

Research Councils' Open Access Block Grants 2018-19

Frequently Asked Questions

1. How have the 2018/19 grants been calculated?

The 2018/19 grants have been calculated in the same way as previous years, in that the amount that each organisation receives is based on the staff effort on grants. However there are two differences to last year: the awards have not been adjusted to take account of any remaining underspend, and the data used to calculate the awards has been updated.

2. What is the total size of the Research Councils' open access fund for 2018/19?

As announced previously, the size of the Research Councils' open access fund for 2018/19 has been set at the level of the 2017/18 fund. The maximum funding available is £24 million. The actual amount that will be awarded will be less than this, as grants are not awarded below a threshold of £10,000 and any underspend at the end of the year must be returned.

3. The amount that my organisation has received is higher/lower than expected compared to our 2017/18 award. Why is this?

As stated above, the total fund is set at the same level as last year and the method (algorithm) for sharing the fund between research organisations (ROs) has not changed. However, more recent data has been used for calculating the share of the total fund that each RO receives. For 2016/17 and 2017/18 this was based on direct labour payments on grants for the three year period 2013 to 2015, as a proxy for the amount of staff effort on grants. For the 2018/19 grants, the direct labour payment figures are based on grants for the three year period 2015 to 2017, as this is the most up-to-date data available. This change has affected what proportion of the total fund each RO receives and thus the 2018/19 award for an individual RO might be higher or lower than the 2017/18 award.

4. In the block grant algorithm, why has the period used for the direct labour payments on grants changed?

For the first three years of the block grants (2013/14 to 2015/16), the algorithm used to calculate the grants was based on the direct labour payments on grants for the three-year period 2010 to 2012. The 2015 'Review of the implementation of the RCUK Policy on Open Access' recommended that this should be updated, so that the distribution of the grants better matched current research portfolios. Accordingly, for 2016/17 and 2017/18 the period for the direct labour payments was updated to 2013 to 2015. At this point it was not known whether the block grants would continue beyond 2017/18 as this was the last of the original five years of funding announced when the fund was created. It was subsequently agreed to extend the funding for a further two years, 2018/19 and 2019/20. The period for the direct labour payments has been updated again for the 2018/19 grants, to 2015 to 2017, in keeping with the principle that the fairest distribution of funding will be based on the most up-to-date data.

5. Will the period used for the direct labour payments in the block grant algorithm be updated again for the 2019/20 grants?

If more recent data is available when the algorithm is re-run for the 2019/20 grants, then this will be used. This will ensure that, as recommended by the 2015 'Review of the implementation of the RCUK Policy on Open Access' the distribution of block grants matches current research portfolios as closely as possible. If the data is updated regularly, this should avoid ROs seeing unexpectedly large increases/decreases in the amount of funding received.

6. If we receive a grant for 2018/19, are we guaranteed a grant for 2019/20?

As the block grant algorithm will be re-run for 2019/20 with more up-to-date data, this could affect those ROs with grants around the £10,000 threshold. Depending on whether ROs move above or below the threshold, some ROs who receive an award in 2018/19 might not in 2019/20 and vice versa.

7. Can we carry forward funding from 2017/18 into 2018/19?

Yes, any remaining funding from previous grants can be carried forward into 2018/19. As announced previously there is no longer a requirement to reconcile grants at the end of March 2018. All expenditure must be reported in the annual compliance/financial reports. The grants will be reconciled at the end of 2018/19.

8. How will any remaining underspend be dealt with?

The 2018/19 grants will be administered via the External JeS and Internal Siebel systems, rather than the manual processes used previously. This will mean some changes in how underspend on grants is dealt with. The 2018/19 awards have not been adjusted for any remaining underspend. Instead, the grants will be reconciled at the end of 2018/19 and any remaining funds should be returned as part of this process.

We reserve the right to terminate awards before the end of the grant period if the returns from the annual compliance report and the Interim Expenditure Statement indicate the total actual and estimated expenditure for 2018/19 will be substantially below the value of the award. However, we would discuss such situations with the RO concerned before taking action to make sure there was not a misunderstanding of the financial situation.

9. How will the change to processing grants via the External JeS and Internal Siebel systems affect ROs?

All ROs who will receive a 2018/19 award should have received a letter regarding the move to JeS/Siebel, explaining the reasons for this, the timetable for 2018/19 processes and a request to provide the contact name for the Principle Investigator. If you have not received this letter please contact openaccess@rcuk.ac.uk.

10. What are the reporting requirements for 2018/19?

As in previous years, all ROs who have received block grant funding will be required to complete the annual compliance/finance reports. An email with the link to the reporting template will be sent to ROs in early April. Following the move to processing the grants via JeS/Siebel rather than manually, the mid-year finance spreadsheets will be replaced by Interim Expenditure Statements (IES), issued via Siebel. Final Expenditure Statements (FES) will be issued via Siebel at the end of 2018/19, when the grants will be reconciled.

11. With the move to Siebel, what will happen if we receive an invoice for 2018/19 expenditure after the end of March 2019?

Any expenditure that ROs incur within the duration of the grant must be reported on the Final Expenditure Statement (FES). ROs will have three months from the end date of the grant to submit an FES, which is normal practice for grants and should be sufficient time for ROs to receive any invoices. There is an expectation for ROs to liaise with suppliers to ensure invoices are issued promptly. Once the grant has been reconciled there is an opportunity for an RO to request a Supplementary Expenditure Statement (SES). There are two additional months to do this following receipt of the reconciled payment. The SES is normally if the RO feel there is a discrepancy between the FES and the reconciliation payment which has been paid.

12. How will the creation of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) affect the RCUK Policy on Open Access and the block grants?

UKRI will carry out a review of open access policy across all Councils. In the meantime, the RCUK Policy on Open Access will continue to apply to the outputs of research funded by the Research Councils. As previously announced, the Research Councils' open access block grants have been extended for two years, 2018/19 and 2019/20, at the 2017/18 level of funding.

13. What are the targets for compliance for year six (2018/19) and year seven (2019/20) as the RCUK Policy on Open Access assumed a five-year transition period for open access?

As mentioned above, until the outcome of the UKRI review of open access is known, the RCUK Policy on Open Access will continue to apply to the outputs of research funded by the Research Councils. The compliance targets for years six and seven are the same as for year 5: for 100% of research papers arising from Research Council funding to be published in journals compliant with the RCUK Policy on Open Access, and for 75% of those papers to be delivered through immediate, unrestricted, on-line access with maximum opportunities for re-use ("gold").