

Research Training and Support Grant (RTSG) Guidance Notes 2022-23

Quick glance

- Support for expenses specific to a student's research and training
- Pre-approval for all costs is required via application form
- Grants would not normally exceed £3,000 in total per student over the life of the award
- Value for money must be demonstrated and low-cost options explored
- Applications must be supported by supervisor
- Activities must take place during the funded period
- The DTP holds some small items of equipment which can be borrowed eg. Tape recorders. Please check on availability before applying for new equipment.

Overview

The Research Training Support Grant (RTSG) is a flexible fund to which students can apply for reimbursement for research-related expenses. The grant is intended to provide support for expenses specific to a student's research and training, such as:

- UK fieldwork expenses
- attendance at conferences and summer schools
- language training courses, usually undertaken in the UK prior to an overseas fieldwork trip
- fieldwork expenses such as interpreters, guides, assistants, gifts for local informants
- survey costs, e.g. printing, stationery, telephone calls
- purchase of small items of equipment for example, cameras, recorders, films
- books and other reading material not available through libraries

The ESRC expects that value for money will be demonstrated in the use of public funds for RTSG. Students must therefore ensure that they investigate any relevant costs, such as travel and accommodation, and identify low-cost options.

Students are expected to plan their expenditure, in communication with their supervisor, in order to make the best use of available funds. There are no individual allowances, however students would not normally be granted more than £3000 over the period of their award. This is a guide and should not be seen as a target.

Any requests for total funds over this limit will be dealt with on an individual basis and require a strong business case demonstrating overall planning of expenditure over the course of the award, and that costs are deemed necessary to carry out research. For example, applications are unlikely to be approved where funds are requested due to attendance at multiple conferences. Students may apply once for a grant that would bring the total of RTSG awarded over £3000. Flexibility will be shown where students have unavoidably high UK fieldwork expenses.

Masters students may apply for RTSG if the expenditure is considered to be essential to the PhD project. They are not expected to attend conferences during the taught phase of their studies, however support may be provided if presenting at a conference just before the start of the doctorate.

Applications cannot be considered for activity occurring during a period of suspension.

Overseas visits must not be undertaken if the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) advises against visiting the country concerned, and cannot be funded through the DTP. Further guidance can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice>. If you are considering applying for travel costs, you must discuss with the relevant safety office before making plans and review options for travel insurance through the University..

Application Process

Students must submit an application prior to the activity taking place and usually before the costs are incurred. Please apply at least **4 weeks** in advance of either when you will need to make payments or the start of the activity (whichever is earlier), using the funding application form available on the DTP website.

Note that the DTP Office will aim to review applications within two weeks of receipt of a complete application including all supporting documentation.

In cases where an opportunity has arisen at short notice or it has not been possible to apply earlier than the usual 4 week timeframe, it is still possible to contact the relevant DTP Office to discuss an application (provided this in advance of the activity).

If you choose to incur costs before submitting an application, please note that it is not guaranteed that these will be reimbursed.

You can apply for multiple expenses in the same application and to more than one scheme, e.g. it may be simplest to apply for both OFE and RTSG at the same time. When considering applications, the DTP will consider that funds are limited and intended to provide support across the entire cohort.

Cost Estimates

Make sure to read the guidance provided in the next section on expense type before submitting your application.

You will be asked to provide estimates for your expenses, explain how they have been determined, and are cost effective. Please attach supporting evidence of costs where possible, including comparisons for expenses such as accommodation and flights (screenshots of comparison webpages are sufficient). If you have not chosen the cheapest options, please ensure you explain the reason for this in your application. It is understood that there will be some cases where it is only possible to provide general estimates of costs, such as for expenses related to fieldwork.

If you believe your expenses may vary from what was initially detailed in your approval please contact your DTP institution as soon as possible to discuss this. The approved amount may be able to be adjusted to accommodate higher costs, but this will contribute towards the estimated £3000 maximum we would expect a student to utilise over the course of their award. This will also avoid delays during the claims procedure if we are aware of any changes to the expected costs...

Approved expenses will normally be reimbursed after the activity has taken place, when you will be asked to submit original receipts, proof of attendance for conferences and training, and any other additional financial information required (e.g. details on exchange rates). All reimbursements must be settled **within 3** months of the activity taking place, as per the relevant finance process at your home institution. Please contact your local DTP office if you have concerns about the timeframe.

For large expenses, students may be able to request advance payment if they need the funds to make bookings, and normally this would be at most 75% of the anticipated expenditure. If you wish to request an advance, please highlight this when you submit your RTSG application.

Expenses that cannot be supported

- Costs that all students might be expected to incur, e.g. laptops; general stationery expenses such as photocopying, printing and binding costs; travel costs related to attending University courses or supervisor meetings.
- Food / drinks / subsistence
- Purchasing vehicles
- Membership of societies / organisations (unless membership of a society / organisation is mandatory for conference attendance)
- Journal subscriptions / submissions
- Activity which takes place after the funded period of the award, even if booked and paid before the funding end date

- Items which provide a personal benefit beyond the specific activity, even if these are more cost effective e.g. weekly or monthly travel passes, student rail cards, visas for lengthy periods, access to platforms such as Dropbox
- Training which all students on a course are required to complete.

Guidance per expense type

The following provides an overview and guidelines for the most common types of expenses supported under RTSG. If the costs for a specific type of expense or activity are high, the DTP may make a contribution rather than cover the full amount.

Travel and accommodation

Travel must not be undertaken if the UK Government or Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) advises against visiting the area or country concerned, and cannot be funded through the DTP. Further guidance from the FCDO can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice>. If you are considering applying for travel costs, ensure you discuss with the relevant safety office before making plans and confirm if a risk assessment will be required. You should obtain travel insurance through your University.

For all travel costs supported under RTSG, the cheapest form of travel should be sought or a case made as to why a more expensive option has been selected. For example if a student wished to use their own vehicle, you would need to demonstrate how this was more cost effective than public transport, or necessary due to a lack of public transport. If a student wishes to travel from, or return to, a location different to the usual area of the home institution or approved UK residence, and this would increase costs, the DTP will provide support up to the equivalent costs from the relevant location in the UK. RTSG cannot fund a trip to the UK while a student is residing overseas for fieldwork, an OIV, or a return to the UK after a vacation.

Cost effective options for accommodation should be explored, therefore the average for an area should not be used as an estimate. The DTP may provide support up to £150 per night, however this would only be granted in exceptional circumstances where it can be shown that there is no cheaper accommodation available. If the student wishes to stay in more expensive accommodation, the DTP may make a contribution to the costs.

RTSG will only cover costs of the student, not guests, so if they wish to travel with a friend or partner, they can apply for support for their portion of the costs.

Research Survey and Data Collection Costs

RTSG can support costs such as printing of questionnaires and related materials, telephone calls, and participant costs (depending of level of expense). The DTP contribution for running experiments etc. will generally be capped at £1,500.

Conferences (in direct support of research)

The DTP encourages all students to attend at least one UK based conference relevant to their research, and to present at a conference during the doctoral period of their award. You should clarify how and why this particular conference is of specific benefit to your project. Attendance at conferences held outside the UK and EU will generally only be funded where a student is presenting, however they may make a case for attendance if it is considered particularly important to attend e.g. it is the key conference for the subject area and occurs every two years, so there will only be one opportunity to attend.

Masters students are not expected to attend conferences during the taught phase of their studies, however support may be provided if presenting at a conference just before the start of the doctorate.

If the conference is being held in a hotel, please check whether there is cheaper alternative accommodation nearby.

Fieldwork Expenses

RTSG can assist with costs for fieldwork carried out in the UK, along with some overseas fieldwork expenses not already covered by an OFE grant. These may include reimbursement of costs for interpreters, guides, assistants, or gifts for local informants when conducting fieldwork overseas.

Keep in mind that you will need to provide details of currency conversion for the date of purchase for overseas expenses and provide original receipts. If you have concerns about obtaining receipts, or you have difficulty while overseas, please contact your local DTP Office immediately to discuss if alternative arrangements can be approved with the relevant Finance Office.

Transcription services

Costs for transcription services are generally not covered as this is considered an integral part of your PhD. However if you and your supervisor are able to explain how you have unusually large amounts of transcription, it may be possible for the DTP to make a contribution to costs. The application would need to explain how the transcription levels are unusual and why it was not possible to account for this in planning your timeframes. The DTP contribution will generally be capped at £1,000.

Language Training

Students may need to take language classes prior to fieldwork, and many UK institutions have appropriate language training courses. Please ensure you explain why a particular course has been chosen, particularly if it is not located at one of the DTP institutions.

Advanced training courses

RTSG supports attendance on training courses and summer schools that are essential to your research, and cannot be completed as part of your programme. However please note that large scale and accredited training courses both in the UK and overseas cannot be supported due to the high cost levels. Ensure you explain why a particular course has been chosen, particularly if it is not located at one of the DTP institutions.

Equipment

The DTP may purchase small items of equipment (e.g. cameras, tape recorders, films) required for fieldwork expenses if they are not already available through the Department or local DTP Office. Equipment purchased through RTSG funds will remain in the custody of the DTP following completion of the award, and will normally be purchased through University preferred suppliers. Please check this with your Department before applying as it may affect the estimate of costs.

RTSG will not generally cover the full cost of expensive equipment, however it may be possible for a contribution to be made. Students are also advised to discuss support options with their Department, particularly if the items could be reused by the Department.

Use of RTSG to finance computer equipment costs may be considered in exceptional circumstances where it is uniquely necessary for the research and not provided through the University. Any such request must be clearly and adequately justified based on the nature of the research being undertaken and must be essential for the successful completion of the PhD.

Software packages

Support may be provided if the student can provide evidence that it is uniquely necessary for their research (e.g. we will not support costs such as Microsoft Office).

Books

Students must explain why they need the book and it should be in direct support of their research. They must demonstrate that the book is not available at the University's libraries, e.g. by including a screenshot from the University system to show that the book in question is not available.