Declaration of Time Commitments by Principal Investigators

Frequently Asked Questions

Q1 : Are there any guidelines from the RGC on how to categorize a research project as an individual research project or a collaborative research project?

A1 : For RGC research funding schemes, individual research projects include projects funded under the General Research Fund (GRF) and the Early Career Scheme. Collaborative research projects include projects funded under the Areas of Excellence Scheme, the Theme-based Research Scheme, the Collaborative Research Fund and the Research Impact Fund.

For research projects not funded by the RGC, principal investigator (PI) / project coordinator (PC) is advised to seek clarification from his / her university or the respective funding agencies.

Q2 : Why is the threshold set for individual research project different from that set for collaborative research project?

A2 : In response to the views and suggestion of the universities, different thresholds are set for different categories of research projects. As individual research projects normally last for 24 to 36 months, setting the threshold for these projects at three looks practicable. For collaborative research projects, more time is expected to be devoted to projects of medium or large-scale and hence setting the threshold at two would be reasonable.

Q3 : How is an on-going project defined in the context of declaration of time commitments?

A3 : Projects for which completion reports have yet to be submitted by the application deadline of a funding exercise are regarded as on-going and will be counted towards the thresholds.

Q4 : For other on-going research projects not funded by the UGC / RGC, do I need to declare updated time commitment for these projects in the application form?

A4 : The new declaration requirements cover all on-going projects held by the PIs / PCs irrespective of whether the projects are funded by UGC / RGC.

Q5   :   At present, when submitting RGC research grant applications, PIs / PCs are required to indicate the number of hours to be spent per week in the proposal as well as the number of hours per week spent in each on-going project. The existing practice should have provided sufficient information about PIs' / PCs' time commitments for reference by the RGC. Why is it still necessary to introduce additional declaration requirements?

A5   :   As public money is involved and the RGC is accountable to its use, the additional declaration requirements would enable the RGC to have a better understanding of the PIs' / PCs' overall time commitment in research.

Q6   :   Are there any guidelines from the RGC on how to calculate the percentage of time spent on research?

A6   :   The RGC understands that there are no typical working hours in academia and hence it is impracticable to impose a standard formula to calculate the time spent on research for every researcher. Besides, the time spent on research by researchers may vary from discipline to discipline and may be different at different stages of a research project. PIs / PCs are expected to exercise their own judgement in providing the percentage of time spent on research in the RGC funding application.

Q7   :   Will the RGC assess the new declarations? Will the new declarations affect the RGC's decision in determining whether a research proposal is supported or not? If not, what is the purpose of the new declaration requirements?

A7   :   The new declaration requirements will facilitate the RGC Committee / Panel Members' understanding of the PIs' / PCs' overall time commitment. The existing criteria for assessing grant applications remain unchanged and the academic quality of a research proposal is the overriding assessment criterion.

Q8   :   Will the RGC downgrade a PI's / PC's research proposal if the number of on-going projects being held by him / her exceeds the thresholds?

A8   :   Notwithstanding the introduction of the new declaration requirements, the existing criteria for assessing grant applications remain unchanged. Academic quality of the research proposal

remains the overriding assessment criterion.

Q9   :   If a PI / PC is found to have provided false information (e.g. the number of on-going projects declared is less than the actual number of projects being held by him / her), what action will the RGC take?

A9   :   It is the obligation of the PIs / PCs to ensure that their funding applications contain sufficient and consistent information for evaluation. Incomplete submission or inconsistent / inaccurate information may lead to disqualification of an application. The UGC Secretariat will monitor the situation closely and work out measures to deal with anomalies.

Q10   :   I have engaged research supporting staff to assist in my research work. Are there any guidelines from the RGC on whether there is a minimum requirement for time commitment and whether supervision effort counts?

A10   :   While there is no minimum requirement for time commitment, PIs / PCs are expected to spend appropriate efforts and time for their RGC projects, instead of participating in name only or acting like an advisor without substantial input.

Q11   :   Will I be debarred from applying for RGC research funding schemes if the number of on-going research projects being held by me exceeds the thresholds?

A11   :   The PI / PC will not be debarred from applying for more RGC grants if the number of on-going projects being held by him / her exceeds the thresholds. However, the PI / PC is required to provide the overall amount of time spent on research and justifications on how he / she would be able to take up the additional research project if funded while maintaining the research quality.

Q12   :   I am the Co-Investigator (Co-I) of an on-going GRF project and would like to withdraw my role from the project. What should I do?

A12   :   The PI of the on-going GRF project concerned should submit a change request for removal of the Co-I from the project via the university's research office to the RGC for consideration.

Q13 : To avoid exceeding the thresholds, I am planning to transfer one of my on-going projects to another PI / PC.   What should I do?

A13 : Request for change of PI / PC is handled in accordance with the requirements set out in the "Disbursement, Accounting and Monitoring Arrangements for Funding Schemes Administered by the RGC".   Genuine and convincing reasons in support of the change for PI / PC must be given.   However, request for change of PI / PC for reasons of avoiding the thresholds will not be accepted and considered by the RGC.

UGC Secretariat
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