

# EURiCA Doctoral Studentship in Philosophy of Astrobiology

The Department of Philosophy at Durham University invites applications for a doctoral studentship in philosophy of science, specifically in philosophy of astrobiology, commencing in the academic year 2021/22.

The studentship has been created thanks to the generous support of the Leverhulme Trust, in association with the EURiCA Project: 'Exploring Uncertainty and Risk in Contemporary Astrobiology', running from 2021-24. The successful candidate would be joint-supervised by philosophers and scientists. Whilst the project is primarily of a philosophical nature, it would be very closely linked to science-as-practiced, and the candidate would undertake hands-on lab work on potential biosignature samples at the UK Centre for Astrobiology in Edinburgh.

The scholarship is tenable for three years full-time.

Funding is available to cover tuition fees for home/UK applicants for 3 years, as well as paying a stipend at the Research Council rate (£15,609 for 2021/2022). Generous support for travel to attend conferences is also included.

The University host department (Department of Philosophy, Durham) may be able to offer paid teaching and/or further research assistance opportunities.

## Eligibility:

Home and International students are welcome to apply.

In the case of Home students: the scholarship will cover tuition fees and an annual maintenance allowance.

In the case of International students: the scholarship covers a proportion of the fees, equivalent to the home/UK fee.

International students will need to provide proof that they are able to cover the remaining costs of their tuition fees and maintenance through their own funds.

## Requirements:

- The candidate will typically hold a first-class or upper 2:1 undergraduate degree and a master's degree (completed or in progress; integrated MSc degrees may be acceptable) in Philosophy, Natural Sciences, History of Science, or a related subject area at distinction or near-distinction level. Those with other academic backgrounds are welcome to contact us for advice before making an application.
- Excellent competence in English (non-native English speakers should have taken a recognised English Language proficiency test within two years prior to their programme (see detail [here](#))
- A high-quality research project on an aspect of the history and philosophy of astrobiology; any or all of the following could be strands of the PhD project:
  - i. A detailed historical analysis of the development of biosignature concepts, including associated risks of false positives and false negatives.
  - ii. A detailed analysis of the prospects and problems of related concepts, such as 'antibiosignature'/'abiosignature'.
  - iii. A detailed account of cautionary tales from the history of biosignature research (in collaboration with the PI and Co-I McMahon).

- iv. A detailed prescriptive account of how best to employ contemporary biosignature concepts (in collaboration with the PI, Co-I McMahon, and Co-I Greenwell).
- v. A detailed account of the role of simplicity/complexity considerations in biosignature research (in collaboration with the PI and Co-I McMahon).
- vi. A contribution to open debates concerning the possible biological provenance of certain ambiguous samples (in collaboration with Co-I McMahon).
- vii. A detailed prescriptive account of how best to spread intellectual risk across the community when it comes to biosignature research (in collaboration with the PDRA and PI).
- Given these different possible strands, there is sufficient freedom within the project so that the PhD student would be able to go into greater depth on the issues that strike them as most interesting and important. For example, the PhD student could focus more on historical objectives, more on philosophical objectives, or more on objectives that are primarily 'scientific' in nature, depending on the student's interests and academic formation. It would be expected, however, that the final thesis would combine history, philosophy, and science.
- An understanding of how the project fits within the wider EURiCA project.

### How to Apply

You will need to complete Durham University's online application form (<https://studyatdurham.microsoftcrmportals.com/en-US/>), and to state that you wish to be considered for the EURiCA Doctoral Studentship when the form asks you to indicate how you intend to fund your studies.

All applicants should submit a research proposal (no more than 1,000 words), which must set out

- the research question and issues that the project aims to address;
- the research context (past and present scholarship on the topic);
- the contribution to knowledge and understanding the project aims to make;
- the methodology/approach that will be employed;
- the resources and facilities that will be used and how they can be accessed;
- an initial bibliography.

All applicants also need to provide a sample of academic writing (3000-5000 words). This may be a previous essay, MA dissertation excerpt or research paper.

The application deadline is **15<sup>th</sup> August 2021**. Applicants may contact the administration of the EURiCA project to discuss their research proposal ([peter.vickers@durham.ac.uk](mailto:peter.vickers@durham.ac.uk)).

A Selection Panel headed by the PI of the EURiCA project (Peter Vickers) will meet soon after the application deadline to consider the submitted proposal and their relevance to the research parameters of the Studentship. The successful candidate will be contacted in the first instance by email, and unsuccessful applicants will be advised of the outcome soon afterwards.