



“RESEARCH AND RED TAPE”



**A Series of Guides for Staff Engaging with
the University’s Grants & Contracts Office**

No. 2

Research Grant Awards

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Introduction

This series of guides is written primarily with Early Career Researchers in mind, however it aims to assist and inform all staff throughout the University - whether academic or administrative, whether employed by the university or an Academic Partner - in steering through the complexities of research delivery and management.

This, the second guide in the “Research and Red Tape” series, will help to explain what happens, and the things you need to do, once you have received notification that your research grant application has been successful. The need for red tape... ahem... why internal procedures are so important is explored and explained, and we’ll take a look at some of the paperwork that you may come across and which will need to be dealt with, both before your project may begin, during its implementation, and following its completion.

In order to not overcomplicate matters, this guide is written mainly on the assumption that you are making funding applications through the University rather than directly from an Academic Partner institution, but essentially the associated processes, and the roles of those colleagues with whom you will interact, should be generally the same whichever way you do things.

But before we begin, if you are reading this, it probably means you have been awarded a grant, in which case...



.....Congratulations!!!!

How Will I Know I've Been Awarded a Grant?

Essentially, the funder will make its decision known, either by contacting you directly or someone else at the University. To keep things simple, for the purposes of this guide, we'll assume that the funder will send you an award notification (also known as an 'award letter' or an 'offer of grant').

What Do Award Notifications Look Like?

These come in different formats; what you receive will depend on how the funder does things. Some funders will send you an email notifying you that your funding application has been successful, and expect you to take everything from there. Or, a funder may send you a simple email which more or less alerts you only to the fact that the funder has taken a decision to award you a grant, and which then may be followed up with an offer letter (either to you, or to someone else) which may or may not need to be formally accepted; others will do everything via email; and others will require someone to access an online system in order to deal with receiving the offer and accepting the grant award.

An award letter may just be a letter, stating, say, the amount of grant being offered and the terms and conditions you must accept in order to receive it, or it may take the form of a legal agreement, the final terms of which may or may not be open to negotiation.

Regardless of the format in which an award notification arrives, you should take immediate steps to put it on the research activity radar.

Who Do I Need to Speak To?

One of the first things you should do is pass on the news – and whatever paperwork you have received, to your relevant contact in the Grants & Contracts Office (GCO). Assuming you followed the correct procedure when submitting the original funding application, you will already know who this should be, as that person will have worked with you at the 'pre-award' funding application stage.

In addition to your GCO contact, there are quite a few people that will want to hear about your success. For example; your Co-Investigators (Co-Is) or other people who will be working on the project, your line manager, your finance department and your Dean of Faculty, the VP (Research) - maybe people in your Marketing Department too (although the nature of your award may mean that they may not be able to publicise it until later, it'll still be good for them to know about it).

Why Is Contacting GCO Early So Important?

There are several things which will need to be checked by your GCO contact at the outset, and this may need to be done quickly, especially if the funder has set a deadline by which the award must be accepted. For example, we'll need to check that:

- the award is consistent with the funding application – for example, that you will receive all the funds you had requested. Sometimes a grant might be awarded, but with a reduced budget - if this happens to be the case, we'll discuss with you the different options that are available;
- the terms and conditions of the award are acceptable to the University. If the terms offered look like they will be problematic for you, the project generally, or the University, your GCO contact may be able to negotiate with the funder to make the terms more reasonable ahead of the award being accepted;
- the award isn't being made for research that has already received funding from somewhere else in the meantime – say, if you had made more than one application to different funders for the same project, hoping that at least one of them will come good; in such a case it would be inappropriate to accept the new award also.

How Do I Accept My Award?

In the vast majority of cases, you will not be the person who is required to accept the award. This is because, although your name may be on the paperwork, it is the University, rather than you personally, to which an offer is actually being made.

For this reason, an award may only be accepted by an employee of the University who has been given the official right to do so. Such individuals have been given what is known as “delegated authority” to conduct University business in the legal sense. The correct delegated authority to accept your award will be evident from the University’s Delegated Authorisation Schedule, which is updated by Court from time to time. Your GCO contact will always know who has the delegated authority to accept your award, and can deal with that aspect of the exercise on your behalf, regardless of the format of your award notification.

Original documents – especially ones to which original signatures have been applied - are precious things, so once such an award document is finalised, GCO will hold the original in its fire safe, and will send you a PDF copy. Other people who need to see it will receive a copy too.

What Happens Next?

Once the award has been accepted (therefore forming a “contract” with the funder), GCO will look at the project to see if any other contractual arrangements need to be put in place. Sometimes this will be something that the funder will require, other times it will be just the appropriate (and very wise!) thing to do; it all depends on the particular circumstances. The need for additional agreements differs widely from project to project, but generally speaking, the more project partners you have, the more likely there is to be a need for these to be put in place. In addition, if you are employed by a UHI Academic Partner, there will always be a need for at least one further agreement.



Erm... hang on a minute....

What's the Difference Between a 'Contract' and an 'Agreement'?

That is a very good question! Essentially, any form of agreement which is legally binding is a contract – so really, seeing as we're dealing with signed documents, we could just talk about 'contracts' here, and leave out any reference to 'agreements'. However, in the university world, we tend to find that different people ascribe different meanings to the term "contract", depending upon their particular roles and perceptions, so one person may refer to a funding application as a contract, and another to a project as a contract, and another to a legal agreement as a contract. Or one person may even use the same term for all three! So – although perhaps unlikely, it's not impossible that, instead of saying, "If this funding application is successful, in order to undertake the project, we will need a legal agreement" someone could say, "If this contract is successful, in order to undertake the contract, we will need a contract". Erm...

For this reason, GCO avoids any possible confusion by always using the term "agreement" rather than "contract" when referring to any written and signed document that forms a legally binding contract. We find it just helps everyone to be clear as to what exactly is being discussed.

Why Are Agreements Important?

Essentially, agreements help to set out the way the project is to work (e.g. who will be responsible for what), and also what will happen if something goes wrong (e.g. how any dispute between the project partners will be resolved). Agreements deal with ownership too, such as who gets to keep any equipment bought with grant funding, who will own the intellectual property created by the research, and so forth. In addition, any external organisation with which the University forms an agreement will need to be made aware that the University must adhere to certain legislation, such as the provisions of the Freedom of Information, Data Protection and Bribery Acts. Publicity arrangements can be dealt with also (e.g. correct use of logos), and confidentiality of the information being shared is also of concern. Having all of these things set out and agreed at the outset helps towards clarity of operations, and also mitigates risk should anything happen to go awry.

Types of Agreements

As your research career progresses, you may come across, and be asked to comment on, various different types of agreement, the diversity of which will depend to a certain extent on your research area and the work that you are doing, but may include, for instance, agreements governing:

Confidentiality	how project partners must treat the information that they share with each other – what they can and cannot do
Intellectual Property	how project partners can use each other's existing knowledge ("Background") that is brought to the project; and who owns new knowledge created by the project ("Foreground"), and what rights the partners have to make use of it
Transfer of Materials	the arrangements covering the delivery and receipt of materials (such as, say, samples for clinical research)
Commercialisation	the bringing to market of a product resulting from the project, arrangements as to, for example, who is responsible for making an application for patent, and the partners' rights to a share in any future profits;
Collaborative Projects/Partnerships	the project partners' joint responsibilities, and each partner's particular responsibilities, with regard to a project on which they are working together;
Consortium Arrangements	for example, membership of an initiative under which future joint projects will be planned and undertaken, such as a universities Innovation Centre or a Doctoral Training Partnership
Studentships	the arrangements whereby a student (primarily at PhD level) undertakes his or her study supported by a combination of grant funding and a contribution from a company to which the research is of particular relevance
Consultancy or Service	the arrangements governing either the performance of a service by you, or the engagement of someone to perform a service for you
Internal arrangements	specifically, what the University calls an "LoA" (Letter of Agreement). You will become familiar with these if you are employed by a UHI Academic Partner but the University has been awarded a grant on your behalf. Essentially, LoAs are put in place to transfer the grant, and its terms and conditions, to your institution so that it is able to claim the funds through the University.

A single agreement may cover several of the aspects above, or may only deal with one. A Collaboration Agreement is a typical example of the former, and Material Transfer Agreements and LoAs are typical examples of the latter.

This is Getting Complicated - Do I Need a Lawyer?

No, the GCO can keep you on the right track with any type of research-related agreement. We have a lot of experience in identifying which agreements are appropriate to the task, we can produce draft agreements from scratch, assist you in negotiating the terms in agreements supplied by other partners, and call on expert advice if needed should a particularly thorny issue present itself. Having said that, GCO won't exclude you from the process – we will always seek your opinion, listen and work with you to make sure you're happy with what the University will be agreeing to on your behalf.

Can I Sign Agreements?

As with grant awards, you may not unless you have been granted Delegated Authority by the University to do this. Your GCO contact will always know who to approach to obtain signatures on your project-related agreements.

In any event, once an agreement has been finalised, GCO will make sure that everyone who should have a copy document has one, and, as with award documents which are signed in the original, we will lodge the University's copy in our fire safe, and provide you with a PDF copy.

Can My Project Work Start While All This 'Agreements' Stuff is Being Sorted?

We would most certainly advise against it, as any activity you undertake before arrangements are formalised would not be protected, leaving you at risk of having no recourse if you hit a problem.

For instance, say you need to give another project partner access to some information which you expect them to keep confidential and only use for a specific purpose. If there isn't already a formal agreement in place setting out and agreeing those arrangements, then technically the partner may do anything it wishes with your information, and in the worst case scenario there may be little you can do to stop them.

That is one reason why, when first putting your grant application together, it is wise to settle on a proposed start date for your project which will be far enough ahead to allow all of the necessary agreements to be put in place before the work starts. It may seem reasonable to expect a funder to allow you to alter a project start date to accommodate any delay, but some funders can be quite rigid in their expectations and will not allow it, so it is good for you to bear this in mind from the outset. Negotiation and ratification of agreements can be a surprisingly lengthy process, especially if your project involves several partners. GCO is extremely used to this, and will be able to offer some advice to you even at the pre-award stage as to how best to handle this side of things.



And so we are all in agreement...

What Happens Next? Can I Get On With My Project Now?

Not quite yet.

First, your project budget will need to be set up in the University's finance system so that you can begin to spend your grant. Your relevant GCO contact will work with you and a Finance Dept. colleague to make sure this is done correctly; the result of this process is that your project will be assigned a budget code which will handle the grant income and your related expenditure.

While this is going on, it will be good for you to read through the documents you have so far – both your award notification and any associated agreements – to make sure you understand fully what is being required of you. It is important that you are fully familiar with what the funder expects you to do, as if you get things wrong it could decide not to pay your grant. In addition, you need to fully understand what has been agreed between the project partners, as misunderstandings can result in impeding the project's progress or disputes arising.

If any document contains terms or arrangements you're not entirely clear about, do ask your GCO contact, who will be able to assist you in understanding the specifics.

Another good thing to do at this point is to note down exactly what the funder requires you to do in return for funding your project. This could include such things as:

- arranging to meet with a funder representative for some reason before the project starts (say, for instance, if the funder requires to have some input into your project plan);
- supplying progress reports as the project develops;
- delivering a workshop which will be attended by the funder, and maybe others not actually involved in the project.

Depending on circumstances, there are all sorts of things that could be required of you that have nothing in particular to do with actually carrying out your research, but it is important for you to take notice of these. You should be especially careful to note deadlines for submission of progress reports, as a funder may be within its rights to impose financial penalties on the project if you don't submit them on time.



... And we're off!

Getting Started On Your Project

Before you begin to become elbow-deep in research, remember that a significant amount of time may have passed between your having applied for the grant and actually receiving your award, and there may be other things to think about too. Here are some that you may come across:

Project start date

When composing your application, it is likely that you had to include a proposed start date for the project, and you will need to decide if this still feasible or if it will need to be changed – that is, if the funder is willing to allow this.

Award start date

Have a look at the award letter; does it tell you what date your award starts? Sometimes, this may differ from the date that the project is actually due to start. If the award start is stipulated in the award document, and you need to change it, you should speak to GCO as soon as possible so that we can assist with having a change accepted by the funder.

Ethical approval

Obtaining ethical approval from the University (and from the NHS if your area of study requires this) for your research to proceed is a vital step in preparing for project commencement. This is true even if you are certain that your study will not involve human participants or animals, or indeed any activity that possibly could be open to ethical question.

Ethical approval of all research undertaken at the University is a **requirement**, not an option. The University has established procedures which must be followed here, the specifics of which will be better explained in an additional guide in this series, but for now you can access them at <https://www.uhi.ac.uk/en/research-enterprise/resource/ethics>.

GCO administers ethical approval applications, so do speak to your GCO contact if you are at all unclear as to what is required of you with regard to this exercise.

Recruitment of staff

If your project necessitates the recruitment of new staff, and a post needs to be in place at the beginning of the project, you will need to speak to your Personnel Department as soon as possible to begin the recruitment process. Even if a new post will not be due to start until some months into the project, it will be good to commence the recruitment exercise straight away; this can be a lengthy process, involving several steps such as writing the job description and person specification, having the new post authorised by the institution, identifying where best to advertise the post, preparing

an advertisement appropriate to the role – all whilst leaving sufficient time for the new recruit to serve any required notice at their previous post and set themselves up to take up their new role.

Remember to check your award terms and conditions to see if there is anything specific you have to do regarding recruitment, for instance some funders (notably the EU) require their logo to be included in job advertisements.

Plans, Plans and More Plans!

While the preliminaries are being dealt with, it is important to keep any project collaborators/team members involved and informed, as they will need to be working with their institutions on the project arrangements from their perspective too. Also, you will need their input into planning and setting out how the project is to be achieved.



At this point you should be reviewing your original plans and project timelines, making sure that these are still achievable, and making any changes where it has become apparent that such are needed. Your project partners will need to be informed of and involved in agreeing these changes, so that everyone is clear who needs to do what and by when. This will be especially important if the tasks of one researcher/project group are dependent on the outputs of another.



If your project has regular meetings or meetings with many attendees (say, if it is a condition of funding that a Project Board, or a Steering Group be put in place), it will be useful to compile and circulate a schedule of the meeting dates early on so that everyone's diaries can be marked up at the outset.



If you need to purchase any large items with part of your grant, make sure you look at the University procurement rules carefully to ensure you complete the necessary steps. Keep in mind that items costing over £5,000 could take 4 weeks to procure and items costing over £25,000 are likely to take 3-6 months. Be aware also that some funders (especially the EU) may place conditions around the procurement process that are in addition to University rules.

Project Finances



It is important to remember that a grant isn't just a pot of money that you can spend. Not only do you need to do the work you said you would, but you also must spend the funds in the correct way. If you don't do this the funder could either refuse to pay the grant, or demand that the University returns all or some of the funds already received - even if you have completed the work.

Many funders (particularly those distributing EU-related funding) are particularly strict about paperwork, so it is vital that you read the rules carefully and make sure that all relevant paperwork is kept in an orderly fashion in case of audit at some later date. **Note:** the project accounts may be visited by an auditor a number of years after the project has finished.

Things to look out for:

Procurement regulations

Not only must you ensure that you have followed the relevant procurement regulations, but you must also have the paperwork that provides evidence of this. Remember that things purchased for the project may be high value items, so you'll need to allow time to accommodate the correct procurement process. If in doubt about procurement regulations, the University's Procurement Officer will be able to offer guidance.

Purchasing deadlines

If you had stated in your funding application that you would be purchasing equipment, be aware that there may be time limits by which this must be done. Most funders expect equipment to be purchased within the first year of the grant, and few will allow you to purchase equipment in the final 6 months of the project without prior written approval. This makes sense when you think about it, as the reason you will have given to purchase the equipment will be that it is needed in order to be able to do the research!

Timesheets

Are you required to keep them? And if so, must these be in a certain format? Your GCO contact will be able to offer advice here.

Travel

For European Funders you will need to keep evidence of the reason for each period of travel e.g. minutes of meetings, as well as proof of each item of expenditure.

Match funding

It may be the case that a funder will only pay a certain amount towards the full cost of your project – this is what is termed as the “intervention rate”. For instance, the Research Councils typically will only fund 80% of the total cost of a project supported by one of their grants.

Managing Your Budget



When to spend

To be able to claim costs from the funder, it is usually the case that expenditure must be incurred only after the start date of the award and before the end date of the project. Some funders will allow certain types of costs (for example recruitment costs) to be incurred before the official start date, but some won't entertain a claim for anything you spend before that point. Your GCO contact will be able to offer advice if you are unsure as to when your expenditure becomes eligible to be supported by the grant.



Keep an eye on what you are spending

Remember that it is not the total budget that you need to be looking at, but the individual budget categories that go to form the total. If you find yourself needing to deviate from these, the rules as to what you can do will vary with each funder. Some will be fine with you spending more in one budget category and less in another, as long as the change can be justified; some will require you to go through some official process before they will grant permission to make a change, and some simply will not allow any changes. Your GCO contact will be able to offer advice if you are unsure as to how exactly your grant may be spent.

Running your project

So, everything is now set up and running, and it's time to crack on with your research. All things being well, the project will follow the plan you had anticipated in your original grant application. Sometimes, though, it may be necessary to make changes to the way you had assumed things would work.

Making Changes



Let's say you had applied for your grant a year or two before you actually start work on it. During this time, things might have changed, or they might do during the course of your project; technology develops, people change jobs and new discoveries in your field may have been made, or happen to be made as you go along. If any of these instances occur, it may be that you will have to alter the project's track to accommodate. Whether or not you need to contact your funder about this depends on the funder; some will allow changes without you having to refer to them, but sometimes you will need to make a formal notification or request permission for a change; what is required will depend entirely on the nature of the change and who is the funder. Your GCO contact will be able to assist you with carrying out changes in the relevant manner, and will liaise with the funder on your behalf if this is what the terms and conditions of grant require.

Writing and submitting reports

In addition to producing the results of your research, you will in many cases need to write progress reports for your funder, essentially providing information as to how the project work is going, and

also perhaps providing statements of expenditure against your budget timeline. Most funders requiring such action will provide guidelines as to the style and content required, and it will be important for you to follow these. *Note:* if you need to provide an expenditure statement with your report, your GCO contact will liaise with the Finance Dept. to have this prepared.

Perhaps the funder will require your reports to be submitted by your GCO contact, or some other person within the University, or it may be that the funder wishes you to deal with them directly. Whichever way, it will be good for you to provide copies of your reports to your GCO contact, as these will be added to the project's administrative file so they can be made available in the event the project is subject to a future audit.

The Importance of Communication



If your project is one which involves other partners, then it will be important for you to keep in touch with them, whether or not you are leading the project, and even at times when you are at a point in the project work where all you need to do really is get down to your particular tasks. If you are leading the project, or a particular section of it, then ultimately it will be you that is responsible for the outcome, so you will need to be aware of any problems or delays that may be happening across the project so that you can ensure appropriate measures are put in place to keep the work on track. Situations are often much easier to resolve if they are dealt with sooner rather than later.

Of course, you may not be the only person from the University who will be concerned with project activities, so it will be important for communication lines to be organised as well as robust. For instance, your GCO contact, and perhaps a Finance colleague, may need to be in touch with their counterparts at the other organisations involved in the project in order to be able to deal efficiently with the contractual, administrative and financial aspects of the project. If this happens to be the case with your project, it will be wise to pin down the particular roles and responsibilities of each individual early on, and stick to the plan. Being clear about who exactly who should be dealing with what will help to avoid things like, for example:

- duplication of effort, such as can be caused by strings of emails being sent back and forth between separate individuals, which are essentially dealing with the same issue;
- confusion setting in due to the right people not having been involved in, or informed of, a decision which has been made;
- missed deadlines – due to it having been assumed that someone else has done the necessities, but actually no-one has!

Communication is, in fact, one of those things that is actually quite easy to get right given a bit of thought, but it is often not sufficiently considered in amongst all of the excitement of having been awarded a grant. Take note, as good communication can go a long way towards making life easier!

Help! It's all gone a bit wrong!



First of all - don't panic. What you may perceive as a difficulty can crop up at any time as the project progresses – however in reality it might not even turn out to be a problem at all. Even if it is, in all likelihood it will be possible to find a solution.

Remember though, in order to assist you to resolve an issue we will need to know about it! It is better to discuss a problem (or a potential problem) so that we can come up with a plan than leave things as they are in the hope that the problem will go away. So, do speak to your GCO contact as soon as you recognise something you think may turn out to be a problem.

Something that GCO comes across quite often is a scenario in which the project partners begin to realise that it will be impossible to finish the project in the time the funder expects. If you do find that you will need to seek an extension to the project period, many funders will be willing to accommodate this; after all they will be keen to see the results of their investment. However, it is unwise to leave such a request until the last minute. If we request a project extension with sufficient notice - say, 6 months before the end of project deadline - it is more likely that the funder will be willing to accommodate the change. Also, in the event that the funder does not grant the request, being aware of this sooner rather than later means there should be sufficient time remaining to come up with an alternative plan.

For this reason, it is wise for you to keep an eye on the completion of project tasks against the timeline, so that you can spot anything that has the potential to become a problem while it is still on the horizon, and raise it with your GCO contact.

And Finally...

We hope this guide has provided you with some good hints and tips when dealing with your grant award and your project, and has maybe even shed some light on a few things that may not have been so clear. The guide will continue to be updated from time to time in response to changes to the grant funding landscape as well as its associated 'red tape', but for now the main things to remember are:

- Know who you need to speak to
- Be aware of what the process requires
- Stay organised, and...
- Don't be a GCO stranger!

UHI Grants and Contracts Office grantsandcontracts@uhi.ac.uk