

## RESEARCH CAREERS NETWORK

5 September 2017

### ANNUAL STIPEND UPLIFT; LONDON WEIGHTING AND TUITION FEES

#### Background:

- When the Operations Oversight Board (OOB) agreed the indicative fee and stipend level for 2016/17 it was suggested that a longer term strategy be put in place to avoid signing them off each year.
- RCN prepared a paper for OOB in December 2016, asking that RCN are given delegated authority to increase indicative fee and minimum stipend rates on an annual basis by the current GDP deflator rate and to use the predicted GDP deflators to provide a forecast of indicative fee and stipend rates for the next 4 years.
- At the June RCN meeting, [REDACTED] confirmed that the Operations Oversight Board (OOB) would require a paper from RCN around October / November, detailing the requirements of the uplift. This will then be forwarded to the Finance Directors Network (FDN) and may require final sign off from OOB or the Shadow UKRI Design and Delivery Board as the funding will run past 01 April 2018.
- Since that meeting and due to the transition to UKRI in April 2018, [REDACTED] from EPSRC, [REDACTED] has suggested that there are a number of groups that would need sight of the proposed uplift.
- It was agreed that this item should be brought back for discussion at the September meeting, along with the London Weighting item.
- Discussions on Tuition Fees would also be discussed, as although the process for the placements this year had been resolved, the RCUK Terms and Conditions may still need to be amended.
- This paper gives information on all three areas along with some discussion / action points for the network,

#### Action:

- RCN members are asked to:
  - REVIEW** the proposed timeline and information paper relating to the annual stipend uplift
  - DISCUSS** the questions posed on the London Weighting item

**DISCUSS** the proposed changes to the RCUK Training Grant Guidance on tuition fees

**Further information:**

Contact: [REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED]

**Annual Stipend Uplift**

On further investigation, due to the transition to UKRI from the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2018, the process for approving the uplift to the 2018/19 indicative fee and stipend levels will need to be amended.

It has been noted that a number of the cross council boards would need sight of the new rates before ultimately, recommendations are made to the UKRI Design and Delivery Sub-Board for approval, rather than OOB as in previous years.

The plan is submit an information paper on the proposed new rates and process to the following groups:

- RISAB – Information paper for 13<sup>th</sup> September meeting
- OOB – Information paper for the 4<sup>th</sup> October meeting
- FDN – Information paper for 9<sup>th</sup> October meeting
- RCN – Discussion on any feedback received so far at the 10<sup>th</sup> October meeting
- UKRI Design and Delivery Sub-Board – Information paper for 12<sup>th</sup> October meeting
- RCN – Review of final recommendation paper at 14<sup>th</sup> November meeting

Feedback from all of the meetings will be collated, with a final recommendation paper being submitted to the UKRI Design and Delivery Sub-Board meeting for approval at the 4<sup>th</sup> December meeting.

The draft information paper is attached (**RCN 17-38a**) and members are asked to comment on this.

**London Weighting**

At the March meeting RCN considered the Research Councils' current policies with respect to London weighting as feedback that the level of London weighting may not be aligned with that provided by other funders had been received. The reasoning for applying this weighting only to London and not to other 'expensive' cities had also been questioned.

Whilst providing this indexation may bring London Weighting in line with other aspects of studentship funding that relate to living standards, it provides London students with further funding, increasing the gap between funding received in London and the rest of the UK. In addition, the following questions remain:

- Does the need for London weighting remain?
- Is the uplift provided for London weighting is appropriate?
- Should London weighting should be applied to other 'expensive' cities and if so on what basis?
- Should 'London' weighting be provided for those undertaking a placement in London (or another 'expensive' city)?
- Are Research Council PhD Students in London institutions are receiving the same amount of London weighting as academics and professional services staff? If not, should they be?
- The financial implications of any changes to the London weighting system.
- Is there potential to harmonise further on our approach (the method of payment currently differs between Councils)?

The evidence provided in the paper indicated that the funding for London weighting was comparable with that offered by other funders.

RCN members noted that although stipends increase annually in line with the cost of living, the element of funding for London Weighting does not. RCN considered there to be rationale to increase the amounts for London weighting in line with inflation in the future, alongside the annual stipend uplifts. This change would not be made retrospectively; any uplift would commence from the next academic year.

RCN requested that the financial implications of these potential funding changes be calculated and circulated to the group.

A calculator for estimating additional costs, can be found in the attached excel spreadsheet (**RCN 17-38b**). Essentially, for one student starting their PhD in October 2018 additional costs would be as follows:

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Annual GDP deflator	1.56%	1.66%	1.88%	1.92%	1.92%
Cumulative GDP deflator	101.56	103.25	105.19	107.21	109.26
Inflated LWA					
Oct 18 - Mar 19	1,015.60				
2019/20		2,064.92			
2020/21			2,103.74		
2021/22				2,144.13	
Apr 22 - Sep 22					1,092.65
Total cost for all students	1,015.60	2,064.92	2,103.74	2,144.13	1,092.65
Additional cost for all students	15.60	64.92	103.74	144.13	92.65

Whilst the financial implications of indexing London weighting are small for one student, for a larger cohort of 50, the figures are as follows:

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Annual GDP deflator	1.56%	1.66%	1.88%	1.92%	1.92%
Cumulative GDP deflator	101.56	103.25	105.19	107.21	109.26
Inflated LWA					
Oct 18 - Mar 19	1,015.60				
2019/20		2,064.92			
2020/21			2,103.74		
2021/22				2,144.13	
Apr 22 - Sep 22					1,092.65
Total cost for all students	50,780.00	103,245.90	105,186.92	107,206.51	54,632.44
Additional cost for all students	780.00	3,245.90	5,186.92	7,206.51	4,632.44

### Tuition Fees:

At the RCN meeting on the 16<sup>th</sup> May 2017, ■■■ highlighted the proposal that tuition fees would not be paid for PhD students during the period in which they participated in the RCUK Policy Fellowship Scheme.

RCN discussed the Councils' various policies in regards to the payment of tuition fees during internship activities. It was noted that the majority of Councils continue to pay tuition fees during internships undertaken by PhD students.

The majority consensus was that the Councils should still pay tuition fees during PhD internships, so that the students continue to have access to their supervisors and required facilities.

In light of this, it has been noted that some changes to the RCUK Training grant guide may be needed.

### The current wording states:

*71. 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.*

Next steps:

RCN are asked for comments and feedback on whether this text needs to amended?