

Ocean Stewardship Fund 2026-27

Student Research Grants: Request For Proposals

A grant funding opportunity for postgraduate research linked to fisheries improving toward, or maintaining, MSC certification

Fund	Student Research Grants
Maximum grant	GBP 10,000
Project duration	Up to 12 months, or 18 months in exceptional circumstances, starting between July and September 2027
Eligible applicants	Current Master's students or PhD candidates in fisheries science Undergraduates with a secured postgraduate position by the start of the project
Deadline	23:59 UTC, 28 February 2027
Queries	Potential applicants are advised to contact their local MSC representative for guidance Further questions are welcome at OSF@msc.org

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1. Purpose of the Student Research Grants

The Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) has a vision of the world's oceans teeming with life and of seafood supplies safeguarded for this and future generations.

The MSC works with partners to transform seafood markets and promote sustainable fishing practices through the [MSC Fisheries Standard](#) and its ecolabel.

The Student Research Grants (SRG) are part of the MSC's Ocean Stewardship Fund. The SRG is intended to support postgraduate research that helps a fishery or fisheries improve their environmental performance with the MSC Fisheries Standard as a benchmark.

Fisheries may need targeted scientific research to address gaps in information, document progress, understand ecosystem interactions, or improve the information available on target species. Student research can provide the practical evidence and analysis required to achieve these objectives and help fisheries improve their performance against the Standard.

2. How to apply

2.1 Deadline

The deadline for SRG applications is **23:59 UTC on 28 February 2027**.

2.2 Process for applying

Applicants must submit their application on the Ocean Stewardship Fund Grants Portal at:

<https://msc.smartsimpleuk.com/>

Applicants must register an account on the Grants Portal to access and submit the application form. To create an account, applicants must click on the "Register Here" button and follow the onscreen instructions. After registering their account, an email will be sent with a URL to set a password.

When applicants subsequently log into the Portal, they will receive a one-time verification code via email or phone number. This verification code will expire **3 minutes** after sending. When they enter the verification code, applicants are advised to tick the "Remember this device" box, to avoid having to authenticate their account every time they log in. The Grants Portal will remember the device for a period of 14 days.

2.3 Questions

Interested applicants are encouraged to contact their local MSC representative for guidance and are advised to reach out at the earliest opportunity to ensure that all requirements are met before the application deadline.

Further questions should be sent to OSF@msc.org.

3. Eligibility

3.1 Who can apply

- Current Master's students or PhD candidates of fisheries science.
- Undergraduates who have secured a postgraduate position and will be in post by the proposed Start Date of the project.
- Integrated Master's students during their final year only.
- Applicants must have a supervisor to oversee their project.
- Applicants must also be able to demonstrate that they have the support of an eligible fishery partner for their project.

3.2 Eligible fisheries

Projects must be focused on supporting a fishery or fisheries to improve their environmental performance using the MSC Fisheries Standard as a benchmark.

The fishery or fisheries must be one of the following:

- MSC certified
- in the MSC Improvement Program
- a Stage 4 Pathway Project fishery
- in a Comprehensive Fishery Improvement Project (FIP)

MSC certified fisheries

Fisheries must be performing at a high level to become [MSC certified](#) but there may be room for improvement in specific areas. These are referred to as “conditions” that the fishery must resolve within a specified timeframe to maintain their MSC certification.

To find a certified fishery, visit MSC's [Track a Fishery](#) database and filter by status “Certified”.

MSC Improvement Program fisheries

Fisheries in the [MSC Improvement Program](#) are committed to achieving MSC certification within a defined period, usually 5 years, and are making improvements to their environmental sustainability. These fisheries will have an agreed Improvement Action Plan that they must fulfil to meet the Fisheries Standard and achieve MSC certification.

To find a fishery in the MSC Improvement Program, visit MSC's [Track a Fishery](#) database and filter by status “Improvement Program”.

Stage 4 Pathway Project fisheries

These are non-certified fisheries on the pathway to sustainability but they need more holistic support to improve their practices. These fisheries are part of an [MSC Pathway Project](#). To be eligible for an SRG project, a fishery must have reached Stage 4 of the Pathway (Implementation of actions).

To find a Stage 4 Pathway Project fishery, contact OSF@msc.org

Fisheries in Comprehensive FIPs

These are non-certified fisheries that are using the MSC Fisheries Standard as a benchmark to make improvements to their practice but are not necessarily engaged directly with the MSC, unlike the other fisheries on this list.

To be eligible for an SRG project, a fishery in a Comprehensive FIP must demonstrate a commitment towards achieving an MSC-level of sustainability, conduct a pre-assessment against the MSC Fisheries Standard, and develop an action plan to implement improvements.

To find a fishery in a Comprehensive FIP, visit [Fishery Progress](#).

3.3 Restrictions

- Projects linked to fisheries that are not MSC certified, in the MSC Improvement Program, part of a Stage 4 Pathway Project, or in a Comprehensive FIP are not eligible.
- Projects that are not linked to environmental improvements as set out in the MSC Fisheries Standard are not eligible.
- Applications must be focused on the work that the postgraduate student would be carrying out with the SRG funds; details of any broader projects they are part of may be provided as introductory context only.
- Salary costs are not eligible for SRG funding.

4. Funding available

4.1 Grant size

The maximum funding available is £10,000 per SRG application.

4.2 Duration

Projects must start between July and September 2027, and be no longer than 12 months, or 18 months in exceptional circumstances.

4.3 Number of expected awards

The SRG has limited funds available and the number of awards will depend on the quality and relevance of applications.

4.4 Eligible costs

- Travel
- Accommodation
- Hire or purchase of essential equipment, including fixed assets where essential to the project
- Project costs that support delivery of the proposed research (see 4.5 for details of eligible activities)

SRG funds cannot be used to cover salary costs.

4.5 Eligible activities

Activities within scope of SRG include:

- data or information collection needed in the fishery partner to address gaps raised in an improvement or client action plan
- research to improve understanding of an ecosystem component interacting with the fishery partner
- research to improve information available on the target species in the fishery partner
- research and analysis to support documentation that might be required by the fishery partner to demonstrate its performance against the MSC Fisheries Standard

5. Application requirements

5.1 What should the project description include?

Applicants must provide a full description of the project. The proposal must describe only what the student will be doing and only provide details of wider projects linked to the work as introductory context.

Requirement	What to include
Project title	A clear and succinct title that conveys the main aims and focus of the project and includes the name of the fishery or fisheries involved.
Project summary	A brief overview summarizing the background, aims, outputs, expected outcomes, and timeline of the project.
Introduction	Brief background and context of the project, the fishery or fisheries involved, and the issues they face in relation to the MSC Fisheries Standard.
Aim of the project	How the project connects with improved sustainability and performance against the MSC Fisheries Standard.
Method	Details of the activities, processes and methods proposed (including materials, equipment, and statistical tools that would be used), and a rationale for the selected approach, which should explain how the method is appropriate for the fishery or fisheries involved.
Expected results	The expected results or outcomes of the project and how they link to the project aim, including any anticipated impact on the fishery's performance against the MSC Fisheries Standard.
Timeline	This should include all significant milestones of the project from planning through to completion. The project duration must be no more than 12 months, or 18 in exceptional circumstances.

Project management	How the project will be organised and managed, including roles and responsibilities and how findings will be conveyed to the linked fishery or fisheries.
Risk assessment	A brief summary of the applicant's risk assessment for the project, including any high-risk actions, mitigation measures, and how these risks will be monitored during the project.
Benefits to the linked fishery or fisheries	How the research will benefit the fishery or fisheries associated with the project, such as improvements in performance against specific PIs in the Fisheries Standard.

5.2 How should the “Project Outputs and Outcomes” table be completed?

Applicants are required to provide details of all the project outputs and outcomes that would be funded by the grant.

- **Action Number:** assign a unique number to each area of work, for example 1, 2, 3 or 1.1, 1.2.
- **Action Name:** provide a brief descriptor of each Action for reference in the rest of the proposal.
- **MSC PI(s):** state the Performance Indicator or Indicators of the MSC Fisheries Standard that the Action is linked to.
- **Output(s) of this Action:** describe the product or the service that would be delivered by the Action such as a meeting, workshop, new tool, information manual, or data analysis. If a particular Action will deliver more than one Output, applicants should enter each Output on a separate row in the table.
- **Outcome(s):** define the short- or medium-term changes that will result from delivery of the outputs. An Outcome should be written as a clear single change, such as improved performance against a Performance Indicator or reduced bycatch. If an Action will achieve more than one Outcome, applications should enter each Outcome on a separate row in the table.
- **Date of Completion:** specify a completion date for each Action, which should take place after the proposed Start Date of the SRG grant and before the proposed End Date.

5.3 Grant Budget

Applicants must provide a total amount under each of the following cost categories along with a total requested amount:

- Travel
- Accommodation
- Equipment
- Other (specifying the nature of the costs included)

Applicants must also provide an explanation for how each budget item will enable delivery of the project actions listed in the proposal.

5.4 Institutional support for the project

Applicants must demonstrate that they have appropriate institutional support to deliver the proposed research (see below for details).

5.5 What supporting documents are required?

The following documents must be submitted in English:

- Student's CV, outlining educational achievements and professional experience to date.
- Signed and headed letter of support from the supervisor, covering the student's academic knowledge and their ability to deliver academic work and meet deadlines. This letter should also provide details of the facilities, equipment, training, and support that will be provided.
- Signed and headed letter of support from the fishery or fisheries linked to the project, explaining how they will benefit from the proposed research in terms of their performance against the MSC Fisheries Standard and other impacts. This letter can be written by any individual who works on behalf of the fishery(ies) to support their sustainability improvement such as a government agency, fishing industry association, fishery cooperative, local management authority, or the fishing company itself.

6. Selection criteria

6.1 How are applications assessed?

SRG applications undergo a competitive review process. The SRG has limited funds available and can only fund the strongest applications that meet the SRG criteria most closely.

Criterion	What reviewers will consider
Clarity of research objectives	Whether the research question, aims and objectives are clear and focused.
Relevance to the MSC Standard	Whether research outcomes are linked and relevant to the MSC Fisheries Standard.
Contribution to the linked fishery or fisheries	Whether the research will contribute towards the progress of the linked fishery or fisheries in achieving or maintaining MSC certification.
Research feasibility	Whether the project is realistic within the grant period, including dependencies and resources.
Institutional and supervisory support	Whether the applicant has appropriate academic, supervisory and practical support.
Risk of non-delivery	Whether key risks have been identified and mitigation measures are credible.

Budget	Whether the budget is eligible, justified and proportionate to the proposed research.
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The decision of MSC in respect of making SRG awards is final. MSC reserves the right to request modifications to applications, in consultation with applicants, before reaching a decision on whether to fund an application. The details of application assessments remain confidential.

7. Timeline

Stage	Date / details
Applications open	00:00 UTC, 4 September 2026
Submission deadline	23:59 UTC, 28 February 2027
Award decisions	June 2027
Project start	Projects must start between July and September 2027

8. What happens if an application is successful?

Successful SRG applicants will be notified by email before the end of June 2027. A draft Grant Agreement will be shared. The Grant Agreement will set out the terms and conditions of the grant awarded, the grant disbursement schedule, and conditions required to release stage payments.

Awardees are required to provide at least one narrative and financial interim report approximately midway through the project, including performance against the Outputs and Outcomes outlined in the application form. Awardees must also provide a final narrative and financial report at the end of the project, including performance against the Outputs and Outcomes, a summary of expenditure and any supporting communications assets such as images or videos.

Awardees will be expected to share all project data, research and knowledge produced as a result of the project with local researchers, fishers, policymakers and other relevant stakeholders. This includes providing open access to any published research articles resulting from the project.

Awardees will also be expected to keep MSC informed of their communication plans and provide MSC with timely contributions towards any published content relating to their project or the SRG as a whole.

9. How would the funding be disbursed?

- Payment would be made to the student.
- MSC would make an initial payment of 75 percent of the total SRG Award in the month preceding the given Start Date of the project.

- The remaining 25 percent of the SRG Award would be made on receipt of a satisfactory final report and interim report.
- Payments would not be made for retrospective spending made prior to the formal offer of the SRG Award.

10. Further questions

Please email any further questions to OSF@msc.org.

11. Applicant checklist

- The student is eligible and has a supervisor to oversee this project.
- The project is linked to an eligible fishery and has the support of this fishery.
- The project is linked to the MSC Fisheries Standard.
- The project duration is no more than 12 months, or 18 in exceptional circumstances.
- The total funding request is between £5,000 and £10,000.
- The budget includes only defined eligible costs incurred within the grant period.
- All required supporting documents have been attached.