK, unless you are already based overseas, or will be at the time of the opportunity. In that case, you may apply for funds associated with undertaking the activity such as travel within the country and course fees.
- In your application, you will be asked to outline the funds you require in detail.
- If your application is successful, you must provide evidence of the proposed opportunity immediately.

- You must pay any approved costs yourself and submit receipts for the relevant expenses as soon as possible, and before the end of June 2020, in order to be reimbursed.
- After the placement, you are required to complete and return a reflective log to the PREP team, for which you will be sent guidelines.
- If you are awarded an amount over £500, you will also be required to create a reflective resource, following guidelines.
- PREP funding is not available for attendance at academic conferences, as this is outside the funding criteria.
- PREP funding is not usually available for attendance at Summer Schools, unless there is clear evidence of knowledge exchange

Section 3

Entrepreneurial activity

If you wish to undertake an entrepreneurial activity related to your own business, please note the following points:

- If you apply for PREP funding to pay you a salary, the business must be UK-based and have the infrastructure in place to create an invoice and make salary payments. See Section 1.
- Applications for personal development expenses, associated with entrepreneurial activity, will be considered. See Section 2.
- PREP funds are **not** available for business development costs.

If you have any further questions, please contact us at:

prep@sheffield.ac.uk