

SCHOOL OF PSYCHOLOGY
Research Expenses for Postgraduate Research Students

The University, and indirectly the School, receives income from Tuition Fees and Funding Council Block Grants to finance the general training of postgraduate research students and to create the research infrastructure in which they can carry out their research.

In addition, Research Councils provide, for Research Council funded students, a sum of money to cover certain costs that are directly identifiable with a particular student's research project (sometimes referred to as the "bench fee" or RTSG – research training support grant). The amount varies from Research Council to Research Council, but does not in general depend on the particular project that the student is undertaking.

The School of Psychology has agreed that the research of other postgraduate research students should be supported in a similar way. Thus all postgraduate research students can draw on funds to cover their research expenses. For Research Council funded students this allocation passes on the money allocated by the Research Council. For other students the allocation comes from School funds.

Three major issues, raised by both faculty and students, are (i) how the scheme should be run, (ii) what counts as legitimate expenditure under the scheme, and (iii) whether the allocations are an entitlement or a maximum permitted expenditure.

Research Council documentation makes it clear that they intend that the School should formulate general policies about the use of funds, even though the supervisor and student will need to determine what is necessary for a particular doctoral project.

The attached policy document is intended to clarify the operation of the scheme.

Alan Garnham
July 2009

UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX SCHOOL OF PSYCHOLOGY

Research Expenses for Postgraduate Research Students (July 2009)

Background

Research and Research Training are expensive to carry out. Research infrastructure and the provision of research training are mainly both through tuition fees and funding council block grants and through Research Grants. The Research Councils, who fund some studentships, allocate a small amount of money for certain costs "which the student/supervisor/department deem to be in direct support of the student's research" (ESRC student handbook). The amount vary from Research Council to Research Council and, in some cases, the School has discretion over how to use money allocated to us. The notional amount allocated to each project (and in the case of ESRC still the actual amount) is:

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| BBSRC | £1000 + £190 conference and course expenses |
| ESRC | £750 (including conference and course expenses) |
| MRC | £1000 + £300 conference and course expenses |

In some cases additional funding is available, particularly for overseas fieldwork (though ESRC specifies that any associated language training should be paid for from the RTSG). For more detailed information about the allocations and their intended use, and about funding more generally, see the Research Council websites.

For BBSRC download the booklet from

<http://www.bbsrc.ac.uk/funding/training/Welcome.html#doctoral>

For ESRC download the studentship handbook from

http://www.esrc.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/Support/postgraduate_students/Studentship_Handbook/index.aspx

(or you can read it in html form on the ESRC site)

For MRC download the student handbook from

<http://www.mrc.ac.uk/Utilities/Documentrecord/index.htm?d=MRC002630>

These allocations are made in each of the years in which the Research Council supports the student but not beyond that time. ESRC students do NOT receive these allocations in year 1 of the 1+3 scheme.

The School of Psychology supports the research of postgraduate research students not funded by a Research Council grant (including GTAs) in a similar (though not identical) way. Most projects in the School attract a research expenses allowance of up to £750 a year for three years. Some, in areas where research is known to be more expensive, attract the BBSRC/MRC "bench fee" rate of £1000, but not the additional conference/course allowance.

As can be seen from the figures, even for Research Council funded students there is not an even playing field. When CASE studentships are taken into account, things are less even still, as CASE projects attract additional funds both to the stipend and to the research expenses. However, they are generally associated with projects that are expensive to run and that involve the student living away from Brighton for some period or periods during their funded years. CASE award usually involve additional effort on the supervisor's part to secure them.

The Research Councils intend their allocation to go to the individual students' projects. There are rules about legitimate expenditure, but we are obliged to make the monies received available for use on those projects, if and when they are required.

Support for other students' research comes from general school funds. Students may draw on UP TO £750 a year for three years (or £1000 in some designated cases). However, the money is to be

spent WHERE NEEDED. There is no intention that students should spend the full amount simply to “use up what is left”.

The School is fully committed to supporting the work of its research students. When a student is accepted to work on a project that is not funded by the Research Councils there is effectively a three-way agreement among the student, the supervisor, and the School that, except in very unusual circumstances, the student will have the resources to carry the agreed project to completion. However, this agreement is made on the assumption that the supervisor has taken into account the School allocation for research expenses and, if he or she projects greater expenses, then he or she will take the appropriate steps to make sure they are available. As part of the student's research training, the student will be made aware of the general issues about research funding, and the specific issues about the research expenses allocations, as soon as their project begins. They will have joint responsibility for planning a programme of research that falls within the available budget.

Use of Funds

As stated above, our obligations to the Research Councils force us to treat the funds that they provide in a way that does not necessarily apply to School funds. Nevertheless, the following guidelines are intended to apply to all postgraduate research students, except where explicit caveats are given.

It is not our intention to provide a rigid list of “cans” and “can’ts” governing the use of research expenses. However, we are asked for guidance on what is and is not a legitimate use of research expenses, and we can give some indication of types of expenditure that almost always will or almost always will not be regarded as legitimate.

One general principle is that research funds are not intended to provide personal possessions for postgraduates, or items that will become personal possessions at the end of the period of research training. This principle explains, among other things, the general exclusion of books as an allowable expense.

- (a) Computers. The School regards the provision of a desktop computer for each research postgraduate as part of research infrastructure, and does not expect computers to be bought from the research expenses allocation. Purchase of additional computers (including laptops, palms/PDAs) is NOT normally regarded as a legitimate expense (except where essential to a particular research project).
- (b) General Stationary. The School will provide reasonable amounts of general stationary, though large amounts (e.g. paper for questionnaires) will usually be charged to research expenses (see f, below). Postage for one-off items related to research will also be paid, though postage for large batches (e.g. of questionnaires) will be charged to research expenses.
- (c) UK Fieldwork. The Research Councils expect UK fieldwork expenses, as opposed to overseas fieldwork expenses, to be taken from the RTSG allocation. The amount of the School allocation, for students not funded by Research Councils, is unlikely to be large enough to support extensive periods of fieldwork.
- (d) Advertising for Participants. Where special groups of participants are required, who might otherwise be difficult to recruit, payments for advertisements in appropriate media may be considered a legitimate expense.
- (e) Payments/Gifts to Participants. Payments to participants in experiments, small gifts to schools that allow research work to be carried out, etc. are regarded as legitimate expenses. Note, however, that postgraduate research students have access to the undergraduate course credit participant pool, which they can use if appropriate. Participants from this pool are not paid, but receive course credit for taking part in experiments. Guidance on gifts to schools should be sought from the School of Psychology's School Liason (currently Robin Banerjee).
- (f) Payments to Helpers. We expect to see a degree of collegiality in the research postgraduate community with people helping each other out over small matters. However, it is legitimate to pay fellow postgraduates or others to do second scoring and similar activities.

- (g) Large Print Runs. Large print runs, of questionnaires and the like, should be carried out by the Print Unit or on the School's printer-copiers (which we calculate to be cheaper than using the Print Unit). They will be charged to research expenses.
- (h) Equipment. Small items of equipment specifically needed for a project may be purchased, though often these can be found in your supervisor's lab. In certain cases, payment for the production of equipment (or other items required for research, such as specialised drawings) may be allowable. Any equipment purchased remains the property of the School at the end of your doctoral training.
- (i) Consumables. Consumables of all kinds that are needed specifically for a piece of research are a legitimate expenditure.
- (j) Summer Schools. Summer schools closely related to a student's interest can be a legitimate expense (travel, accommodation, course fee). Many summer schools provide direct or indirect subsidies for students and represent excellent value for money. Many also provide a forum in which students can present their work. See (k), below, for restrictions on Summer School spending.
- (k) Conferences. It is part of a research postgraduate's research training to learn to give presentations to academic audiences. This training usually begins in an informal environment, such as a lab meeting. All students should aim to give a poster or a paper at a conference before they complete their research training. As can be seen, MRC and BBSRC provide their students with a specific allocation for conferences and courses, though it is not large and comprises only a small proportion of the total funds available. Spending of these allocations should be discussed with supervisors, but the considerations that follow do not necessarily apply to BBSRC and MRC conference/course allocations. There are various external sources of funds that are available for attendance at conferences, and students should apply for these not only to save money from their research accounts, but because of the prestige of being awarded them. The School will consider supporting conference attendance where a student is presenting a paper or a poster, and would expect such attendance to happen at the end of the second year or in the third year of a full-time DPhil. We will not, in general, support attendance where the student is not presenting. BBSRC, our second research council funder after ESRC, notionally allows £190 a year for conferences and other courses (e.g. summer schools). This figure was fixed a number of years ago. We, therefore, suggest, therefore, that students with no specific income stream for conferences etc (ESRC-funded, GTAs, self-funded etc.) should be allowed to spend up to £250 a year on such expenses (or rather £750, to be spent at appropriate times during the three years). Students with no specific income stream for conferences include ESRC students. These students will be expected to conform to the £250 a year guideline, but because the School receives external income for these students, requests to exceed this figure may be treated in a different way from requests by students whose research is funded by the School (such students will be expected to keep closely to the guidelines). Payment for conference and summer school attendance will still be subject to criteria of: direct relevance to the student's project, presentation of a paper or poster, and attempts to obtain outside funding to supplement any School contribution. It should be noted in particular that conference attendance cannot be planned to use up the £750 (or £1000) a year allowance (because it then becomes a resented "perk" for people whose research is cheap to run). As a rough rule of thumb, the conference allowance should allow a student to cover most of the expenses for either one UK conference a year in each of the three years, or one major overseas conference.
- (l) Travel. Where travel is necessary to carry out research (e.g. travel to schools or to visit special classes of participant) it is a legitimate expense. It should be undertaken in the most cost effective manner, by public transport except in very exceptional circumstances.
- (m) Books. Books are NOT usually regarded as a legitimate expense. Research Students may request the University Library to obtain books that they need (and do not wish to buy). Students making such requests should bear in mind that the University Library may take some time to obtain a book, and plan ahead appropriately. Certain manuals for test administration or computer software may be allowable. Where such items are purchased they should remain in laboratories or other School space, and they should remain with the School when the student leaves.

We recognise that research expenditure is uneven across the course of a DPhil and the allowance should be regarded as a maximum of (usually) £2250 over three years, rather than strictly as £750

a year. Both credit and debit balances will be carried over from year 1 and year 2 (and beyond where students have additional funding). Similarly, part-time students will be able to draw on up to £2250 over the course of their empirical work.

Procedures

All items of expenditure over £25 must be agreed with the Director of Doctoral Studies in advance. Claim forms for smaller amounts should be countersigned by the supervisor before being passed to the Director of Doctoral Studies.

For conferences and summer schools, in addition to prior approval of expenditure by the Director of Doctoral Studies, we require a statement of support for conference attendance from the main supervisor. Without this statement, expenses cannot be paid from School funds. If the supervisor has agreed to conference attendance but has not ensured that the student has obtained approval from the Director of Doctoral Studies, we reserve the right to charge the expenditure to the Supervisor's personal code. Where not even the supervisor has been consulted, we reserve the right not to reimburse any expenses.

Repayments for expenditure above the allocation or on non-legitimate items may not be authorised, even if payment has already been made by the student. In certain cases, where the supervisor's advice is at fault, expenditure may be recharged to the supervisor's personal devolved code.

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