

# Research Office Bulletin 2 – Special Edition

Published 30<sup>th</sup> March 2012



## PhD Students on European Commission Research Projects – Special Edition

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### What has changed?

Up until March 2012, it has not been College practice to include PhD students within proposals to the European Commission funding frameworks (FP6 and FP7). This position has now changed. With the exception of Marie Curie funding schemes, applicants for European Commission (EC) funding will now be permitted to include PhD studentships in their proposals, subject to Head of Department approval. This change in policy was requested by the Faculty Principals and endorsed by the College Research Committee earlier this month.

Whilst this practice is now permitted, it is not without risk. Unlike Research Councils, the EC have a number of onerous requirements that students must comply with. Failure to do so, not only risks financial penalties at project / departmental level or indeed College level, but conceivably could have reputational impact. The College Research Committee mandated that management of the additional EC requirements would be the responsibility of the Principal Investigator's Department.

The purpose of this Special Edition Bulletin is to inform administrative staff of the changes and to provide guidance to assist Academic Departments in their management of the associated risks.

### What are the additional requirements for EC funded students?

The European Commission require the following:

- Assignment of Intellectual Property (IP):** the student will be required to assign all arising IP to the College before their start date on the project (this is automatically the case for employees of the College).
- Confidentiality:** beneficiaries of EC funding must preserve the confidentiality of confidential information during the project and usually for five years after its completion. Students will be required to comply with this requirement, and provision made for it in their reporting and publications (including thesis publication).
- Terms of Engagement:** details of the studentship (e.g. stipend, time commitment and details of work) must be clearly documented before the student starts on the project.
- Timesheets:** the EC will expect full-time students to work the same hours as a College employee e.g. at least 35 hours per week (pro-rata for part-time). EC funded students must complete timesheets to demonstrate their hours worked. Where students are not wholly dedicated to the EC project, time recording of all activities must be kept.

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## What does this mean for Academic Departments?

Academic Departments may now apply for PhD Studentship funding (stipend only) on EC proposals, providing that those adopting the policy change put processes in place to ensure that:

- Stipends are only charged to EC projects where such funding has been explicitly requested within the application and subsequently awarded.
- Students are advised of the additional funding conditions (in particular the requirement to pre-assign any intellectual property and the completion of timesheets) prior to the studentship offer / acceptance.
- Engagement Letters are completed for each student (using the [standard template](#)) and appropriately signed prior to the student's start date, with copies submitted to the [Research Office](#) (rs.compliance@imperial.ac.uk)
- Students regularly complete comprehensive timesheets (using the standard template) and submit these to their supervisor for approval.
- That original copies of Engagement Letters and Timesheets are retained by the Academic Department in line with EC requirements (5 years after project end date) and College policy (financial year plus 6 years) – whichever is the longest.

## Pre-Award Guidance for Academic Departments

### Prerequisites

Stipends should only be included in EC applications where:

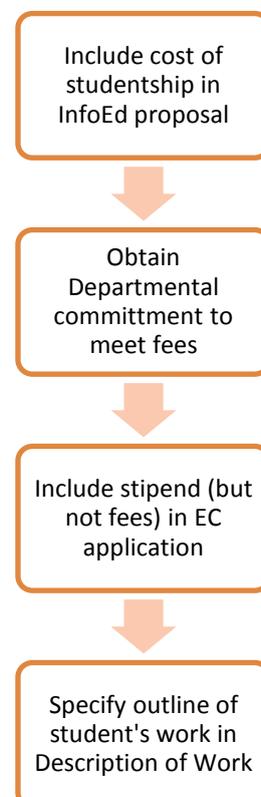
- Alternative funding for the associated tuition fees has been secured / approved.<sup>1</sup>
- Reference to the studentship is explicit within the Description of Work / Annex 1.
- The Academic Department has accepted ownership of the obligations associated with completion and management of the **Engagement Letter** and subsequent timesheets (InfoEd approval by the HOD will constitute this acceptance).

### Costing Guidance

- Stipends should be costed in line with the published minimum [RCUK London Rates](#) for a minimum of three years.
- The indexed costs (as calculated by InfoEd) should be used.
- Tuition fees should be costed for, but must not be included within the price / funding application - the EC consider these costs ineligible.
- At least one full-time researcher is also included within the costing.

### Restrictions

- Stipends must not be included in applications to Marie Curie schemes.
- PhD students must not be asked to cover their own fees in return for a higher stipend rate.



<sup>1</sup> Alternative sources should not include other research (P) accounts

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## Post Award Guidance for Academic Department

### Prerequisites

Stipends should only be charged to EC applications where:

- Funding has been explicitly requested within the application and subsequently awarded.
- Students have been advised of, and are willing to comply with, the additional EC requirements
- A fully executed Engagement Letter has been signed and authorised prior to the student's start date – mandatory for all students charged to EC projects.

### Charging Guidance & Templates

- Complete 'Engagement Letter' using template and submit copy of executed Engagement Letter to the [Research Office](mailto:rs.compliance@imperial.ac.uk) (rs.compliance@imperial.ac.uk)
- Charge stipend payment in line with the published [RCUK London Rates](#)<sup>2</sup>
- Ensure regular completion of timesheets by the student (using the College's excel template) and subsequent supervisor approval.
- Retain copies of fully executed Engagement Letter and approved timesheets
- Templates are available on the Research Support website:

Confirm funding source for fees (these cannot be charged to the EC)

Communicate funding conditions to studentship applicants

Complete and ensure proper execution of Engagement Letter

Oversee adherence to Annex 1 and regular completion of timesheets

[Engagement Letter Template](#)

[Timesheet Template \(PC\)](#)

[Timesheet Template \(MAC\)](#)

- Maternity leave (or ceases to work on the project): In the event a student either temporarily or permanently is unable to progress the agreed Description of Work, the Academic Department must put appropriate measures in place to support the student, and must also ensure the contractual obligations with the EC are fulfilled (e.g. in some situations, it may be necessary to employ a post-doctoral researcher to complete the Description of Work). In such situations, the Department will be required to meet any additional costs.
- Existing grants: Replacing researchers with students on existing grants will be closely scrutinised by project auditors, i.e. there is a high possibility that costs could be deemed ineligible. It is therefore not a viable option unless fully cleared with the appropriate EC desk officer or project co-ordinator
- Ineligible Costs: tuition fees, thesis write-up time

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- If this bulletin has been forwarded to you and you would like to be included on the distribution list;
- If you would like to unsubscribe to the distribution list;
- If there are any topics you think should be included in future issues

**Regular links:** [Research Support web site](#)    [Key information \(policy and guidance notes\)](#)    [Training](#)

<sup>2</sup> In the event that the published rate is higher than the available sterling budget, the Academic Department will be required to meet any shortfall.