

Guidance on Estimating PI Time

Estimating investigators' time

Q1. What method should investigators use to estimate time on a research project?

A. Investigators can estimate their time in a number of ways - three examples are (a) a month-by-month build up of time; (b) estimating no. of hours on average across a year; or (c) using a proxy of hours per week per RA, plus time at end for writing up. By 2007 investigators need to improve the robustness of these estimates. The first, (a) represents a robust method.

Q2. How should investigators' time be entered on the project costing form?

A. It is good practice to enter total hours on the project. This would then be divided by the project length (e.g. three years) to arrive at an annual total of hours on the project. Annual hours multiplied by an hourly rate provides the chargeable salary cost for that investigator for each year. Investigators' time does not have to be profiled across the life of the project (the actual life is often longer than the life assumed for funding purposes by the sponsor e.g. work for a project funded by the RCs over three years is often carried out over six years). To ensure project costing is not made too complex, time (and associated salary costs) can be spread evenly across the life assumed for funding purposes (e.g. three years) for costing purposes.

Q3. Don't we have to show average hours a week?

A. No. The first draft of the RC forms did include data entry fields with this heading, but that is being changed. The RCs will be asking for an estimate of hours required for the whole project. The RCs will still be interested in average hours per week purely for comparative purposes, but they will be calculating a notional figure themselves (based on standard assumptions about the number of weeks in a year).

Q4. Why shouldn't we show average hours a week, or number of days a year?

A. The use of average hours a week does not encourage academics to think through the real time required (this encourages them to assume that they do the same amount of work in every week, which they do not). It is also more onerous to cost robustly (as the academic would need to specify their assumptions about the weeks that they will be working on the project in a year, and the number of years they will be working on the project). Similarly, the use of number of days in a year is more onerous to cost robustly (the academic would need to specify the number of days in total that they will be working in a year - and how many hours a day they will be working). Both of these will be more complex for academics to use, especially if they are using robust methods to estimate their time (e.g. building up their project estimates week by week). That is why it is good practice to record total hours on the project, not hours a week or days a year.

Q5. Can we record percentages of time on a project costing form?

A. It is strongly recommended that you do not. This implies that there may not have been a particularly robust method of estimating time, and it is difficult to be certain that the costs that are then derived are correct.

Q6. If we ask investigators to estimate their time in hours across a project, how do we get to numbers of FTEs?

A. The project hours of each investigator should be converted into hours per annum by dividing by the life of the project. These hours per annum should be divided by 1650 - that will give a FTE for each investigator. These are then added together, along with the FTEs of research assistants, to provide the total FTEs for each year of the project. Indirect cost rates and estates charges would be applied to that total FTE figure.

(The FTEs of project studentships would also carry indirect costs and estates costs if their costs are calculated on the research project - but these would need to be shown separately, and they do not inform the funding, see (c) below.)

Q7. Our clinical academics are contracted to work 44 hours a week. Other staff are contracted to work 35 hours a week. Can we use these to calculate the cost per hour?

A. No. 1650 hours is considered a fair and reasonable measure of the time spent on average by academics across all institutions and should be the number of working hours p.a. assumed for each full-time member of staff for costing purposes.

Q8. Can we include the costs of disseminating research in our project costs?

A. For RC projects the time spent writing the RC final report should be included in the PI time estimates - even if it takes place after the research grant has been completed (as defined by the RCs).

In some cases there is some specific reporting activity within a project, and here the cost is likely to be a directly incurred project cost. However most dissemination of research will take place months or years after completion of the project - the costs of this dissemination should therefore be allocated to indirect costs and included in the indirect cost rate.

Project studentships

Q1. Why do we include PGR FTEs (weighted) when we initially calculate our indirect cost rates and estates charges, when we can't recover them from RCs?

A. Costing PGR activity and pricing PGR activity are two different things. PGR activity must be allocated indirect costs and estates charges, and including them in the denominator of those calculations means that this has been recognised.

Whenever you prepare a fEC for PGR student activity, these costs should be included.

However, for the next few years project studentships, and other PGR students funded by the RCs will continue to be funded at 100% of tuition fees and stipends (or a doctoral training account and stipends). There is therefore no

mandatory requirement to put their full costs on a project application (or any application for a PGR student made to the RCs).
But a full set of costs still exists for them. It is just that costs are not being recognised as a basis for RC funding for the present.

Q2. Can we show tuition fees as a cost of a project studentship on a research project?

A. Yes, but it is not good practice to do so - this is an underestimate of the real fEC. Tuition fees represent the level of funding: they are less than the full costs. The real cost of supervising and training PGR students is made up of the supervisors' (and co-supervisors' and examiners') time; indirect costs and estates charges on that time; and indirect costs and estates charges on the PGR FTE.

However it is complex to calculate all these costs, and this is not a requirement of TRAC (nor of the RCs). The RCs will be funding project studentships at the level of the standard tuition fee (plus stipends, see below). Tuition fees will be shown on the RC application form under the 'exception' head; not as a cost. They should be shown on institutional project costing forms as part of the price, not the cost.