

How to obtain funding to attend an academic conference

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Attending a conference (meeting, workshop, seminar, etc) is one of the great learning and development opportunities available to a DPhil student. A carefully chosen event can provide access to the latest research in your field, often before it is published, and the chance to meet influential people who might become a future supervisor, collaborator or reviewer of your job or grant applications, or even be your external examiner. If you are able to present your work (by displaying a poster or giving a talk) you can raise your profile and talk to interested parties in person.

To do this, someone must provide financial support. Even if you are lucky enough to have a well-funded and supportive supervisor, or money within your specific funding that is earmarked for this purpose, raising your own funds shows initiative and could enable you to attend more conferences than you might otherwise have done. This article contains some practical suggestions and examples.

Broadly, you can look for sources related to who you are, what research you are doing, and/or which conference you want to attend. A key point to bear in mind when applying is that your chances will be highest when you best meet the funder's objectives, so it is worth spending time considering that and presenting your case in a way that clearly shows how it fits the purpose of the scheme. You should also check your eligibility. Do not make any assumptions; for example, some schemes forbid another application within a set period, while others do not restrict this and might even look more favourably on an application if your visit report from a previous occasion showed that you made the most of the opportunity and so you would be likely to get a significant benefit again. Preference is often given to students who are presenting their work and not simply attending.

As a St Anne's student, you can apply to the College's graduate student conference and travel funding scheme; details are on the [College website](#). A panel, including the Senior Tutor, meets twice a term to review applications and award funds. There is a standard form to complete and your supervisor must send a reference supporting your application. Although you should try to find matching funds where you can (e.g. from your or your supervisor's grant, your Department or your Research Council), it is acceptable to show that you made some effort. You might indicate that you have a concurrent application in, show you have tried for competitive funds but not obtained them, or explain that you have investigated but are not eligible for other relevant sources. The aim of this fund is to support the development of St Anne's graduate students, so it is a good idea to stress the networking and personal development opportunities as well as the academic content of the event. After the event you should submit a brief report to your Graduate Adviser and the Senior Tutor.

Other sources could include funds that support students of particular nationalities, or from minority groups. For example, the UK Resource Centre for Women in Science, Engineering and Technology (UKRC for Women in SET) operates a [travel bursary scheme](#). At the time of writing, the scheme is closed; the previous round's deadline was 15 May 2009. You can check the timing on their website, and download the application form and guidance notes. For convenience, you could extract the guidance about letters of support to send to your supervisor. You might also approach your College Graduate Adviser if appropriate. Awards are conditional on adding yourself to the UKRC database and submitting a short report afterwards with your receipts.

If you belong to a professional society or organisation, you should check whether it has a small grants scheme that members can apply for. These schemes sometimes fund visits to other conferences, to present research work related to the society's remit, as well as attendance at meetings organised by the society itself.

It can be useful to gather funding from several sources and to look for ways to reduce the cost or to get some elements waived. Even a small amount can help you meet your costs overall. The website for the conference that you wish to attend can be a good source of information. For example, registration is usually cheaper for students (with some verification or support from the supervisor and/or Head of Department). Members of the organising society will often get reduced registration rates, so it is worth looking into the costs and benefits of membership and weighing those against the saving in fees (but note that some conference funding schemes will not cover personal membership subscriptions, or only if you explicitly make the case that the subscription plus reduced attendance fee is lower than non-member registration).

The conference organisers might have a limited number of student scholarships or awards for participants from developing countries available on application. Some societies want student volunteers to help operate registration desks, the presentation upload desk, the careers centre, etc at the annual meeting; some will offer to waive or refund registration fees in return for a doing a shift as helper. One society runs a small participation award scheme to encourage students and junior postdocs to participate actively in its annual meeting, paying a modest amount that increased with the level of participation. Some conferences run student web pages where you can get in touch with others attending and organise room sharing. Try to plan ahead; book early to get 'early bird' rates and have more chance of finding a cheap flight. Officers or members of committees might have some of their costs waived or refunded, so consider volunteering or getting elected (also good for the CV if you can afford the time). These are just some examples – there are many more possibilities.

For other sources, look at [ResearchResearch](#), a general source of information about grants for various research purposes. While you are on the University of Oxford network you can use the 'campus login' button on the right-hand side, you do not need to register (although you can, for example, to save searches or register for alerts). You can search for particular types of grant – use key words like 'travel' or 'conference' - and follow links to the relevant websites.

Some kind of letter of support is typically required for student applicants. You could offer to draft something for your supervisor to save them time. In any case, your supervisor will be a good source of advice about which conferences are relevant and help you prepare your poster or oral presentation. They may also recommend sources of funding.

Below is an example, concocted from several real-life successful applications. It is intended as an illustration to show example wording for several of the aspects discussed above. It would be unusual to be able to mention all of these points in one application, so do not be put off by the content! Good luck with your hunt for funding.



Links:

<http://www.st-annes.ox.ac.uk/study/graduate/financial-matters/help00.html>

<http://www.ukrc4setwomen.org/html/women-and-girls/bursaries/ukrc-travel-bursaries/>

<http://new.researchresearch.com/>

Example: extracts from application form

Details of the research trip or conference including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • where you expect to travel/name of conference • exact dates for which the funding is requested • reason for attending/relevance to your work 	Annual meeting of the Entomological Society of America 16-19 November 2008 in Reno, Nevada, USA (plus 2 travel days). Objectives: 1. Present recent research work in a short talk (abstract in preparation). Enter student presentation competition. 2. Update on key developments and discuss my work. 3. Professional networking. Please see justification below.
Application for research council funding enclosed	YES /NO (ineligible)
Result of application enclosed	YES /NO Other funding obtained, see attached
Reasons for attending and relevance to my work My research is on novel genetics-based methods of controlling pest insects. These methods are applicable to agricultural pest insects and to insects, such as mosquitoes, that transmit human or animal diseases. Scientists and others working in both these broad fields will be present at this meeting. Last year I presented a short talk on my research on managing insect resistance to Bt crops, obtained important and up-to-date information directly relevant to my work and discussed it with some high-profile research scientists from academia and researchers and regulators from the US Department of Agriculture and Environmental Protection Agency. I have extended that work and have a complete story to tell at this year's meeting, which has not yet been presented at any national or international conference (a manuscript is in preparation). I will have similar opportunities to gather information and discuss the medically important insects, which will assist with the remaining chapters of my DPhil thesis and raise my profile to help me towards my goal of doing postdoctoral work in that field. I was co-opted onto the ESA's Student Affairs Committee following a Student Network session last year. My suggestions and contacts have since contributed to some sessions planned for students and I would like to be present to benefit from them. I have been asked to judge one session of the Student Debate competition.	
Other funding or reduced/waived costs Registration is at a reduced rate because I am already a student member of the ESA (subscription paid). I have been awarded a travel bursary of £750 from the UK Resource Centre for Women in Science, Engineering and Technology. See award letter attached.	

Example support reference from supervisor

Nina wishes to attend the 2009 annual meeting of the Entomological Society of America which will be held in Reno, Nevada, USA from the 16th to the 19th of November 2008. This conference brings together people working on various aspects of entomology, including insect biotechnology and resistance management, from theoretical, lab-based, applied, field and regulatory perspectives. Very few conferences have this scope and focus, so this represents a rare opportunity to discuss her work with lab-based scientists working on resistance management, with those with more of a field focus, and the government regulators who need and wish to understand the type of approach that Nina is developing. Nina has submitted an abstract and will present her work as a talk. The conference will be valuable for her, providing exposure to international scientists in and around her field, the opportunity to understand better the real-world context of her theoretical work and to present her work to a high-level audience. I am happy to support her application. ★