

**In-year further uprating of the UKRI doctoral stipend****To approve**

Committee Name: ExCo August 2022

Previously discussed by: N/A

Author: [REDACTED] Investment Strategy. [REDACTED] Analysis Team.

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Circulation: Executive Committee, StratCo, PFO, Council talent leads

**Summary**

ExCo agreed advice to BEIS on the allocation of £104m this financial year including c.£20m to UKRI-funded doctoral students, providing for a one-off payment of £660 responding to rapid increases to the cost of living in addition to the 2.9% (cash-terms) increase for academic year 2022/23 announced in February. ExCo also agreed that if the £20m were not available, that it would prioritise £10m of underspend in FLF and £7m of over-profiling flexibility in order to fund this.

The Secretary of State (SoS) approved in principle that spend, but this is subject to HMT approval. HMT prefer uprating of the doctoral stipend to a one-off payment. HMT are content to hear arguments for an uprating of the stipend by the £660 originally proposed **and** for increasing that level further, and for why that increase in stipend should be higher.

ExCo had an initial discussion on this issue at the Wednesday Morning Meeting on the 17<sup>th</sup> August. This paper provides the follow-up detail that members requested.

The Executive Committee is asked to:

- **Decide** whether to put forward an additional option for a higher recommended stipend increase of £1606 to HMT for approval **or** to propose only a minimum stipend increase of £660 (as aligned with ExCo's previous decision for a one-off payment of £660)
- Agree that the magnitude of additional funding needed is manageable within existing UKRI Allocation.
- Agree to take a future prioritisation decision to ensure that the magnitude of additional funding needed is manageable within existing UKRI's existing allocation recognising that an increase of £1606 will mean a maximum additional pressures of £20m in 22/23 (which can be supported through the supplementary allocation of £104m), £55m in 23/24 and £75m in 24/25 which would need to be met from reductions to other parts of core research allocations (either specifically from within Collective Talent Funding through a reduction in student or fellow numbers, or from wider Research Budgets)

## 1. Issue

- 1.1. UKRI Studentships are the only investment for which UKRI has direct control over the minimum income that individuals receive. Incomes for other individuals in the R&I system are agreed with their employer and covered by employment legislation including the National Minimum Wage Act.
- 1.2. In 2020-21 there were 105,000 doctoral students in the UK. 29,000 (only one quarter) are receiving some funding from one of UKRI's research councils.
- 1.3. This October, the UKRI minimum stipend will increase from £15,609 to £16,062 for academic year (AY) 2022/23. This 2.9% increase reflects inflation from October 2020 to September 2021. Given current inflation rates, this is now a real-terms cut in income. If we do not increase our stipend levels now, then we risk being less attractive to globally mobile talent compared to other countries. We also risk considerable reputational damage if we fail to address the cost-of-living crisis.
- 1.4. The evidence gathered as part of our work on the New Deal for Postgraduate Research show that an increase in stipend levels would be considered a welcome intervention by UKRI. Other funders are already taking action, for example the Royal Society is about to announce a 13% increase for their doctoral student stipend. See Annex A for details on sector feedback and engagement.
- 1.5. If we do not increase, then we will also be less attractive to globally mobile talent compared to other countries. Relative to other countries UK stipend levels are lower: in the USA, doctoral students receive federal support of around £21,500 pa (net); German Research Foundation students receive a net salary equivalent to around £18,500; the Dutch Research Council provide a minimum base salary equivalent to £19,060 pa (net); and in Canada international doctoral students receive government funding of around £30,000<sup>1</sup>. The proportion of non-UK domiciled students recruited to UKRI grants fell from 30% in 2019 to 22% in 2021.
- 1.6. If we were to follow our business as usual process for calculating the minimum student stipend for 2023/24, we would take the rate of inflation in the period October 2021 to September 2022, agree and publish the new stipend rate by January 2023 and implement it from the new academic year in October 2023.
- 1.7. In August 2022, Bank of England forecast that CPI inflation in the year to Q3 2022 (the period we would normally use to set the minimum stipend for 2023-24) would be 9.9%. This would give an indicative stipend of £17,652. Based on current Bank of England inflation

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<sup>1</sup>Based on analysis conducted in April 2022. Analysis uses exchange rates and salary calculators current at the time.

forecasts, stipends would cost an estimated £1,350m across financial years 2023-24 to 2025-26, £150m more than predicted under previous inflation forecasts. We are therefore already looking at a considerable increase to the stipend from October 2023, beyond the profile in current training grants.

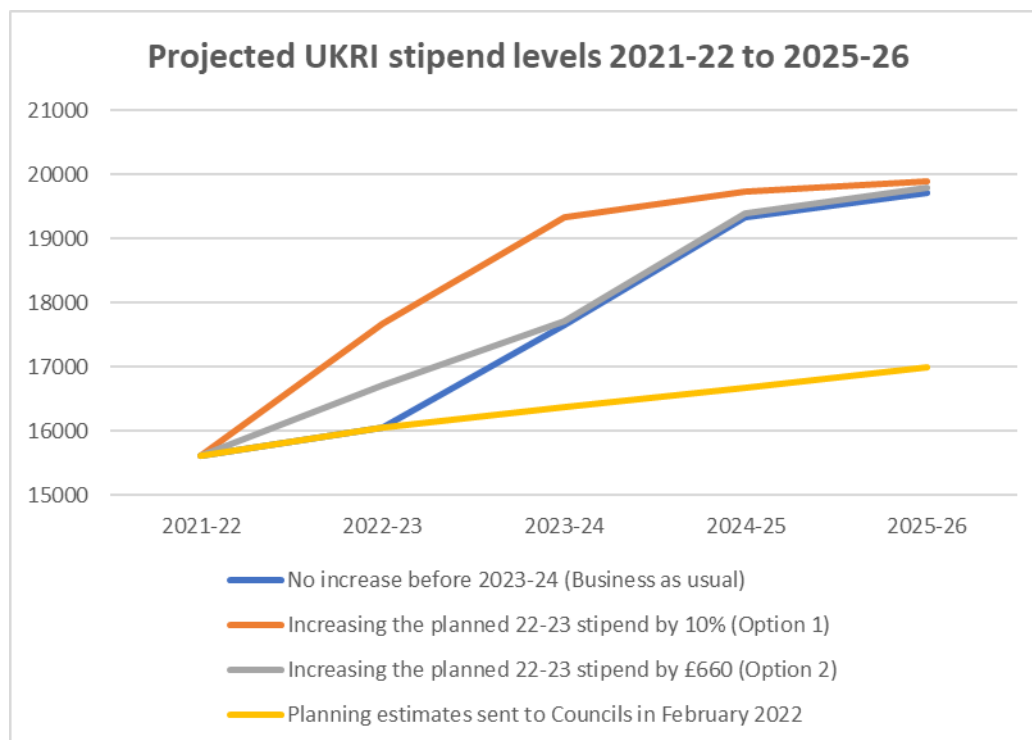
- 1.8. Exco had previously agreed to help bridge the gap between the 2022/23 stipend and 2023/24 stipend by providing a one-off payment of £660 to UKRI-funded doctoral students to help with the costs of the living crisis, as part of an additional allocation from BEIS to UKRI of £104 million. £660 was put forward as a one-off payment that broadly reflected the government's approach to support, but acknowledged it did not fully compensate students for the rising cost of living. £660 represents an additional 4.1% increase on the 2022/23 stipend.
- 1.9. Although HMT officials have agreed in principle the £660 additional payment, the one-off payment mechanism has been rejected. However, HMT has also indicated it will consider a case for uprating the stipend for 2022/23 for the original £660 proposed and for increasing that level further.
- 1.10. There is therefore the opportunity for UKRI to present a case for a swifter timetable to increase the stipend in line with the uplift we expect to make in October 2023. By increasing the minimum stipend by 10%, (in line with forecast inflation) for academic year 22/23 we would cushion most of the cost-of-living increases that current students are experiencing and mitigate against the risk of students not starting, dropping out and maintain the UK's international competitiveness. The current cost of living crisis is disproportionately impacting doctoral students without other sources of income.
- 1.11. Emerging evidence from the New Deal suggests that students from under-represented groups are particularly unlikely to have additional income, so this presents a significant challenge to UKRI's commitments to equality, diversity and inclusion. Not acting during this period of acute stress is likely to result in an even less diverse population of doctoral students.
- 1.12. An uprating of 10% would give UKRI doctoral students a minimum annual income of £17,668 which is equivalent to the take home income of a c£20,000 salary (a UKRI band A/B salary). The UK median graduate starting salary is estimated to be £21-25,000<sup>2</sup> with graduates at the 'top 100' UK firms i.e. top talent, at a median starting salary of £30,000<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Graduate-jobs.com, *Graduate salaries in 2022* <[Graduate salary UK 2022 | graduate-jobs.com](https://graduate-jobs.com/graduate-salary-uk-2022)> [Accessed 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2022].

<sup>3</sup> High Fliers Research (January 2019) *The Graduate Market in 2019* [Accessed 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2022], found in Graduate-jobs.com, *Graduate salaries in 2022* <[Graduate salary UK 2022 | graduate-jobs.com](https://graduate-jobs.com/graduate-salary-uk-2022)> [Accessed 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2022].

**Figure 1**



**Notes:**

1. All forecasts based on Bank of England's Monetary Policy Report, August 2022.
2. The 'no increase before 2023-24' option follows the existing practice where stipend levels are based on inflation in the twelve months to the previous September.
3. The increase of £660 provides a temporary increase which is then deducted from the inflation-adjusted stipend for 2023-24.
4. The 10% increase to the proposed 2022-23 stipend applies inflation forecasts for the same year to avoid 'double-counting' inflation.

1.13. As shown in Figure 1, if we uprate stipends now, we are in effect bringing forward some or all of the business as usual 2023 increase by 12 months and using some of the BEIS additional allocation to achieve that. This would reduce the 12-24 month lag between inflation happening and that inflation being reflected in our stipend rate. If Bank of England forecasts prove accurate and we maintain the above methodology for setting stipends, we would expect the minimum stipend under our preferred option to return to within 2% of a business as usual scenario by AY2025/26. The business as usual scenario would still require decisions to be made on how to manage costs of an increased stipend in AY23/24, based on current inflation rates.

1.14. Adopting any approach beyond Council's existing planning assumptions creates additional upfront costs which were not accounted for during the recent allocations process, as discussed in more detail below. One option to meet the additional funding requirement would

be to reduce student numbers by effectively limiting recruitment of students for around three years. This could have a significant impact. In the scenario where we increase stipend by 10% with no additional funding for training grants, we may be faced with reducing doctoral student recruitment by up to a maximum of 50%. This is new student starts not a reduction in the total number of doctoral students.

## 2. Timing

- 2.1. HMT and BEIS have asked that to allow a timely decision and therefore implementation a note needs to go to HMT Ministers ahead of the new government starting on 5<sup>th</sup> September. The team are looking to get a note to HMT by Friday 26<sup>th</sup> August.
- 2.2. A decision is required today to ensure that we can meet this deadline. If ExCo is not quorate then we will seek a decision by correspondence.
- 2.3. We will seek sign-off from the CEO/ acting CEO tomorrow morning (Thursday 25<sup>th</sup>); we will then send our case for further funding to BEIS and HMT tomorrow afternoon. The draft note for HMT can be seen at Annex A.

## 3. Recommendations

- 3.1. We suggest presenting two options to HMT, these are presented below with associated risks and financial implications. Percentage increases are on top of the published AY 22/23 minimum stipend level (£16,062), which was agreed in January 2022, in line with the previous 12 months' inflation rate.
- 3.2. **Option 1 - Increase the minimum stipend by £1606 (10%) for AY 2022/23. Minimum stipend: £17,666 (preferred option)**  
This approach responds to immediate financial pressures experienced by UKRI-funded students and is aligned with current inflation rates (9.9% in the 12 months prior to August 2022 and estimated to rise to around 13% across the 12 months prior to December 2022). It would see students receive an additional £946 on top of the £660 per student already agreed by ExCo (and agreed in principle by HMT officials).
- 3.3. **Option 1 is our preferred option.** UKRI's minimum stipend level is already dropping below international comparators (even with a 10% increase on the agreed AY 22/23 level). Providing an adequate stipend that allows UKRI-funded students to keep up with the basic costs of living will avoid students who have no additional financial support (e.g. from family) leaving their studies. This has implications on the diversity of student cohorts – those with no financial stability are more likely to come from underrepresented backgrounds.
- 3.4. **Option 2- Increase the minimum stipend by £660 for AY 22/23. Minimum stipend: £16,722**  
ExCo previously already agreed to allocate an additional £660 to UKRI-funded students to help with the cost of the living crisis and to help with the retention of top talent who may be

experiencing financial pressures in the current climate. The amount has also been agreed in principle by the BEIS Secretary of State and HMT officials.

- 3.5. There is a reputational risk with this option, as it does not match inflation. Communications report that the issue of students and inflation continues to dominate social media for UKRI, and is being increasingly picked up upon by sector and national press. As well as students, there are many colleagues in HEIs – at all levels of seniority – who have expressed concern over the stipend level. This option is likely to leave this issue largely unmitigated and we can expect continued pressure on the point, and stipends more generally, in the future.

#### **4. Financial implications**

##### Affordability

- 4.1. The analysis in this paper provides an estimate of the maximum cost of the two options. This does not take into account funding from co-funders and is based on a general analysis across UKRI. The totals in this paper are therefore likely to represent the maximum cost to UKRI, and the 'true' cost is likely to be lower.
- 4.2. Allocations from UKRI's Spending Review settlement did not take into account the potential impact of current projections of inflation on stipend costs. This means that even if we did not go with option 1 or 2, if we were to fully account for the impacts of inflation in setting stipend levels from next year, this would still create a pressure on Collective Talent budgets of up to £50m by 24/25.

##### Analysis of affordability of options 1 and 2

- 4.3. In 2022/23, the c. £20m cost of option 1 and c. £10m cost of option 2 are affordable since UKRI Executive Committee and BEIS SoS agreed for £20m from the additional £104m allocated to UKRI to be used for the stipend intervention.
- 4.4. In 2023/24, the c. £55m cost of option 1 and the c. £30m cost of option 2 are not affordable within current budgets without a reduction of other budgets in the Collective Talent Funding or a significant reduction in student numbers. UKRI is currently over-profiled at £277m or 3.2%. To keep within the 3.5% over-profiling limit agreed by BEIS, the most UKRI could commit to while keeping within our limit is c. £15m. Assuming use of this £15m, this means a further £40m (option 1) or £15m (option 2) would be needed.
- 4.5. In 2024/25, the c. £75m cost of option 1 and c. £50m cost of option 2 are also not affordable within current budgets without a reduction of other budgets in the Collective Talent Funding or a reduction in student numbers. UKRI is at its 3.5% over-profile limit in this year.

Options available to fund options 1 and 2 in 2023/24 and 2024/25

- 4.6. UKRI will either need to re-prioritise funding in the Collective Talent Funding i.e. reduce studentship/fellowship numbers or re-prioritise funding from other parts of UKRI's budget.
- a) Reprioritise Collective Talent Funding. The majority of funding within the Collective Talent Funding supports studentships and fellowships. The potential scale of change in student numbers is set out in the analysis below. Noting that there is not a straightforward relationship between the amount of funding provided by UKRI and the number of UKRI doctoral students supported. [...] Alternatively, UKRI could reduce fellowship numbers to keep costs within the overall Collective Talent Funding budget of £2bn over the SR period.
- b) Reprioritising wider existing budgets: UKRI Executive Committee could agree to reprioritising funding either from Council core baselines or from uncommitted strategic programmes in order to fund the shortfall:
- Core research budgets in 2023/24 and 2024/25 total £5.4bn and £5.6bn respectively, and so the impact would be up 0.3%-0.7% in 2023/24 and 0.9%-1.3% in 2024/25.
  - Revisit allocations advice for cross-cutting programmes, - noting potential objections from BEIS or HMT.
- 4.7. We could seek to agree an increased over-profile limit for UKRI, from BEIS. This would mean going up to 3.6%-3.8% in 2023/24 and 4.1%-4.4% in 2024/25. BEIS may be concerned at the level of risk this would expose BEIS-UKRI to and would want to know how we would manage this risk down. As this may also take some to approve, ExCo would also need to be content with the reprioritisation options in a) and b) to fund the uplift in the first instance.

Analysis of costs and student numbers

- 4.8. Tables 1 & 2 below set out estimated additional costs associated with two levels of stipend uplift. Additional costs are estimated against the assumed costs planned by Councils based on projected stipend levels they received in February 2022. Table 3 shows the estimated number of overall studentships that we estimate can be supported if additional costs cannot be covered from elsewhere. However there is not a straightforward relationship between the amount of funded provided by UKRI and the number of UKRI students supported.
- 4.9. Stipend cost estimates assume that UKRI wholly funds all UKRI students, we know that this is not the case with c.40% of all studentships co-funded in some way. Therefore these figures reflect a maximum cost scenario. There is further uncertainty in these estimates as the cost baselines reflect a simplified calculation to assess overall studentship costs rather than using Councils' actual planning forecasts.
- 4.10. Caution is required when interpreting the potential impact on student numbers. As most ROs choose how to manage their own training grants, they may recruit more students than UKRI notionally fund. Actual changes in studentship numbers will depend on how ROs

choose to manage any additional stipend costs and cannot be assumed to have a direct relationship with funding.



Table 1: Option 1 financial implications.

Estimated impacts of a 1606 increase to the stipend	Projected stipend level (Academic year) <sup>2</sup>	Estimated annual additional stipend cost above planning forecasts to maintain current numbers (Financial year, £m, rounded to nearest £5m)	Estimated annual additional stipend cost above business as usual to maintain current numbers (Financial year, £m, rounded to nearest £5m)
2022-23	£17,668	20	20
2023-24	£19,347	55	40
2024-25	£19,734	75	25
2025-26	£19,891	70	5
<b>Total</b>		220	90

2- All future stipend levels are forecast using 12-month Bank of England CPI forecasts for Q3 published in its August 2022 Monetary Policy Report. As forecasts, they are subject to change. The Bank of England forecasts for 2023 are currently higher than other forecasters and there is a wide variance in forecasts for the twelve months to the end of 2023.

Table 2: Option 2 financial implications

Estimated impacts of a £660 increase to the stipend	Projected stipend level (Academic year) <sup>2</sup>	Estimated annual additional stipend cost above planning forecasts to maintain current numbers (Financial year, £m, rounded to nearest £5m)	Estimated annual additional stipend cost above business as usual to maintain current numbers (Financial year, £m, rounded to nearest £5m)
2022-23	£16,722	10	10
2023-24	£17,717	25	10
2024-25	£19,401	50	<5
2025-26	£19,789	65	<5
<b>Total</b>		150	25

1 - Reductions in studentships have not been calculated for 2022-23 as ROs have already recruited for the year. In future years, ROs may choose to manage reductions in studentships in ways which limit the numbers projected here but not all will have that capacity.

2- All future stipend levels are forecast using 12-month Bank of England CPI forecasts for Q3 published in its August 2022 Monetary Policy Report. As forecasts, they are subject to change. The Bank of England forecasts for 2023 are currently higher than other forecasters and there is a wide variance in forecasts for the twelve months to the end of 2023.

Table 3: Total full-funded year studentships supported under different stipend options<sup>1</sup>

Academic year	Under Council planning assumptions	Under 'Business as Usual' with no	Under option 1 with a 1606 increase on the BAU 2022-23 stipend	Under option 2 with a £660 increase on the
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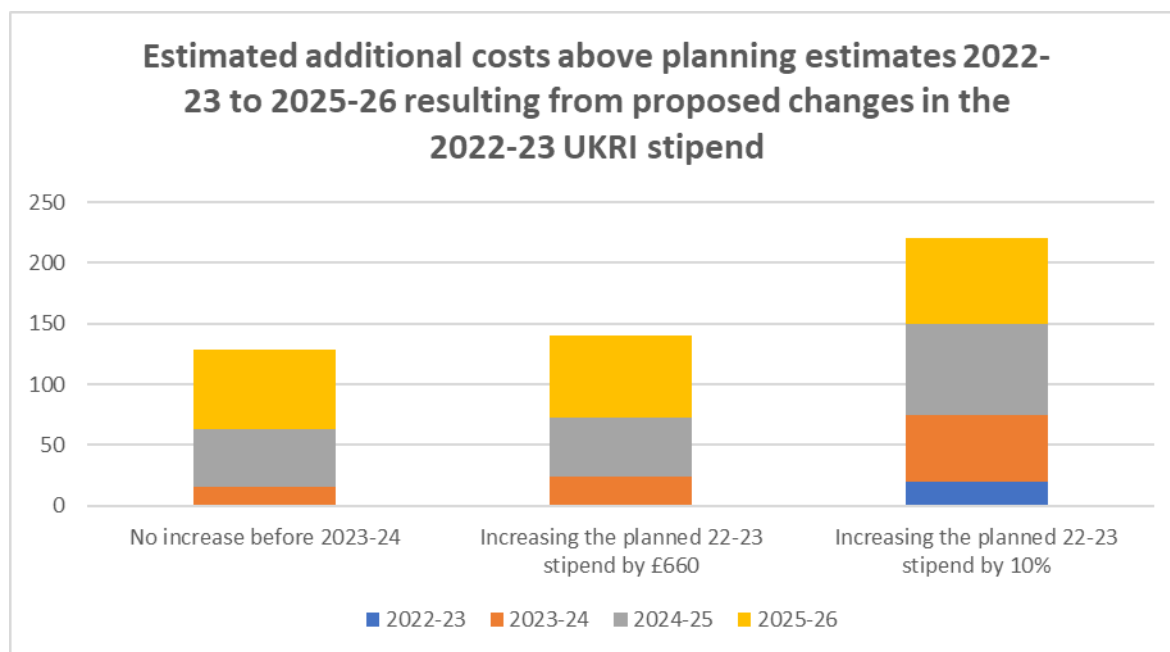
		change until 2023-24		BAU 2022-23 stipend
2022-23	24,200	2	2	2
2023-24	24,200	22,800	21,200	22,700
2024-25	24,200	21,500	21,200	21,500
2025-26	24,200	21,500	21,400	21,500

1 – Figures are based on full-funded studentship years rather than individual studentships held.

2 - Reductions in studentships have not been calculated for 2022-23 as ROs have already recruited for the year. In future years, ROs may choose to manage reductions in studentships in ways which limit the numbers projected here but not all will have that capacity.

- 4.11. Figure 2 describes the overall estimated additional costs resulting from different changes to the stipend against our estimates of Councils' planned stipend spend. All possible scenarios carry significant additional costs as we believe planning estimates were based on inflation forecasts pre-dating the current inflationary pressures. This only models costs to the end of the 2025-26 financial year in line with the suggested stipend levels Councils received in February 2022.

**Figure 2:**



## 5. Risks

### Overall risks

- 5.1. If we have to use Collective Talent Funding to support the uprating in stipend, then we may need to consider reducing student numbers in future years – estimates range from 1,900 to

3,000 fewer students across all UKRI stock per annum (see Tables 1 and 2). This could impact upon CDT/DTP ability to recruit top talent. However, this risk is offset by the need to increase stipend levels now to retain talented researchers and innovators who are in the middle of/are about to commence their doctoral studies. Both perspectives have implications for equality, diversity and inclusion (e.g. supporting and retaining talent who have no other financial backing).

- 5.2. As part of the response to the New Deal Call for Input, stakeholders indicated that, in the event of fiscal constraints, prioritisation should be in the adequate resourcing and training of students, over student numbers (see Annex A for further information on ongoing engagement with the sector).
- 5.3. Inflation may change prior to formal publication of a stipend increase. Any change to the student stipend level may still be perceived as inadequate if the cost of living continues to increase. This risk is somewhat mitigated by Option 1 (our preferred option) which takes into account inflation forecasts until December 2022. Conversely, inflation may fall, resulting in a UKRI-students receiving a minimum stipend above inflation rates.
- 5.4. As the largest single funder of doctoral students in the UK, UKRI's minimum stipend is often used by other funders of doctoral research (e.g. universities) to benchmark their own funding offer. Any increase to UKRI's stipend will therefore have financial implications for these organisations, as they are likely to increase their funding offer in line with UKRI's minimum stipend.
- 5.5. An in-year increase to the minimum stipend may set a precedent for future years. Changes to the stipend as a response to increasing inflation runs the risk of locking in our methodology for calculating stipend rates in future years. However, we will seek to mitigate this risk as part of our work on the New Deal. We will review how we set the minimum stipend and consider whether linking it to inflation is the most appropriate approach. We intend to bring this work to ExCo by January 2023 and have publicly committed to updating on this work by Spring 2023.
- 5.6. The pressures from inflation do not only fall on cost of living – cost of research pressures will need to be considered in the round across the whole portfolio before reopening allocations.
- 5.7. The pressures from inflation on the economy and cost of living may lead the new PM and cabinet to reopen some or all of the SR settlement, making allocated resource in Y3 or even Y2 moot.
- 5.8. Horizon Europe provides some support for doctoral training, though it is no substitute for UKRI's main PhD support. Association with HEU remains preferred option but in the even of non-association the cost-of-living crisis may put pressure on the resources earmarked for Top Talent including replacement of access to MSCAs.

Option 1 risks – increase the minimum stipend by £1606 (10%) for AY 2022/23

- 5.9. A 10% increase in the minimum stipend has the potential to introduce pressures on other UKRI budgets. We may also need to consider reducing future student numbers to afford the proposed increase (see para 4.1). As outlined in Table 1, a worst-case scenario would see student numbers decrease by approx. 3,000 in 23/24 and 24/25, and by 2,800 in 25/26.
- 5.10. UKRI grant holders recruit around 5,500 to 6,000 students a year. If all costs were absorbed by a reduction in new starts, it would be equivalent to reducing recruitment of students by approximately half in a single year.

Option 2 risks – increase minimum stipend by £660 (4.1%) for AY 2022/23

- 5.11. This approach would only partially address the increase to the cost-of-living given that the uprated stipend does not keep in line with current rates of inflation; therefore, we consider this option to have the highest degree of reputational risk for UKRI. The community may perceive this approach 'delaying the inevitable', given that we anticipate a higher increase in our funding offer in AY 2023/24.
- 5.12. As with option 2, a £660 increase in the stipend also has the potential to introduce pressures on other UKRI budgets and we may also need to consider reducing student numbers to afford the proposed increase. As outlined in Table 2, a worst-case scenario would see full-year funded studentships decrease from around 24,200 in 2022-23 to 21,500 in 2024-25.
- 5.13. There is considerable reputational risk with this option, as it leaves the increase the inflation well below the minimum stipend. With considerable interest from stakeholders, social media, as well as sector and national press, the option is likely to leave the issue open to attracting further negative press.

## **6. Other Implications**

- 6.1. Equality, diversity and inclusion. Feedback from ROs indicates that some students are already responding the rise in the cost of living in a variety of ways, including increasing the amount of paid work they take on (at the expense of time dedicated to their doctorate), through commercial loans, through support from parents, and contemplating leaving their programme. Evidence collected in responses to our Call for Input on the New Deal for PGR indicates that many students have no access to additional work, finance or parental support, examples including people with dependents or people from certain socio-economic backgrounds. These groups are more likely to be dependent on the stipend for their entire income and more adversely effected by the rise in the cost of living.
- 6.2. Reducing student numbers may also have an impact on EDI, for example, if reducing the total number of students leads ROs to focus recruitment on less diverse groups. However, this has not been fully assessed. Work on the New Deal is focussing on access and routes in to postgraduate research, which will allow us to better assess potential, and how these balance against students from diverse backgrounds not entering or exiting PGR because of low stipend and other factors.

## **7. Conflicts of interest**

- 7.1. [REDACTED] has two family members who are in receipt of a UKRI stipend. [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] has a family member in receipt of a UKRI stipend.

## Annex A

### Sector feedback

1. The topic has been dominating UKRI's social media feeds since about June, for example, a tweet on August 22nd having 1, 239 retweets in under 24 hours. We have seen a sustained level of tweeting about stipends over the last few months. There are often increases in activity (and mentions of UKRI) when things such as increases in inflation rates and energy price caps are mentioned in the media.
2. The strength of feeling in the community is evident in the notable increase in emails received on this topic over recent months. For example, looking at just the UKRI CEO email inbox, they received six emails on this topic in July-August 2022, whilst they received no more than two emails in the whole of 2021. The EPSRC student mailbox received 19 emails on the topic of stipends from February to August 2022, with receipt of such emails becoming more frequent as time progressed. No emails were received on this topic from August 2021 until February 2022 (emails before August 2021 cannot be accessed). These come from multiple sources and perspectives- from student groups, grant managers, DTPs, individual PGR students, etc- and outline the challenges of meeting the rising cost of living on the current UKRI stipend.
3. Feedback from the Press team has highlighted that the topic of PhD stipends is very much a 'live' issue. On Tuesday 25<sup>th</sup> August, colleagues highlighted that:
  - a. The issue of stipends and the impact of cost of living on PhDs has been covered across the national media including The Guardian, The Times and The Telegraph. We are aware of continued interest of the impact of inflation/energy prices on research students.
  - b. More detailed coverage on stipends and UKRI role and intervention has been covered by the sector press and The Guardian.
  - c. We have seen a sustained level of tweeting about stipends over the last few months. There are often increases in activity (and mentions of UKRI) when things such as increases in inflation rates and energy price caps are mentioned in the media.
  - d. The last two days have seen a big increase in the number of tweets mentioning UKRI in relation to stipends. Much of this activity has been sparked by a tweet sharing the emotional impact of the cost of living. This tweet had over 1,200 retweets and over 3,700 likes in less than 24-hours and has stimulated a lot of debate and comment, which is largely critical of UKRI.
  - e. Other recent tweets tagging UKRI have mentioned yesterday's inflation rate forecasts, UKRI's 'silence' and frustration generally that UKRI don't seem to be doing anything.
  - f. We anticipate increased media coverage of this issue in coming weeks both as part of the national coverage of inflation and energy cap increases and more detailed questions on our intervention from sector press. We anticipate increased social media engagements with direct questions to UKRI.

### Ongoing engagement

4. UKRI has significant influence over the stipend level paid to UK-based students, irrespective of funder. For university funded students in particular, the UKRI minimum is often the benchmark stipend rate. As part of both the work on the New Deal and the short-term support for students, we reached out to senior representatives across the sector. External stakeholders indicated that we 'should go further' with our financial support. Concerns range from students not being able to complete their studies to universities being able to recruit top international talent.
5. One HEI was already considering taking action themselves and felt the £660 was something they could do within existing graduate school budgets. A third Russell Group member independently suggested £500 but felt £660 was reasonable. We also spoke to some smaller HEIs, all of whom agreed with the one-off payment as a minimum. In some institutions there is a little nervousness about increasing the stipend because of the future impact on student numbers, but none actively raised concerns about existing budget constraints. UKRI has also received correspondence from within the sector. One recent letter received 8,000 signatures.
6. Another letter, sent to a number of Executive Chairs by academics at the University of Strathclyde noted that "Many PhD students are now taking second (sometimes third) jobs, with knock on implications for their ability to complete high quality research within the funded period. By winter 2022, a £16k a year stipend is likely to only just cover rent and energy costs. Rough calculations suggest students will be left with about £50 a week to pay / for everything else (food, clothing, all other bills, emergency costs).
7. In submissions to the New Deal 'Call for Input' (a cross-sector consultation exercise, which invited the research and innovation community to submit evidence to inform our thinking around the New Deal), the Russell Group (which recruits some 80% of UKRI-funded doctoral students) noted that if fiscal constraints required prioritisation, they would support adequate stipend numbers before growth (response from the Russell Group).
8. The recent review of EPSRC-funded Doctoral Education made the following recommendation (number 11) *"EPSRC should prioritise funding excellent doctoral experiences and access to opportunities over student numbers, while ensuring value for money."*