

Title: Doctoral Studentship (PhD)

Application Closing Date: 6 July 2026

Location: Hartpury University, Gloucestershire.

Funding: Fees paid only (max. 5 years)

Contract Type: Part-time over a minimum of 4 years

Area of Research: Agriculture, Environmental and Animal Sciences

Title: Exploring the Relationship Between Gastrointestinal Microbiome and Behaviour in dogs and horses: Implications for Evidence-Based Health, Wellbeing, and Care

The overall aim of this project is to investigate relationships among gastrointestinal microbiome composition, behavioural phenotypes, and factors associated with health and wellbeing in dogs and horses. The gut microbiome is increasingly recognised as an important contributor to animal health, influencing immune function, metabolism, and neurological processes. Growing evidence also suggests that variation in microbiome composition may be associated with behavioural challenges in animals; however, the interplay among health and management factors, the microbiome, and behavioural phenotypes remains poorly understood, especially in horses. This project will utilise large-scale canine and equine microbiome datasets generated through an established collaboration to investigate these relationships. The objectives of the research are:

- To investigate how gastrointestinal microbiome composition varies across dogs and horses in relation to host characteristics, including diet, breed, age, sex, and health status.
- To examine associations between gastrointestinal microbiome composition and owner-reported behavioural phenotypes in dogs and horses.
- To identify shared and species-specific patterns in microbiome–behaviour relationships across dogs and horses using large-scale real-world datasets.

This is a unique and exciting opportunity to become part of a vibrant postgraduate community in an idyllic rural setting, with world-leading facilities and the opportunity to undertake impactful, cutting-edge research. The University of the West of England is the awarding body for this degree. Studentships comprise tuition fees and a research project allocation.

For more information and for an initial discussion please contact Dr Ivana Schork – ivana.schork@hartpury.ac.uk

PhD Studentship Selection Criteria:

Please demonstrate the following criteria in your CV and/or covering letter:

- Essential: Undergraduate and/or Master's degree in Animal Behaviour, Animal Welfare, Zoology or an Animal Sciences related degree
- Essential: Experience of quantitative research methods, statistical analysis, or data management with an interest in animal behaviour, welfare, microbiology, and/or companion animal research.

- Essential: Ability to work independently and manage large data sets.
- Desirable: Practical knowledge and experience of animal management, husbandry, or care, particularly within canine and/or equine settings.
- Desirable: Knowledge of animal behaviour and welfare assessment, including behavioural observations, welfare monitoring, or related research methodologies.

Candidates should also be aware of the following:

The normal expectation is that applicants will hold a First-Class Honours degree or a Master's qualification from a UK university, or a qualification of comparable standing from a university outside the UK. Applicants should be able to demonstrate research aptitude and a strong interest in companion animal health, welfare, behaviour, and evidence-based animal care.

Applicants whose first language is not English require a recognised English language qualification. The minimum entry requirement is GCSE English at grade C or above or IELTS score 7.0 or TOEFL score 600 (or demonstrable equivalent).

Applying for a PhD studentship

To apply for a PhD studentship, you must send the following documents
RKE.Administrator@hartpury.ac.uk:

- A curriculum vitae (maximum 3 pages)
- Copies of academic transcripts
- A covering letter outlining your suitability for the studentship
- Your undergraduate or postgraduate dissertation or another relevant piece of research you have completed or contributed to.
- If English is not your first language, certification of English language qualification

Applications that do not arrive by Midnight (UK time) on **6 July 2026** will not be considered.

If your application is selected, you will be invited for interview on **Thursday 23 July 2026**. All applicants must ensure their availability on this date.

Key Dates:

6 July 2026: Deadline for submission of applications
w/c 13 July 2026: Interview invitations sent to shortlisted candidates*
23 July 2026: Interviews at Hartpury*
24 August 2026: Deadline for accepting studentship
September 2026: Studentship begins

*Please note that by submitting an application you are confirming your availability to attend an interview on **Thursday 23 July 2026**.

We are committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people and expect all staff and volunteers to share this commitment. We will ensure that all our recruitment and selection practices reflect this commitment. All successful candidates will

be subject to Disclosure and Barring Service checks along with other relevant employment checks.

Hartpury values a diverse workforce and welcomes applications from all sections of the community.

