

TRAC Academic Time Survey – Frequently Asked Questions

What is TRAC? TRAC stands for Transparent Approach to Costing, it is an annual, mandatory return submitted to HEFCE analysing the university's income and expenditure between three categories – Teaching, Research and Other.

Why is TRAC important? TRAC data is used by government and research funders to assess the proper financial management of all UK HEI's. The return calculates the Indirect, Estates and Technician Infrastructure cost rates that apply to research applications. The aggregated data informs government funding for teaching.

Why do I need to complete the Academic Time Survey? One of the TRAC requirements for completing the return is to undertake a staff survey to identify how staff time is split between Teaching, Research and Other. This survey data is then used to apportion staff costs between these categories. The TRAC guidance requires a minimum 75% response rate for the survey data to be valid.

Who will see my survey results? Heads of School and Department and School Managers see all submissions within their school/department as they are asked to confirm the data is reasonable. Other than that, the submissions are only seen by a small team that manages the survey in Corporate Accounting. All other use of the data is at an aggregated level and it will be impossible to identify any individual and will be used solely to comply with the reporting and data requirements from HEFCE and RCUK.

How can a survey covering months provide an accurate reflection of work undertaken? By surveying all academic staff and each survey covering a term, individual responses may not 100% accurately reflect all of the work undertaken. However, by combining the three surveys, each with a 75% response rate and by aggregating the responses at a department level we will get a reasonable reflection of the proportions of time spent on Teaching, Research and Other.

How can I be expected to remember everything I was doing over the survey period and accurately reflect this in the return? We recognise that this may be a difficult process, please make use of any planning documents, such as your workload plan/model to inform the split of your time. We are aiming for a reasonable reflection of the split of your time, rather than a return that is accurate to the hour. The survey will automatically identify and display any externally funded research projects you are recorded against that were open during the survey period.

Future surveys will be launched in a more timely way and now that the 2017/18 survey timetable has been published, you may find it helpful to make a note of the split of your time as the term progresses.

I work part-time for the university and part-time for another organisation – which work should I include? Please only record the split of your time that relates to the work you do for the university.

I need to change part of my survey response, how do I do that? Please contact the TRAC team in Corporate Accounting, using the trac.ats@sussex.ac.uk email address.

Should I enter the split of my time as a percentage or in hours? Please enter the split of your time as a percentage. In previous surveys there was the option to enter in hours. However, given the length of the survey period this is no longer practical. If you hold the information in hours and would like help converting this into percentages please contact the TRAC team in Corporate Accounting, using the trac.ats@sussex.ac.uk email address.

How should I record absences such as holiday or sick leave? Please ignore absences when recording the split of your time. The percentages reported should only reflect your worked hours. If you were absent for the whole of the reporting period please submit a nil return by entering a zero in one of the categories and saving and confirming your survey.

How should I record taking industrial action? Please do not include strike action, the percentages reported should only reflect your worked hours.

Why are there so many categories and not just Teaching, Research and Other? The TRAC return requires us to report using all of the categories listed. A link to the list of definitions can be found here on the Sussex Direct Academic Time Survey webpage.

Common classification queries:

Travel time should be recorded in line with the purpose of the trip.

Sabbatical leave carried out under research fellowship should generally be recorded under Research and the appropriate sub-category (unless the individual is still undertaking Teaching or Other activities) where there is no external funding body this will be generally coded to Own Funded Research.

Administration activity in support of the whole University, rather than your School should be recorded under General Support - Management, Admin & Committee work. This includes sitting on University committees (where the committee does not specifically relate to Teaching or Research), or work to promote the University as a whole.

Conference attendance should be recorded in line with the purpose of the attending the conference.

How do the Research Funder classes map to the ATS reporting categories? Please see the table below:

Research Funder Class Description	Research Funder Class Ref	ATS Reporting Category
UK Research Councils	1	Research - Externally Funded - Research Councils
UK Govt Depts (Inc LA's,Health and Hospitals)	4	Research - Externally Funded - Other Government Dept's
EU Government	6	Research - Externally Funded - EU government bodies
EU Charities (Open Competition)	7	Research - Externally Funded - EU Other
EU Industry	8	Research - Externally Funded - EU Other
EU Other	9	Research - Externally Funded - EU Other
UK Charities (Open Competition)	2	Research - Externally Funded - UK based Charities
UK Charities (Closed Competition)	3	Research - Externally Funded - UK based Charities
UK Industry,Commerce and Public Corporations	5	Research - Externally Funded - Industry
Other UK Sources	13	Research - Externally Funded - Industry
Overseas Charities (Open Competition)	10	Research - Externally Funded - Other Overseas
Overseas Industry,Commerce and Public Corporations	11	Research - Externally Funded - Other Overseas
Overseas Other	12	Research - Externally Funded - Other Overseas