**Applicant Guidelines: Stepping Stones Early Career Bursary**

The Stepping Stones Early Career Bursary scheme is designed to support career development of early-career members of the UK marine science community who do not have current indefinite employment. The scheme can provide modest amounts of support (up to £1000 per grant) for activities designed to enhance the career prospects for researchers, but not to provide direct salary support.

Bursaries can be used for research related activities including but not limited to travel, collaborative visits, laboratory or field work and conference participation. Bursaries may, for example, be used to develop existing research, explore new research ideas, develop grant applications, establish or further new research collaborations, carry out public engagement activities, participate in conferences, pay for laboratory costs, cover expenses for field work, or attend workshops. Bursaries are open to PhD candidates (PhD thesis submitted) or early-career researchers, particularly those seeking employment in a research environment post-qualification, and to active researchers between or nearing the end of fixed term contracts, or researchers wishing to return to research after a break, such as maternity leave or illness.

1) Eligibility

a. Applicants must be members of the Challenger Society.

b. Applicants must be active in marine science research, e.g., completed PhD studies, publications, participation in research campaigns.

c. Applications are not permitted from researchers holding permanent positions.

d. Applicants holding a fixed term contract may apply in the last 6 months before the end of their contract (i.e., if your contract ends in October 2025 you may apply from May 2025 onwards). PhD students who have submitted their PhD thesis are eligible to apply for a bursary.

e. The maximum amount that any individual can be allocated in any one funding round will be £1000. Individuals are only eligible to receive one bursary in any three-year period.

f. Salary costs are not eligible to be covered.

g. Applicants must be early career researchers. The Challenger Society defines early career researchers as those who are:

· within eight years of their highest degree (BSc, MSc, PhD award), or equivalent professional training;

OR

· within six years of their first permanent/open-ended academic appointment (the first full or part time paid employment contract that lists research or teaching as the primary functions);

whichever is the shorter period since their highest degree or equivalent professional training.

These periods relate to full-time work and will be extended pro-rata to account for part-time working or any career breaks, for example due to:

· family care

· health reasons

· reasons related to COVID-19 such as home schooling.

2) Completing the application form

a. Applications for the Stepping Stones Early Career Bursary should be completed using the form (MS Word Document) provided.

b. Evidence of recent research activity: There is a word limit of 200 words for this section. Please provide details of research activities. Examples include publications, PhD studies, conference presentations, and participation in fieldwork.

c. Evidence/statement of employment status: Please give details of your current and recent employment status e.g., PhD submission date, details of fellowships/funding applied for, recent or current research project employment including dates of contract.

d. Description of research activity applied for: There is a word limit of 200 words for this section. Please describe the research activity for which you require funds e.g., collaborative visit, participation in fieldwork, conference attendance, access to equipment.

e. Breakdown of costs: Please provide detailed costs for your proposed activity, e.g., conference registration fees, flights, travel subsistence, laboratory consumables, equipment charges.

f. Benefit of research activity: There is a word limit of 200 words for this section. Please describe how the research activity will benefit your career in marine science. Please also include any benefits to marine science research or the marine science community, if applicable.

3) Reports

a. Recipients of a Stepping Stones Early Career Bursary are required to submit a report to Challenger Council following completion of the research activity, which will then be published in Challenger Wave and on the website. Challenger Council may also request a submission to Ocean Challenge.

b. This report should detail: (1) a description of the research activity and its impact on both the award holder and marine science research as a whole (preferably in MS Word) ; (2) picture attachment - please provide a selection of interesting pictures with captions illustrating your experience; (3) profile of award holder; (4) 140 character Twitter feed (if you are a Twitter user yourself, please tweet about the research mentioning the Challenger Society).

c. The report must be submitted within 3 months of completion of the research activity. If you are unable undertake the research activity, please notify Dr Christopher Auckland (c.auckland@uea.ac.uk) and depending on the circumstances, the award can be delayed or re-assigned.

4) Payments

a. Please apply in a timely manner before funding is required.

b. Payments will be made shortly (within 2 weeks) of bursary completion.

c. Payments will be made by bank transfer direct to the applicant.

5) Submission Process

a. Applications can be submitted by email using the link to the application form at the bottom of this page.

b. Application deadlines are January 15th, April 15th, July 15th, and October 15th.

c. Applications can be accepted at any time but will be reviewed shortly after the above-mentioned deadlines.

d. Electronic submissions should be made to Dr Christopher Auckland (c.auckland@uea.ac.uk).

6) Decision Process

a. The Stepping Stones Bursary applications are reviewed by the Council against a number of criteria (including the scientific merit, potential career benefits, budget and referee’s statement of support).

b. The annual budget for bursaries is £4000-6000. Monies can be rolled over if not fully used in any one period.

c. A decision will be made within 6 weeks of the deadline and applicants will be notified of the outcome at that time

Previous award winners are listed [here](https://www.challenger-society.org.uk/Stepping_Stones_Reports).