



lapetus Studentship Competition 2025-2026

Applicant Guidance for Prospective Students

7th November 2025 - V1

1. All applications are made via an online form. A Word template is provided so that applicants may edit their responses in advance, and applicants are strongly encouraged to discuss their application with the primary supervisors. International applicants *must* contact the supervisor in advance, in order to be considered for sponsorship, which is required to apply for the project. The assessment criteria used to evaluate applications are given in [Appendix 3](#) of this document and, again, we strongly encourage applicants to use these criteria to structure their answers. **The candidate must complete the lapetus online Studentship Competition Application Form, and then email their 2-page CV and any relevant academic transcripts to lapetus.applications@durham.ac.uk by Monday 5th January 2026 at 12 midday (UK time) for the one project for which they wish to apply.**
2. Applicants' referees will be contacted automatically by lapetus on submission of the application form.
3. The lapetus Manager will send full application documentation (lapetus application form, CV, transcripts and 2x references) to the supervisory teams of each project on Monday 19th January 2026 for the first stage of shortlisting to Host Organisation (HO) internal competitions. The application form requests information from those from underrepresented groups in order to identify applicants who are eligible for the Widening Participation Scheme (WPS). The DTP aims to give up to 30% of interview places to those eligible for the WPS but who would not have been shortlisted initially by the host organisation.
4. Those shortlisted applicants will be contacted on **Friday 30th January 2026** and invited to put in a full application to the degree-awarding institution. Those not shortlisted will also be notified of this on the same date.
5. The PhD application must submit their application by **Monday 9th February 2026** at the latest for evaluation.
6. HO's nominate their highest ranked applicants to the lapetus final interviews. The full nomination includes:
 - a) lapetus project description
 - b) lapetus Studentship Application Form with completed supervisor nomination statement
 - c) 2-page current CV - candidates should not include a photograph and should write without using gender -specific pronouns.
 - d) Full transcripts of qualifications.
 - e) 2 references on the lapetus proforma
7. The highest ranked applicants will be interviewed using a set of common questions about their application and PhD. Applicants are requested to ensure that they will be available to interview via Teams on the advertised dates. These interviews are weighted 40 % in the overall evaluation of the studentships panel, with 60 % coming from the evaluation of the initial nomination.

Further Information

Professor Philip Stephens - DTP Director

Email: philip.stephens@durham.ac.uk

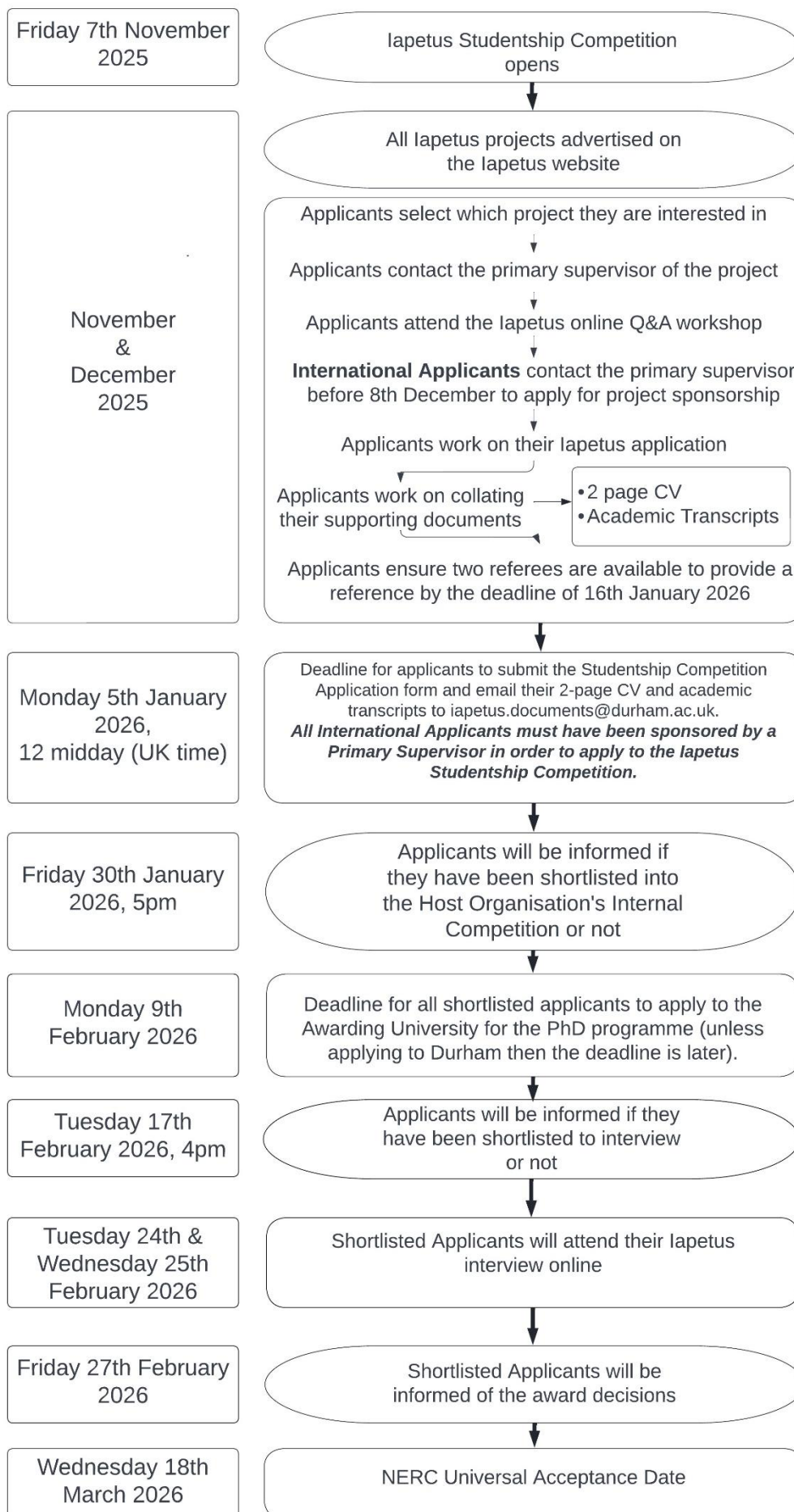
Jennifer Gadouleau - DTP Manager

Email: lapetus.applications@durham.ac.uk

Appendix 1 - Timeline

Dates	Activity / Milestone
Friday 7 th November 2025	Iapetus Studentship Competition Applications open
Monday 8 th December 2025	Deadline for international applicants to contact the primary supervisor to be considered for sponsorship
Monday 15 th December 2025, 5pm	International applicants will be informed of if they have been sponsored
Monday 5 th January 2026, 12pm	Deadline for all applicants to apply for a studentship
Friday 30 th January 2026	Applicants will be informed if they have been shortlisted into the Host Organisation's Internal Competition
Monday 9 th February 2026	Deadline for shortlisted applicants to apply to the Awarding University for the PhD
Tuesday 17 th February 2026 4pm	Applicants will be informed if they have been shortlisted for interview
Tuesday 17 th February 2026 4pm	Invitation to Interviews sent out to all nominated candidates
Tuesday 24 th February 2026 9am-5pm	Interviews of nominated candidates
Wednesday 25 th February 2026 9am-12pm	Interviews of nominated candidates
Wednesday 25 th February 2026 2pm-4pm	Iapetus Studentships & Scholarship panel convenes
Friday 27 th February 2026	All nominated candidates notified by Iapetus of award decisions
Wednesday 18 th March 2026 12 noon	Deadline for selected candidates to accept or decline their award offer. (NERC Universal Acceptance Date)
Thursday 19 th March 2026 onwards	Reserve offers made (where required)

Full details of the competition process are shown in the flowchart below.



Appendix 2 - Iapetus DTP Host Organizations

Partner Organization	Departments/Schools
British Antarctic Survey	All staff active within NERC's disciplinary remit.
British Geological Survey	All staff active within NERC's disciplinary remit.
UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology	All staff active within NERC's disciplinary remit.
Durham University	All staff active within NERC's disciplinary remit.
Glasgow University	Engineering Geography & Earth Sciences Mathematics & Statistics Scottish Universities Environmental Research Centre Institute of Biodiversity, Animal Health & Comparative Medicine
Heriot-Watt University	School of Energy, Geoscience, Infrastructure and Society
Newcastle University	All staff active within NERC's disciplinary remit
St Andrews University	Earth & Environmental Sciences Centre for Biological Diversity, and relevant parts of the Biomedical Sciences Research Complex Geography & Sustainable Development
Stirling University	Biological and Environmental Sciences

Appendix 3 - Student Assessment Criteria

Marking Scheme for selection of applicants for Iapetus interview based upon documents received including CV, nomination form and references.

Each criterion is marked out of 5 by Panel Reviewers and is then weighted to reflect their respective importance to the total score for each application.

Scoring Descriptors:

0	No Evidence
1	Limited Evidence
2	Good Evidence
3	Very Good Evidence
4	Excellent Evidence across multiple materials*
5	Outstanding Evidence across multiple materials*

* Multiple materials refers to evidence gleaned from the application, the CV and the references.

Criteria

All eligible nominations for studentships will be assessed by the Iapetus Studentships Panel against all of the following criteria. Sections indicated below refer to the nomination form filled in by the student and potential supervisors. Potential supervisors should be aware of issues of unconscious bias when filling out forms, and be appropriately considerate of a candidate's background and career trajectory.

Criterion	Weighting
I. Background This criterion focusses on the candidate's ability to conduct high-quality doctoral research in the environmental sciences. Reviewers should look for evidence of the candidate's interest in the research topic, and demonstration that the candidate has a clear interest in the project itself. Supporting information for example might come from section 3.2 of the nomination form, in relation to past research experience and from section 3.3, and in relation to evidence of research into the topic area beyond what is available in the advertised project description. Evidence of a demonstration of initiative in proactively seeking information about the project and research topic and the DTP (in section 3.3 of the nomination form) is also useful. Evidence from sections 3.2-3.4 of an ability to take on responsibilities (not necessarily directly relating to research) and meet deadlines is useful. Evidence of written communication skills from these sections should also be considered when evaluating this criterion. Although at least a 2:1 at undergraduate level is generally required by HOs, other contextual information should be considered in relation to academic qualifications to avoid the potential for unconscious bias. Other evidence of 'research experience' in section 3.2 should be used, for example, for candidates seeking to embark on a research project after graduating some time ago. Contextual information from section 5 of the nomination form can also be used for supporting evidence that the candidate has an appropriate background for carrying out the research project.	10

2. Project Fit Candidates need to demonstrate clearly how their skills, qualifications, experience and interests fit to, and support the project they intend to study. Section 4 provides a specific statement on this criterion. However, reviewers should be careful to assess contextual information (for example in section 3.4 of the form) and to balance past specific experience in relation to the project with more generic research skills. Demonstrations of a candidate's abilities to pick up new approaches and take initiatives in developing skills should also be considered, for example as illustrated in sections 3.2 and 3.3. A strong application will clearly articulate the candidate's interests and experience relevant to the project, whilst also outlining their anticipated training and development needs during their studies. Demonstration of a strong motivation to develop new skills may be used to support the assessment of a candidate's fit to the project. As the purpose of the DTP is to train students in appropriate skills, it should not be assumed that existing experience in a particular method or past activities should outweigh the demonstration of the motivation to find out about new topics, not least because applicants from different backgrounds may have had limited access to facilities or opportunities. Candidates may also be hoping to change career paths based upon new or recent interests and activities. Further information from sections 3.4 and 5 of the nomination form may be useful in evaluating these aspects.	8
3. Future Potential Reviewers should consider the profile of a candidate relative to their current career stage and access to past opportunities. Reviewers will also consider the candidate's future potential to deliver their specific research project, for example, based on statements in relation to personal skills such as self-discipline and time management. Statements in the nomination form demonstrating confidence in a candidate's abilities should be balanced in relation to how realistic these statements might be. A candidate's future career aspirations should be considered, but as the DTP contributes to training in relation to the broader environmental science sector, no preference is given to those wanting to develop an academic or a non- academic career pathway. The key element to consider is a demonstration of a keen interest in the topic and a wish to pursue activities related to this research topic in the future. A strong candidate will demonstrate that they are well equipped to deliver their proposed research project and also able to engage in other related activities and initiatives that will not only support their individual research, but the wider lapetus and/or disciplinary community. Contextual information arising from interviews and other forms of interaction/assessment (section 5 of the form) may provide Reviewers with further useful evidence as to the future trajectory of the candidate.	2