

## RESEARCH CAREERS NETWORK

14 March 2017

### LONDON WEIGHTING

#### Purpose:

The Research Councils have received some feedback that the level of London weighting may not be aligned with that provided by other funders. The reasoning for applying this weighting only to London and not to other 'expensive' cities has also been questioned. The provision of London Weighting has not been reviewed by the Research Councils in recent years.

This paper considers the Research Councils' current policies with respect to London weighting and potential next steps.

#### Action:

##### RCN is asked to agree;

- 1) Our position on London weighting is appropriate and requires no further investigation **OR**
- 2) Our position to need further investigation to determine whether:
  - The need for London weighting remains.
  - The uplift provided for London weighting is appropriate.
  - London weighting should be applied to other 'expensive' cities and if so have a clear rationale.
  - London weighting should be provided for those undertaking a placement in London (or another 'expensive' city).
  - 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.
  - Whether there is potential to harmonise further on our approach (the method of payment currently differs between Councils).

#### Background:

##### *For Research Council Studentships*

London weighting is available to students studying at a London-based Research Organisation. This is administered in line with the Conditions of RCUK Training Grants where, to be eligible for London Allowance, a student must undertake the majority of their studentship within an eligible London location, usually whilst based at a London institution (within the Metropolitan Police District or be based at Imperial College, Silwood Park or Brunel) for a minimum continuous period of 12 months.

A student undertaking a temporary placement in London as part of their PhD would not be eligible for London Allowance.

The Research Councils currently offer £2000 p.a. for London Allowance and, as this is a supplement to the stipend, is not available to fees-only studentships. This is tax and National Insurance exempt.

London Allowance is not awarded retrospectively and additional costs incurred relating to London Allowance are managed by the Research Organisation, using the flexibilities within the training grants.

Research Organisations are encouraged to use the flexibilities within the Training Grant to support students appropriately e.g. to take into account location or discipline. Where London Weighting is explicitly included within the Training Grant, it must be passed on to the student.

#### *For Research Council Grants*

For research grants, salaries are set by the institution, and are agreed locally to reflect supply and demand. As such the Research Councils don't inflate separately.

#### **What do other Funders offer?**

*Alzheimer's Society* – Funding of up to £85,000 is provided for up to three years and includes a stipend (£15,000–£16,000 per year), university PhD fees at EU rates, consumables & equipment, and conference dissemination support. A London weighting uplift of £2000 p.a. has been added to PhD studentships from October 2015, raising the award total to £91k for London-based applications.

The *Wellcome Trust* provides London weighting as follows:

	Inside London	Outside London	Difference
Year 1	£22,278	£19,919	£2359
Year 2	£24,093	£21,542	£2551
Year 3	£26,057	£23,298	£2759
Year 4	£26,839	£23,997	£2842

*University of London* – The Universities significantly increased their London Weighting offer for academic and professional services staff in December 2014. As a result, London Weighting has increased to £3500 p.a. in annual stages from 1 August 2014 to 1 August 2018 as follows:

01/08/2014 – £2407

01/08/2015 – £2680

01/08/2016 – £2954

01/08/2017 – £3227

01/08/2018 – £3500

#### **Considerations:**

A brief comparison (Unison, NUMBEO) of living costs between London and other UK cities, suggests that the provision of London weighting is still valid (see table 1). To establish whether the level of uplift provided by the Research Councils is appropriate, whether it should be applied to other cities, and if so to which ones, would require further analysis.

As training grant award holders are given a level of flexibility in how they use the funding allocated to them, they are able to pay above the minimum stipend if they see a need to do so. This system allows training grant award holders to decide if they need to top up a stipend or pay extra T&S if a student is spending time with a collaborator in London:

'Where a student is eligible for a stipend, the stipend awarded must be at least equal to the Research Councils' minimum rates for the relevant academic year. The Research Organisation may, if it wishes, pay a higher level of stipend, provided that it does not overspend the value of the Training Grant'.

It may be appropriate to remind award holders of the flexibility available to them with regards to stipends.

Anecdotally, I have asked about London weighting during DTP evaluation visits and an issue with the stipend not meeting the cost of living has not been raised or seen as a problem.

**Table 1: Comparison of living costs between London and other UK cities (NUMBEO)**

City	% difference in rental price between London and x city	Increase in overall cost between London and x city
Southampton	133	+ 1696.36/62%
Cardiff	188	+ 1813.99/67%
Manchester	152	+1667.03/57%
Oxford	44	+912.41/25%
Cambridge	75	+ 1090.44/32%
Edinburgh	126	+ 1404.94/45%
Birmingham	169	+ 1777.25/66%
Sheffield	201	+ 1832.05/70%
Aberdeen	130	+ 1331.71/43%