



[REDACTED]

19 December 2024

Dear [REDACTED],

Freedom of Information request: FOI2024/01108

Thank you for your Freedom of Information request received on the 20 November in which you requested the following:

Your request:

What modelling was done in the lead up to the Sept 2022 announcement of a 10% increase in PhD stipends from 2022-23, regarding the impact the raise would have on the number of students UKRI could fund?

<https://www.ukri.org/news/ukri-increasing-the-minimum-stipend-from-1-october-2022/>

Similarly, what modelling was done in the lead up to the May 2023 announcement of a further increase in PhD stipends from 2023-24, regarding the impact the raise would have on the number of students UKRI could fund?

<https://www.ukri.org/news/ukri-publishes-stipend-and-postgraduate-research-consultation/>

Please provide any papers prepared for the UKRI Executive Committee and UKRI Board on these matters.

Our response:

I can confirm that UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) holds information relevant to your request. Please see the information below and attached.

The attached papers (1-7) were prepared for the UKRI Executive Committee in relation to the September 2022 and May 2023 increases in the UKRI minimum stipend, paid by research organisations to UKRI funded PhD students. Document (8) is a memo to the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT), displaying final modelling on the impact of the 2023 uplift. These documents focus on the input given into the decision-making process and provide a full narrative that includes details of the modelling undertaken:

2022-23 Increase

1. FOI2024_01108 (1) Contingency plan to support UKRI-funded PGR students - Aug 2022_Redacted
2. FOI2024_01108 (2) In-year further uprating of the UKRI doctoral stipend - Aug 2022_Redacted
3. FOI2024_01108 (3) Affordability of the UKRI doctoral stipend uplift - Sep 2022_Redacted
4. FOI2024_01108 (4) Distribution of 2022-23 stipend uplift pressure - Nov 2022_Redacted

The decision was made by the UKRI Executive Committee to allocate resources in order to mitigate a potential reduction in student numbers that could be caused by the uplift applied to the student stipends in academic year (AY) 2022/23. Though not stated in the papers, all Research Councils subsequently reallocated funding to avoid reducing student numbers as a result of this stipend decision¹.

2023-24 Increase

5. FOI2024_01108 (5) Financial Support for Students - Dec 2022
6. FOI2024_01108 (6) UKRI minimum stipend for academic year 2023-24 - Jan 2023_Redacted*
7. FOI2024_01108 (7) UKRI minimum stipend for academic year 2023-24 - Mar 2023_Redacted

¹ Councils may independently change studentship funding for other reasons, for example: [Update on AHRC future doctoral provision – UKRI](#)

8. FOI2024_01108 (8) UKRI minimum stipend - Apr 2023_Redacted

* Please note that all information in Annex 3 of document (6), is contained in document (5) Financial Support for Students – Dec 2022

The papers make reference to consultations with government. These were either (a) due to additional funding being allocated to UKRI, contingent on the government's approval or (b) a requirement for HM Treasury approval for matters deemed to be novel, contentious or repercussive.

In this context, UKRI received advice from the Chief Secretary to the Treasury (CST) regarding the stipend uplift for 2023/24. This resulted in the UKRI Executive Committee agreeing to a lower increase to the minimum UKRI stipend for AY 2023/24 than originally recommended but meant that the stipend increase was achieved without the need to reduce student numbers, as had been proposed originally.

We note that your request relates to the modelling of student numbers. Any modelling is against planned spend. While student starts are below the peak of 2017/18 and 2018/19, (in which years funding from the National Productivity Investment Fund (NPIF) temporarily increased recruitment by around 1000 then 700 students respectively) the numbers are broadly consistent with the trajectory of research councils' core budgets as set at the 2015 Spending Review.

Student numbers also should be read in the context of our response to the COVID-19 pandemic which extended some studentships, meaning slightly inflated total numbers where students who would normally have completed had instead received a covid-related extension. To date we have used flexibility available to us in our budget to prioritise funding for stipends, meaning we do not presently believe that the stipend increases have had a material impact on the number of students directly funded by UKRI in the period 2022-2024. Financial pressures on Research Organisations and other funders may have led to some change in the number of students they fund, whether in their own right or with UKRI co-funding. For more information on UKRI's budget, see the [UKRI budget explainer](#)².

We are exempting the names of individuals in these documents under section 40(2) of the FOIA. Disclosing this information would contravene the first Data Protection Principle as defined under Section 86 of the Data Protection Act 2018 and Article 5 of UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR).

Section 40(2) is an absolute exemption and does not require a public interest test.

No relevant papers are held on this matter for the UKRI Board.

If you have any queries regarding our response please do let us know. If you are dissatisfied with the handling of your request, you have the right to ask for an internal review, explaining which elements of this decision you disagree with and why. Internal review requests should be submitted within 40 working days of the date of our response and should be addressed to:

Head of Information Governance

Email: foi@ukri.org

Please quote the reference number above in any future communications.

If you are still not content with the outcome of the internal review, you may apply to refer the matter to the Information Commissioner for a decision. Generally, the ICO cannot make a decision unless you have exhausted the review procedure provided by UKRI. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at: www.ico.org.uk.

If you wish to raise a complaint regarding the service you have received or the conduct of any UKRI staff in relation to your request, please see [UKRI's complaints procedure](#)³.

Yours sincerely,

² <https://www.ukri.org/publications/ukri-budget-allocation-explainers/>

³ <https://www.ukri.org/who-we-are/contact-us/make-a-complaint/#skipnav-target>


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