

RCUK TRAINING GRANT GUIDE

To be read with

[Conditions of Research Council Training Grants](#)

[UK Quality Code for Higher Education \(in particular Chapter B11: Research Degrees\)](#)

[RCUK Statement of Expectations for Doctoral Training](#)

This guidance is primarily for use by Research Organisations (universities, research institutes and other bodies), in receipt of Research Council Training Grants.

A Training Grant (TG) is a grant paid by a Research Council (RC) to a Research Organisation (RO) for the provision of postgraduate study. The Research Councils do not fund students directly, but fund Research Organisations through Training Grants.

Research Organisations and supervisors advertise, award and manage RC studentships. Therefore, potential and current students should contact the institution hosting the studentship should they have any queries.

Research Organisations are responsible for checking students' eligibility and providing advice to prospective or existing Research Council students.

Abbreviations

RC	Research Council
RCUK	Research Councils UK
RO	Research Organisation
RTSG	Research Training Support Grant
TG	Training Grant

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Application procedures

1. The RCs award studentship funding directly to ROs via a TG and not to students. TGs are awarded via a number of different approaches.
2. RCUK has set out Common Terminology for the different approaches to funding postgraduate training taken by individual RCs. It provides an overview of the different studentship schemes.
<http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/documents/skills/rcukcommonterminologyforpostgraduatetraining2013-pdf/>

3. More detailed information can be found on individual RCs' websites:

AHRC: <http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/skills/phdstudents/fundingandtraining/>

BBSRC: <http://www.bbsrc.ac.uk/funding/studentships/studentships-index.aspx>

EPSRC: <https://www.epsrc.ac.uk/skills/students/>

ESRC: <http://www.esrc.ac.uk/funding-and-guidance/postgraduates/index.aspx>

NERC: <http://www.nerc.ac.uk/funding/available/postgrad/>

MRC: <http://www.mrc.ac.uk/Fundingopportunities/Studentships/index.htm>

STFC: <http://www.stfc.ac.uk/funding/studentships/>

Research training remit

4. The research undertaken by a student as part of an RC studentship must fall within the remit of the Council(s) funding that studentship. Each of the RCs fund research training within a broad set of subject disciplines and in collaboration with other Councils and partners.
5. Detailed information about the areas of research each Council supports can be found on their individual websites. A brief summary of the areas of research each Council funds can be found on the RCUK website: <http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/research/areas/>
6. Joint RC funding of multidisciplinary awards is possible on the basis of 50:50 funding from two Councils; in that case, one of the Councils must be designated as the majority funder for monitoring and information purposes.

Equality and diversity

RCUK Training Grant Condition 3 Paragraphs 10, 11, and 14
QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education – Chapter B11: Research Degrees Indicator 5 (Page 12)

7. Diversity and equality must be promoted in all aspects of the recruitment and career management of students.
8. ROs should meet the [RCUK Expectations for Equality and Diversity](#) and in particular ensure that supervisors are trained and supported in this area.
9. RCs collect and analyse data on the gender, ethnic origin and age of supported students to monitor the effectiveness of their policies and initiatives.

Student complaints/difficulties

RCUK Training Grant Condition 3 paragraphs 15, 16, and 17
QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education – Chapter B11: Research Degrees Indicator 18 (Page 29)

10. The RO is responsible for ensuring that students and supervisors are aware of the complaints procedures and the QAA guidance for students. RCs will not intervene in individual cases.

Student eligibility

RCUK Training Grant Condition 5 paragraphs 37 to 39; Condition 6 paragraphs 40 to 42
QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education – Chapter B11: Research Degrees Indicators 5 and 6 (Pages 12 & 13)

11. The RCs are not involved in the recruitment and selection of students for studentships. It is the responsibility of the RO to ensure each selected student meets the relevant residency, academic, subject and scheme eligibility criteria. The RO should not offer a studentship to a prospective student unless they are certain that they meet all the relevant eligibility criteria. ROs should be able to provide evidence to support this decision if required by the awarding RC. Recruitment processes must be fair, open and transparent.
12. There are two types of studentship award (based on meeting residential eligibility criteria):
 - A full studentship award – this covers the cost of approved tuition fees and provides a stipend.
 - A fees-only studentship award – this excludes funds for a stipend

Student eligibility – residency

RCUK Training Grant Condition 6 paragraphs 43 – 46

13. The Education (Fees and Awards) (England) Regulations 2007 refer to Research Councils adopting rules of eligibility that confine eligibility and there is further detail in the regulations: http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2007/779/pdfs/uksi_20070779_en.pdf
14. Prospective students must apply to the research organisation offering the studentship. For how to apply, documentation needed and advice on eligibility, they must contact the research organisation that will deal with their application. Supervisors or departmental staff seeking further advice should contact their own postgraduate admissions office (or equivalent). Final decisions on eligibility are made by research organisations and questions about eligibility should be addressed to the research organisation directly.
15. Useful sources of information on postgraduate study in the UK include:
 - Education UK: the British Council's official website for international students
 - [UK Council for International Student Affairs \(UKCISA\)](#): the website includes advice and illustrations of how the Fees and Awards regulations may apply to particular circumstances as well as some case law.

International recruitment to RC studentships

RCUK Training Grant Condition 6 paragraph 52

16. The RCs have agreed a number of underlying principles in relation to the recruitment of non-UK domiciled candidates to RC funded studentships.
(<http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/skills/frameworks/international-recruitment-to-research-council-studentships/>)
17. There may be RC specific opportunities arising for those individuals who would not normally meet the eligibility requirements for RC funding. ROs in receipt of TGs will have been informed of any flexibility and discretion to support international students and details can be found on individual RCs websites.
18. TG funds cannot be used to cover the difference between home and overseas fee rates.

Student eligibility – qualifications/experience

QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education – Chapter B11: Research Degrees Indicator 6 (Page 13)

19. Minimum qualifications and experience to undertake a research degree are detailed in the QAA UK Quality for Higher Education.
20. For some subject areas, there is also an expectation that an individual will have undertaken a Masters qualification before beginning a doctoral programme. However, ROs can use their discretion in deciding whether candidates are suitable for research

training, making reference to any Council-specific expectations.

21. Heads of Department, prospective supervisors and potential students who require advice on eligibility should contact the RO Registrar's Office (or equivalent). Final decisions on eligibility are made by ROs.

Funding, stipend and fees

RCUK Training Grant Condition 5 paragraphs 32 - 36

22. RCs publish their national minimum doctoral stipend and indicative fee level on an annual basis. Details can be found on the RCUK website:
<http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/skills/training/>
23. The RO should pay the stipend due to students in advance.
24. Where RCs provide additional funds such as enhanced Research Training Support Grants these will be specified in the TG and details are available on individual RCs websites.

London and other allowances

RCUK Training Grant Condition 5 paragraph 36

25. ROs are encouraged to use the flexibilities within the TG to support students appropriately e.g. to take into account location or discipline. Where London Weighting is explicitly included within the TG (AHRC, ESRC, BBSRC, NERC, MRC, STFC) it must be passed on to the student; students must be studying within the Metropolitan Police District or be based at Imperial College, Silwood Park or Brunel for a minimum continuous period of 12 months.

Research training support grant

RCUK Training Grant Condition 5 paragraph 36, Grant Condition 6 paragraphs 47 – 53

26. The TG includes a Research Training Support Grant (RTSG) component. This is a contribution towards costs incurred in training research students e.g. the provision of consumables, equipment, travel, etc. The RTSG is not intended to relieve an RO of any part of its normal expenditure.
27. Additional funding can be drawn from the TG to fund activities to support student training such as student attendance at conferences, internships, workshops and short course attendance and internships. Support might also be provided for, local, cohort specific activities, for example, to develop opportunities, which arise from being part of a peer group, or to raise awareness amongst the cohort of the wider context in which their doctoral research sits doctorate was funded. Some RCs may also provide additional

funding for activities e.g. overseas fieldwork; information is available on the individual RC websites.

Disabled students' allowances

RCUK Training Grant Condition 6 paragraphs 72 and 73

28. RCUK Disabled Students' Allowances (DSA) are intended to help with additional expenditure for the costs of study-related requirements that may be incurred as a result of disability, a mental health problem or a specific learning difficulty that means additional support is needed to undertake a RC funded studentship. The allowances can cover the cost of non-medical personal assistance, items of specialist equipment, extra travel costs and general expenses.
29. ROs should undertake the assessment of need and provide costs for the student when they are required. ROs will be able to claim back eligible costs at the end of the academic year by submitting a completed DSA claim form to the RCs by 31st October or, if the grant is in its final year, including costs in the Final Expenditure Statement.
30. For further information see: <http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/ResearchCareers/Pages/dsa.aspx>

Income tax

RCUK Training Grant Condition 6 paragraphs 75 - 77

31. Payments made as part of a RC studentship are training awards and not regarded as income for income tax purposes. The RO should ensure that students are aware that earnings received from sources such as teaching and demonstrating may be taxable and should be aggregated with income from any employment when assessing income tax liability in any tax year – this is particularly relevant for the tax year in which the award ends. It is the student's responsibility to ensure they understand their tax liabilities throughout their award. The RCs are not able to provide advice on tax, national insurance, pensions or on benefits issues.

National insurance

32. No additional payments will be made for students' National Insurance contributions. The RO should ensure that students are aware that they can, if they wish, pay contributions as non-employed persons. They should consult their local office of the Department for Work and Pensions about their position to determine the impact of non-payment of contributions on any future claims for benefit including the basic State Pension. Students may become liable for contributions in connection with any paid teaching or demonstrating which they undertake.

Post-award processes

33. ROs have the authority to make many decisions about post-award matters without the need to have them confirmed or signed-off by the RCs. Where an RO requires additional clarification to make a decision on a post-award matter, appropriate registry or finance office staff should contact the UK SBS directly. The RCs cannot handle enquiries from students about post-award decisions; students should be advised to direct all queries to the relevant authority at their RO.

Number of students supported and co-funding

RCUK Training Grant Condition 5

QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education – Chapter B11: Research Degrees Indicators 5 and 6 (Pages 12-13)

34. Students can be funded from more than one TG as long as at least 50% of the total funding comes from the awarding RC. The remaining funding could be drawn from other sources, such as departmental funds, other RC TGs or collaborative partners outside of academia. The student must not be expected to fund the remainder of the studentship costs themselves, nor may any individual RC-funded student be charged additional fees above the level paid by the RC.
35. Studentships can be funded 50:50 from two different Research Council TGs in order to support an interdisciplinary area.
36. There must be a fair and transparent recruitment process, which should not, for example, favour fees-only students over those, eligible for a full award for financial reasons. The RO should advertise the studentship as fully funded regardless of whether the full amount is coming from the RCs or not. Studentships should not be advertised as being part-funded.
37. The TG funding can be used flexibly. For example, where a fees-only student is supported, unallocated stipend could be used to provide an enhanced stipend to another student in an area of recruitment and retention difficulty or could be vired into other eligible headings.

Part-time students

RCUK Training Grant Condition 6 paragraph 48

38. Studentships are available for students who wish to study on a part-time basis. For example, those who wish to combine their research training with work or personal responsibilities. Students should be made aware that funding for part-time study is an option. ROs and students should be realistic, however, about such arrangements. It is expected that the period of study will reflect the percentage of time spent pursuing doctoral studies, and a minimum of 50% of full time effort is required (with an expected

period of study of up to 6 – 8 years). Supervisors will wish to ensure that arrangements are made to incorporate any new research or research developments that are likely to emerge within the extended period of study.

Illness

RCUK Training Grant Condition 6 paragraphs 57, 58, 60 and 63

39. Award payments can continue during absences covered by medical certificates for up to 13 weeks, within any 12-month period. RCs do not need to be sent medical certificates, but ROs may wish to retain copies for audit purposes. Beyond 13 weeks, studentships should be put into abeyance. Medical absences beyond the 13 weeks are not funded by the RCs.
40. If a studentship is put into abeyance then the RO should ensure that the Je-S Student Details (Je-S SD) has been updated with the new funding end date and expected submission date (based on the period of absence, any period of abeyance and, if applicable, any subsequent part time study).
41. RCs expect ROs to meet the costs of medical absences from within the cash-limit of their TGs/accounts. If a RO has a very small TG and no expectation of future funding from the RC, they can request additional funding above the cash-limit. The ROs will need to show that payment for costs resulting from Medical Absences cannot be made from the TG and that there is no other contingency funding or TGs to draw on.

Maternity, paternity and adoption leave

RCUK Training Grant Condition 6 paragraphs 54 - 63

42. RC funded students are entitled to 52 weeks of maternity or shared parental leave. The first 26 weeks should be paid at full stipend rate. The following 13 weeks should be paid at a level commensurate with employee entitlements to statutory maternity pay. This is c. 41% of the minimum doctoral stipend. The final 13 weeks are not paid. Partners are entitled to up to 10 days paid Ordinary Paternity Leave on full stipend. Partners may be entitled to up to 50 weeks of Shared Parental Leave; this may include paid and unpaid leave, depending on the individual circumstances, any paid leave should be at full stipend. There is no qualifying period for maternity, paternity, or shared parental leave.
43. The RCs expect the RO to have policies in place to support students and to advise the student of the terms and conditions under which Maternity, Shared Parental or Adoption leave and stipend will be available. In addition, what duration of study is required on return to study after such leave in order for the student to keep the whole value of funding paid during the period of leave. This may be calculated on a sliding scale.
44. It is acceptable for a student to return to study on a part-time basis as long as it is at least 50% FTE.

45. The studentship end dates and expected submission dates should be amended on the Je- S SD to reflect periods of Maternity, Shared Parental or Adoption leave or changes in study patterns.
46. RCs expect ROs to meet the costs of Maternity, Shared Parental or Adoption Leave from within the cash-limit of their TGs/accounts. If a RO has a very small TG and no expectation of future funding from the RC, they can request additional funding above the cash-limit. The ROs will need to show that payment for Maternity, Shared Parental or Adoption Leave cannot be made from the TG and that there is no other contingency funding or TGs to draw on.
47. There is no limit to the number of periods of Maternity, Ordinary Paternity, Shared Parental or Adoption Leave that can be taken during a studentship.

Ordinary paternity leave and shared parental leave

48. RC students are entitled to 10 days Ordinary Paternity Leave. A total of 10 days Ordinary Paternity Leave may be taken at any time during a partner's pregnancy or within three months following the birth. No extra funding will be provided to the RO.
49. RC students are entitled to 50 weeks Shared Parental Leave. While recognising that students are not employees, the Shared Parental Leave should be calculated on the same basis as an employee with an employment contract (excluding the qualifying period). Further information can be found on the government website:
<https://www.gov.uk/shared-parental-leave-and-pay-employer-guide/overview>

Maternity leave

50. If a student becomes pregnant such that the expected date of confinement will occur during the period of their award, the student is entitled to 52 weeks of maternity or shared parental leave. The first 26 weeks should be paid at full stipend rate. The following 13 weeks should be paid at a level commensurate with employee entitlements to statutory maternity pay. This is c. 41% of the minimum doctoral stipend. The final 13 weeks are not paid. Additionally, their studentship will be extended by a commensurate period.

Adoption leave

51. Adoption leave should be granted on the same basis as maternity leave (please see above).

Suspension of awards (abeyance)

RCUK Training Grant Condition 6 paragraph 57
QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education – Chapter B11: Research Degrees Indicator 13 (Page 21)

52. RCs expect students to complete their training in a single continuous period and do not encourage the suspension of awards (see paragraph 53-54 & 68 for exceptions).
53. Sympathetic consideration should be given to requests for suspensions due to personal or family reasons.
54. Suspension of an award is limited to a maximum of 12 months unless exceptional circumstances prevail.
55. The studentship end dates and expected submission dates should be amended on the Je-S SD to reflect suspension periods with a reason provided. The RO must enter the details of any approved suspensions in the Je-S SD within one month of the suspension being approved.
56. If the suspension takes the student beyond the end date of the grant, the RO should either add the student on to a later grant covering the remaining period of the studentship, or request a no-cost extension to the grant if no other grant is available.

Changes of thesis title, research direction, course or programme of study

RCUK Training Grant Condition 13 paragraph 94

57. As their research plans are developed and refined, a student may need to make some modifications to the original programme of research and/or project title. The RO should enter changes into Je-S SD as soon as possible.
58. Major change of topic or direction, should only be approved in exceptional circumstances. ROs must not agree a change to a course or programme of study that falls outside the funding RC's remit.

Transfers

RCUK Training Grant Condition 6 paragraphs 66 and 67

59. Where students transfer from one RO to another, the receiving RO will be required to accept all the terms and conditions relating to the studentship as it was offered to the student, including its start date and duration, registration requirements and submission date.
60. If the transferring student is the only student on a particular grant, the entire grant and any remaining funds must be transferred to the receiving RO. In this situation, both ROs should submit a grant transfer request through Je-S to arrange for a transfer of the grant to the receiving RO.

Termination of studentships

QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education – Chapter B11: Research Degrees Indicators 13 (Page 21)

61. The RO should ensure that the appropriate termination and grievance procedures have been followed, if relevant, before terminating a studentship. ROs are expected to take reasonable steps to recover monies that have already been paid to students for the period following the date of leaving or termination. RCs will not supplement TGs, but the remaining TG funds could be used to fund/part-fund another student.
62. Termination details must be submitted via the Je-S SD.
63. Any PhD student who terminates after the first 12 months of their doctoral studies will still be included in the submission data survey.

Annual leave

RCUK Training Grant Condition 6 paragraph 65

64. Reasonable holidays, a recommended maximum of eight weeks in the year including public holidays, should be allowed for by supervisors (pro rata for parts of a year for part-time students). Students working in collaboration with non-academic partners are expected to bear in mind their obligations to those partners in planning leave.

Demonstrating, teaching and other paid work

RCUK Training Grant Condition 6 paragraph 75

QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education – Chapter B11: Research Degrees Indicator 14 (Page 23)

65. Students may undertake teaching or demonstrating work when this is compatible with their training and provided their supervisors approve. The total time spent (including preparation and marking) should not interfere with the progress of the PhD. The amount of time is at the RO and supervisor's discretion but it is recommended that this is no more than six hours in any week. It must not be compulsory and must be paid for at the RO's usual rate and supported by appropriate training. Costs for demonstrating or teaching may not be taken from the TG.
66. Students may also undertake a small amount of other paid work, provided the supervisor gives consent and it does not delay or interfere with the research training.

Internships and placements

67. Students may undertake a work placement or internship where this is either directly related to the student's training, or provides valuable transferable skills and, provided this is well justified and approved in advance by their supervisor and RO.

68. The placement may be an integral part of the award, in which case a suspension or an extension of the student's funded period is not required. In other cases, there may be a case for the award to be extended. However if a placement is not directly part of their PhD programme (i.e. is undertaken for purely personal reasons) or the student is receiving a payment for the placement, then the studentship should be suspended. The studentship end dates and expected submission dates should be amended on the Je-S SD to reflect suspension periods.

Other training and activities

69. Individual RCs may allow extensions of the student's funded period for other activities e.g. for language training.
70. RCs expect ROs to encourage doctoral students to collaborate with partner organisations in the private, public and civil society sectors, to enhance their research training experience; these collaborations do not necessarily require the PhD to be a fully collaborative award (e.g. CASE). All collaborations should be reported in the SDP.

Careers and transferable skills training

RCUK Training Grant Condition 3

QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education – Chapter B11: Research Degrees Indicator 14 (Page 23)

71. The RCs expect that the quality of skills provision and the employability of researchers are maintained and improved, through ROs acting to:
- Maintain availability of a broad range of career planning, training and development opportunities for RC funded researchers
 - Fully embed researcher development into the normal processes in the research and training environment.
 - Recover funds to support researcher development from all funders of research and research students
 - Continue to improve effectiveness and value for money of their researcher development programmes.

Researcher development statement

QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education – Chapter B11: Research Degrees Indicator 14 (Page 23)

72. All research students should receive appropriate training in research-related and personal skills. The Researcher Development Statement (RDS) developed by Vitae, from the Researcher Development Framework, sets out the knowledge, behaviours and attributes of effective and highly skilled researchers appropriate for a wide range of careers. The RDS can be found at: <http://www.vitae.ac.uk/rds>

Use of funds and financial reporting

RCUK Training Grant Condition 2 paragraph 8 and 9, Grant Condition 3 paragraph 10, 11 and Grant Condition 5 paragraph 32

73. The RO can move funds between the different fund headings on the grant except for those funds, which are specific to an individual student e.g. Disabled Students Allowance, or as specified by individual RCs.
74. The RCs expect ROs to use the flexibility of TG funding for maximum strategic effect, and to think strategically about how best to maximise the impact of the RC's investment in the RO. This might include using the flexibility of part-funding to leverage funding from other sources, or offering enhanced stipends to attract the strongest candidates in areas of research in which a RO may have been experiencing recruitment difficulties.

Duration and writing-up

75. The expected duration of the PhD project and funding should be agreed with the student at the outset.
76. Councils expect doctoral projects to be designed and supervised in such a way that students are able to submit their thesis within the funded period, as defined at the outset of the project.

Monitoring and information requirements

77. The RCs receive first-destination data on the employment of students once they have been awarded their degrees from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) survey of Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE). The RCs would ask that ROs make students aware of the importance of completing the HESA questionnaire, which they will receive in due course. This information is vital for the RCs to be able to report on the impact of their funding.

Early Submissions

RCUK Training Grant Condition 6 paragraph 64

78. In some cases, students may submit their thesis prior to the end of their award. Where the student continues to undertake work that is directly linked to their thesis, it is permissible for the award to continue to the end of the quarter in which the thesis is submitted. For example, a student who submits their thesis on 31 January can retain the payment made for the 1 Jan – 31 March quarter but their doctoral award would end on 31 March.

Joint electronic submissions (Je-S) student details (SD)

RCUK Training Grant Condition 13 paragraphs 93 – 100

79. All records relating to RC-funded students should be managed by ROs within the Je-S SD. ROs must use the Je-S SD to update information about their students throughout the duration of the TG. New records must be created within a month of the student commencing their study. Amendments to records should be made in accordance with RC guidance and within a month of the change being formally agreed by the RO.
80. When creating a new student record, the “Studentship Details” option should be selected from the menu. When updating an existing record, there is the option to use “Studentship Details” where all details of the record can be amended, or “Batch Update” where multiple records can be amended, but where only some parts of the record can be altered. We expect ROs to update the Je-S SD for their students on an ongoing basis, e.g. to reflect any change in status or student circumstances, and to undertake an annual check by 31 October each year.
81. For any questions relating to Je-S, ROs should contact the Je-S Helpdesk on 01793 867000 or JeSHelp@rcuk.ac.uk.

Submission survey

RCUK Training Grant Condition 13 paragraphs 97 - 100

82. RCs collect submission data from ROs on an annual basis via the Je-S PhD Submissions Survey.
83. If a studentship is terminated before the end of the first year of doctoral funding, for whatever reason, the student will be excluded from the submission rate surveys.
84. Students, who have been recorded as deceased on the Je-S SD, are omitted from calculations of submission rates.

Publication and acknowledgement of support

RCUK Training Grant Condition 15 paragraphs 104 - 111

85. Further guidance to ensure that funders are acknowledged in a standardised way can be found at: <http://www.rin.ac.uk/system/files/attachments/Acknowledgement-funders-guidance.pdf>
86. The RCs expect that a full text version of the thesis should be available no longer than 12 months following award of the doctorate. Councils recognise that commercial, collaborative or publication arrangements may necessitate a slight delay; the delay can be at the RO’s discretion but we expect the thesis to be deposited as soon as possible. The RCs expect the RO to have in place a documented process for determining where exceptions can be granted to the requirement for publication within 12 months.

87. When the thesis is lodged, ROs should ensure that the sponsor name and the name of the funding Research Council(s) are included in thesis repositories (e.g. AHRC, BBSRC, EPSRC, ESRC, MRC, NERC, and STFC).