



[REDACTED]

23 April 2024

Dear [REDACTED],

Freedom of Information request: FOI2024/00258

Thank you for your Freedom of Information request received on the 22 March in which you requested the following:

Your request:

I am wondering if you have data on how long STFC-funded students take to complete their PhD.

I would like data from 2010 onwards, for Physics, Astronomy and Astrophysics PhD students, funded by the STFC, the start date of their program, submission date and the date they had their viva (Or just the number of months from start to completion of the entire PhD program), as well as how long the student was provided funding.

Based on the STFC student survey annual report, data is collected on students' opinion on "Do you think have sufficient time within the funded duration of your studentship to complete your PhD, including writing up?". It would be useful to also have data for those who answered this question, along with what duration these students were funded for (i.e. answers to the question 'How long is funded period?').

Our response:

I can confirm that UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) holds some information relevant to your request. Please see the information below and attached in "[FOI2024_00258 Annex 1](#)".

We have taken the approach that the areas of Physics, Astronomy and Astrophysics describes the STFC research remit and have therefore provided data on all STFC funded students.

Data from 2010 for STFC funded students, relating to total duration and submission timeframe is included in the 'Studentship Data' tab. Please note that STFC do not hold information on when a student's viva takes place.

To explain further, studentship data is collected by the Research Organisation (RO) and submitted to UKRI via a studentship portal. This includes Doctoral Training Partnerships (DTPs) which are allocated via a funding algorithm, and competitively won Centres for Doctoral Training (CDTs), some CASE studentships and studentships funded on grants.

For total duration, timeframes are calculated using date fields (start date, end date and submission date) of the studentship. The start and end dates are submitted at the beginning of the award and may not be updated if changes are made. The end date may not always be updated to reflect termination date. The RO is responsible for making any changes.

Funding provided is based on a nominal duration for a full-time student and may vary depending on the doctoral model used. It is up to the RO to define the duration for an individual studentship. STFC provides ROs with an average of 3.5 years of funding for each student on DTPs, CDT students are allocated 4 years on average. Students may be full or part time.

ROs have the flexibility to decide the period of support for students, but STFC expects doctoral projects to be designed and supervised in such a way that students are able to submit their thesis within the funded period, as defined at the outset of the project. The final funded duration is subject to change during the studentship for various reasons including part-time study, significant period of sickness, parental leave etc. ROs also have flexibility to fund students for longer with alternative funding.

The submission date is taken from a student submission survey, also provided by the RO, which collects the thesis submission and completion of degree data for the PhD students who were due to submit by the preceding September. There is a time lag between students submitting their PhD and the student submission survey being completed, therefore information is not held on submission dates for studentships started from 2020.

In addition, we know from analysis and additional exercises conducted to check this data directly with departments that some students do not have a submissions record updated in the studentship portal. This could be for a number of reasons, for example, terminating early, obtaining another qualification such as Masters, or submitting early.

Consequently, the numbers provided in the two data sets for total duration and submission timeframe are not counts of the same students as data may not be complete for each studentship. Instead, these data sets should be considered as subsets of the total numbers and are therefore not directly comparable.

Please note that the data submitted to the studentship portal by ROs is not verified by STFC.

Data from the STFC student survey has been provided for years 2019-2023, which is when the question of 'sufficient time' was first introduced. This data is included in the 'Survey Data' tab of Annex 1.

STFC only ask students in their third and fourth year to answer the 'sufficient time' question, consequently, there may be duplicated answers across the years. The survey is not mandatory, and therefore may not include responses from all STFC funded students.

The survey question about funding period changed in the 2022 survey due to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The option changed from a multiple-choice drop-down box to a free text field. This has impacted the funding period option for 2022 and 2023, with funding period for these two years calculated using the number of years and weeks/months as stated in the survey. UKRI allowed for covid related extensions.

The data provided is a count of unique studentships, one individual may be funded from more than one training grant. All numbers have been rounded to the nearest five in line with standard statistical reporting.

Further information about how UKRI supports doctoral training can be found [here](#)¹.

If you have any queries regarding our response or you are unhappy with the outcome of your request and wish to seek an internal review of the decision, please contact within the next 40 working days:

Head of Information Governance
Email: foi@ukri.org

Please quote the reference number above in any future communications.

If you are still not content with the outcome of the internal review, you may apply to refer the matter to the Information Commissioner for a decision. Generally, the ICO cannot make a decision unless you have exhausted the review procedure provided by UKRI. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at: www.ico.org.uk.

If you wish to raise a complaint regarding the service you have received or the conduct of any UKRI staff in relation to your request, please see UKRI's complaints policy: <https://www.ukri.org/about-us/policies-and-standards/complaints-policy/>

¹ <https://www.ukri.org/what-we-do/developing-people-and-skills/supporting-doctoral-students/>
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Yours sincerely,


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