



The Darwin Scholarship Programme

The Darwin Scholarship is an award programme to support postgraduate study at a selection of international universities affiliated with the Darwin International Institute for the Study of Compassion (DIISC).

The programme will initially focus on supporting Masters and PhD students. Citizens of any country may apply for what is likely to become a highly competitive merit-based grant. The trustees of the Darwin Centre Trust (DCT) have taken note of similar prestigious programmes (Fulbright, Rhodes, Harkness, Kennedy) and have devolved the management and administration of the Darwin Scholarship to an international academic board, whose membership includes representatives from DIISC and affiliated universities.

DIISC was established in September 2015 to act as the operational wing of the newly formed DCT. Spearheaded by Professor Patrick Pietroni, a leader in psychological therapies, mental health and wellbeing, the DCT and DIISC are supported and guided by an international group of eminent academics, writers and thinkers. Professor Ruth Padel (poet, author and great-great-granddaughter of Charles Darwin) is patron of the DCT. The DCT also benefits from the commitment and experience of Professor Charles Easmon (Chair), Lord Stone of Blackheath (former MD of Marks & Spencer), Councillor Karen Calder (Chair of Health & Wellbeing, Shropshire Council), Mrs Darshita Gillies (training consultant, entrepreneur) and Professor Rod Thomson (Director of Public Health, Shropshire Council).

The Working Conference on Compassion, where DIISC was launched in 2015, demonstrated that there is a renewed urgency for developing more compassionate ways of relating and acting in the world. In response to this need, DIISC has established the Darwin Scholarship Programme, which will initially provide funding for postgraduate students to study the role and relevance of compassion, cooperation and altruism in the context of their particular disciplines and indeed across disciplines. So far, eleven international universities have expressed interest in hosting a Darwin scholar and working collaboratively with DIISC. In addition to their own studies, the scholars will gather at an annual summer school hosted in Shrewsbury to discuss their research and develop strategies for disseminating their findings. The core aim of DIISC is to foster the development of these future leaders, as intelligent and skilled practitioners and promoters of compassion.

Aims and objectives of the Darwin Scholarship Programme

*The overall aim of the programme is to
foster and inspire future leaders for our societies*

Why compassion?

Easily championed, but everywhere alarmingly challenged, compassion can too readily be relegated as a “soft” or “pious” quality, side-lined by more instrumental, technical, pragmatic or ideological concerns. Compassion needs to be re-considered, re-evaluated and consciously integrated into the understanding and practices of society as:

- a primary value and requirement in a modern world that, at individual, social, institutional and political levels, frequently fosters its opposite – a fear of annihilation of valued social institutions, of groups, and of the self – is widespread;
- a means of treating others with the same concern, attention and generosity that one would wish for oneself; refraining from treating them as one would not wish to be treated oneself; being open to, disturbed by, empathetic to, and moved to respond to the experience and pain of others;
- a difficult and challenging quality that itself requires better understanding; which also requires the recognition of, and engagement with, pain, damage, anxiety, anger and difference, and the exploitative, competitive, violent or simply self-centred feelings and motives by which human beings, individually and collectively, are also driven;
- something that has been split off from and relegated to a subsidiary place in technical or professional skills, and collective enterprises, and that needs to be reintegrated as a core and primary component of all such practices and wider social relations;
- an evolutionary phenomenon emerging as a positive and dynamic aspect in social relations as human beings have learned to cooperate and preserve themselves and their communities;
- an attitude and a practice that, in turn, depends on social relations for its cultivation and sustenance – relations that can be thought about, constructed and nourished to do that, or which can work directly against compassionate mindedness and behaviour;
- a quality that depends on the individual, the group, the organisation and society developing the skills and the habit of self-awareness and reflection;
- a quality that requires, for its exploration and understanding, a dialogue between and synthesis of many traditions and discourses, including scientific, psychological, philosophical, historical, cultural, religious, sociological and political perspectives.

Why Darwin?

Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection is the major cornerstone of our modern understanding of both human and non-human origins and development. In his three major works: *On the Origin of Species*, *The expression of the emotions in man and animals*, and the *Descent of Man*, it is possible to trace his own understanding of the evolutionary nature of compassion and empathy, although he refers to these qualities in terms of "sympathy", "moral actions" and "social instinct", in keeping with contemporary parlance. His treatises, while complex and exploratory, do not reflect the glib shorthand of "survival of the fittest".

As Dacher Keltner, a leading scholar of psychology at UC Berkeley, points out:

Recent studies of compassion argue persuasively for a different take on human nature, one that rejects the pre-eminence of self-interest. These studies support a view of the emotions as rational, functional, and adaptive – a view which has its origins in Darwin's *Expression of Emotion in Man and Animals*. Compassion and benevolence, this research suggests, are an evolved part of human nature, rooted in our brain and biology, and ready to be cultivated for their greater good.

More recent discoveries in neuroscience and neural-imaging support this biological basis for compassion, but it was Darwin who originally argued that "[T]hose communities which

contained the greatest number of the most sympathetic members would flourish best, and rear the greatest number of offspring”.

Charles Darwin was born in Shrewsbury and DIISC will eventually be located in his old school building, which currently functions as the town library. Ruth Padel, the eminent poet and Darwin’s great-great-granddaughter, was a founding trustee of the Darwin Centre Trust and is now its patron.

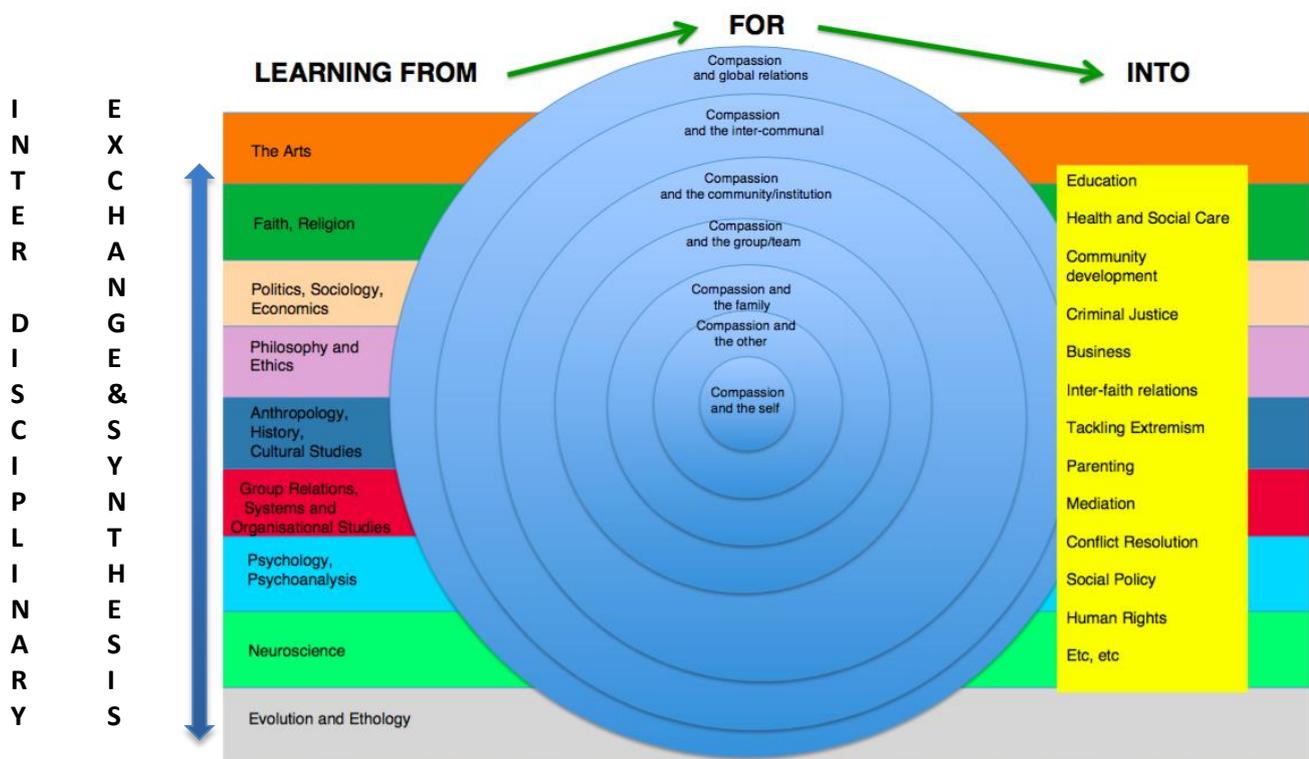
The work of DIISC

The institute’s core mission is to support the development of emerging scholars, especially future leaders, as intelligent and skilled promoters and sustainers of compassion.

DIISC has four primary aims and functions:

1. to stimulate and organise exploration, research and education in and between a wide range of discourses and practices, as they help us understand compassion at individual, family, social, organisational, communal, intercultural and international levels;
2. to bring together these perspectives into dialogue, and mutual learning – promoting interdisciplinary collaboration and common purpose;
3. to understand the implications for all aspects of community life, such as education, health care, business, social policy, intercultural relations, and so on;
4. to explore, develop and evaluate practices at any or all these levels and domains of life that promote and sustain compassion.

This is an illustration of how these aims will eventually flow together at DIISC.



That perspectives and concerns from different fields and disciplines will conflict or challenge each other is inevitable, but their exponents must agree to coexistence and dialogue. The institute will model and promote Socratic dialogue, conversation and reflection – with a firm

acceptance of the inevitability of doubt and of the dark forces that can emerge within even the most benign of traditions and individuals.

Academic and exploratory consideration of compassion will together be part of “changing the conversation”, for individuals, and for the world of interaction, cooperation, organisation and society. DIISC will aim to develop fluency in interdisciplinary working to encourage and develop an inclusive, academically credible and influential narrative about compassion.

The institute will support applications from students all over the world to apply for grants and bursaries to study/research and complete a dissertation/thesis selected from the following disciplines and sectors:

- health and social care
- psychology and psychotherapy
- education and teaching
- environmental and global issues
- business and economy
- interfaith dialogue, mediation and dispute resolution
- communities and leadership
- culture and arts
- neuroscience and evolution

Darwin Scholars may study any full-time postgraduate course that is offered by an affiliated university and approved by the DIISC academic board. The award at Masters level covers one year in the first instance, or for two years if required. The Darwin Scholarship PhD award provides funding for three years and will require approval from both DIISC’s Academic Board and the affiliated university.

University and college fees are paid by the DCT. In addition, Darwin Scholars will receive a bursary to cover accommodation and living expenses.

It is expected that the award will also cover the expense of attending the summer school (two weeks) to be held annually in Shrewsbury.

The trustees have specified the following criteria for the selection of Darwin Scholar candidates:

- academic achievement
- English language fluency
- strong moral character and instinct to lead
- proven interest in compassion and demonstration of intelligent kindness towards ones fellow beings
- recognition of Darwin’s contribution to the understanding of evolutionary theory

Candidates will be assessed on their research proposal, application form, personal statement and interview.