

ICASE Workshop May 2022 – Questions & Answer panel session

Questions	Response
<p>Has EPSRC seen a decline in the number of ICASE vouchers awarded? Our ICASE 2022 grant had a significant reduction in the usual number, and we are trying to understand if this reflects a wider trend of less research grant money having industry contributions.</p>	<p>The annual budget for ICASE has remained fixed at £17m for over a decade, so with the cost of studentships always rising, this has meant a steady decline in the number of vouchers that we have available. In the last few years, we've been able to compensate somewhat by agreeing a slightly larger budget commitment and kept the total number of vouchers around the 200 mark. However, this year (ICASE 2023) the projected cost for a 4-year studentship rose significantly, resulting in a 15% reduction in the total number of vouchers.</p> <p>As for fluctuating numbers at individual universities, this could be due to several reasons. Industrial partners themselves would be best placed to explain their collaboration choices.</p>
<p>Please could you provide some more information on the ICASE call process? What is the schedule? How do companies get selected for EPSRC ICASE vouchers? How do they find academic partners?</p>	<p>We have added an illustrative timeline to the website: https://www.ukri.org/what-we-offer/developing-people-and-skills/epsrc/studentships/industrial-case/timeline-of-activities/#contents-list</p> <p>The allocation process is explained here: https://www.ukri.org/what-we-offer/developing-people-and-skills/epsrc/studentships/industrial-case/allocation-funding-and-additional-partners/#contents-list</p> <p>In some cases, companies will have established relationships with universities and academics, but they may find academic partners through various other routes, such using the Konfer platform or asking EPSRC Portfolio Managers.</p>
<p>Are the external partners informed about the ICASE award T&Cs?</p> <p>(For example - that they share a grant award number with other awards at the same institution and there is a cap of recruiting 30% international students to that grant)</p>	<p>We provide industrial partners with a link to the online copy of the most recent set of ICASE conditions (which cover international students) when we send out the voucher allocations to them.</p> <p>Please remember that one of the conditions is that the ICASE Conditions must be shared with the industrial partners and students, so all parties are aware of them.</p> <p>The outputs from the ICASE Workshop in May 2022 fed into a tips and considerations document which we made available to the industrial partners with their new allocations. This included a note saying their project would likely be one of several forming a single grant, and that this arrangement may affect the way universities manage things.</p>
<p>Can we re-open the route to SMEs? Perhaps with a lower threshold for funding requirement for them.</p>	<p>This is something we've been thinking about for some time. We don't want to eat into the current budget for this, given the steadily increasing costs and fixed budget, and the strong appetite for vouchers in the current group of partners, so we've been hoping for a budget uplift for some time. This would enable us to try out</p>

	<p>some different things for ICASE, and we would really like to develop SME involvement. What form it would take is unknown - for example, the lengthy timeline of the ICASE scheme (as well as the cash contribution) can be a barrier to smaller companies, and there is also perhaps a greater risk of smaller companies being less resilient/stable than larger ones.</p>
<p>Can an ICASE student undertake an internship that is not based with the industry partner?</p>	<p>EPSRC does not have a rule that prevents an ICASE student from undertaking an internship. Obviously, it would be best practice for this to be agreed between all the parties involved, but exactly what agreement is required from the industrial partner would depend on university policy and whatever contractual arrangements are in place for the project between the University and the company. Assuming the internship is an additional activity that is not part of their main research, the student typically needs to temporarily suspend their studentship to undertake the internship. Whether the student also undertakes a placement with the industrial partner at another time would need to be decided between the parties involved.</p>
<p>What are the reporting expectations for ICASE?</p>	<p>The ICASE team will run the Usage Survey with universities every two years (so the next one will be at end of 2022 for completion Spring 2023). They each cover 4 ICASE rounds and will shift forwards 2 rounds each time which provides some overlap with the previous survey as well as covering some new ground. We'll run this maybe 3 or 4 times and then see if we can reduce the frequency further. This exercise is separate from any student survey's run by EPSRC colleagues in the Students Team.</p> <p>We are currently planning our approach to evaluation for the industrial partners and expect to ask them to provide feedback on their ICASE projects covering the same 4-round period as the Usage Surveys. After that we would like to look at something where the students can feedback about their experiences. In all these we are conscious that we don't want to overburden people with loads of unnecessary bureaucracy, and we'd prefer quality over quantity. We would also love to hear of any good news stories from the universities. We're conscious that you are already providing the great quantitative data, so this is entirely optional right now, but please do let us know when you hear about particularly interesting or successful projects, even if it's not written up as a full case study - even a few bullet points would be brilliant.</p>
<p>Is there anything that UKRI can do to mitigate the issues caused by the EU international fee status?</p>	<p>UKRI funding may not be used to cover the difference between the home and international fee rate. Please see guidance on our website for more details: https://www.ukri.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/UKRI-170321-InternationalEligibilityImplementationGuidance.pdf</p>

<p>Applications from UK students seem to be declining, so is UKRI considering raising the cap on international students?</p>	<p>There are no plans to change the cap at present.</p>
<p>Does EPSRC have a view on how best to manage the 30% flexibility when recruitment to the projects can be over two recruitment cycles? For instance, if overseas places are allocated based on the total number of vouchers but then there was a failure to recruit to all the vouchers, the % of overseas students would breach the 30% rule.</p>	<p>The cap applies to all the studentships/projects/awards associated with each particular ICASE grant and is dependent upon the number of studentships that can be supported by the ICASE grant. It is not separated into cohorts. If an ICASE grant covers 10 studentships, then up to 3 of them (30%) can be international. The cap applies to the whole grant, not the number of students recruited to it at any particular time.</p> <p>As ICASE grants often cover small numbers of students there is additional flexibility in that one international student can be recruited if 30% of the grant is less than one student. For example, if your ICASE grant only covers two studentships, then one of those can be an international student.</p> <p>If you recruit non-UK students first and reach your cap, but then don't manage to recruit UK students for the remaining projects despite your best efforts, then there won't be any sanction. You have acted with good intentions.</p>
<p>Does EPSRC plan to look at the level of funding in ICASE vouchers and how this impacts on CDTs and DTP CASE? ICASE currently sets a "market price" particularly for the larger companies which makes it challenging to get the higher financial commitments needed for CDT and DTP-CASE studentships (which cover the full cost including RTSG and London-weighted stipends)</p>	<p>The scope of ICASE is limited to small number of companies (40). Routes like DTP-CASE and CDTs are open to all and therefore are the only option for most companies.</p> <p>Some collaborating companies are often quite willing to contribute much more than the one-third cash contribution required of ICASE and CASE conversions.</p>
<p>Is there flexibility in the amount spent per student from the ICASE grant? In other words, can we allocate over the award amount to some studentships, and under the amount to others?</p>	<p>Yes, there is flexibility. The awards are estimates and we acknowledge that different studentships cost different amounts, so yes, you can go over the award amount for some, providing that no student is disadvantaged by this. However, each industrial partner contribution must only be used on the associated project and may not be used elsewhere.</p>
<p>Has the nominal value of ICASE vouchers decreased for 22/23? If so, is there a reason?</p>	<p>The value can change year-to-year. Each year we use the UKRI estimated fees and stipend to project studentship costs, and this resulted in the value falling slightly between ICASE 2021 and ICASE 2022. In ICASE 2023 it has risen substantially in line with stipend increases.</p>
<p>The Letters of Intent and Training Grant Condition 4.9 say that students can start once the grant offer letters go out, and that costs can be incurred from that point. Training Grant Condition 5.1.2 says we need to send the Start Confirmation within</p>	<p>Fees and stipend can indeed be incurred from the date of the Offer Letter if you have a student starting early. ICASE grants have a fixed start date of 1st October which can't be changed. You can submit the Start Confirmation for early students from the 1st October, with a given start date of 1st October. If this is more than a month after the student actually started then we will waive the</p>

<p>42 days of the fixed start date (which is 1st October) or within a month of the first student starting - whichever is sooner. But you can't start the grant early if it has a fixed start date, so how does this work in practice if a student starts earlier than 1 September?</p>	<p>condition which requires this, providing it's actioned within a month of the grant starting (so by the end of October).</p> <p>You can register the student in Je-s after the grant has started, and you can use the real start date.</p> <p>One other note on this: when you submit the FES, all cost dates must be within the start and end dates of the grant, so any reimbursement of costs associated with an early student must be given a date which is on or after the 1st October grant start date. The description of those costs might note that they cover student costs incurred during a period prior to the start because the student started early.</p>
<p>Can you clarify what makes a DTP/DTG CASE conversion?</p>	<p>Doctoral Training Partnership grant (DTP) CASE-conversions share many similarities with ICASE, with the same parameters for duration, partner cash contribution, and placement. Both ICASE and CASE are fully funded UKRI studentships - the partner contribution is in addition, so their funding level is ~133%. The key difference is that the money is already with the universities (in their DTP grant) so academics may initiate projects, as well as industry being able to come in with a project, and things can potentially get moving much more quickly than with ICASE.</p>