New Procedures for University Short Term Travel

(Draft v5.2 – 22/6/12)

1) Introduction

The processing of the majority of Short-Term Travel (STT) Claims can no longer be handled by STFC and will have to move to the Universities. This was initially motivated by a number of factors, in particular that the present system is slow, error-prone and labour intensive. Although it had been hoped to move to an electronic system it has been clear for some time that this would not happen for a considerable time. The urgency to make the move has now increased following changes to the arrangements between STFC and the RCUK Shared Services Centre (SSC). One of the constraints considered in devising a new process has been to retain the flexibility for experiments to adjust the distribution according to need, and not impose fixed allocations to each University.

The typical number of claims handled per month by the present system is ~230, and fewer than 10% of these are by people not affiliated to a UK University (mainly people from overseas institutes or a few individuals affiliated to RAL without access to the normal electronic system for RAL staff). The vast majority of the claims by University staff are paid in Sterling, but there are a small number paid in other currencies (mainly to staff resident outside the UK). In the new process all claimants affiliated to a UK University would submit all of their STT claims for experiment travel[1] to their University. (Note that it is expected that claims from Emeritus Staff will also be handled by the University to which they are affiliated.) However, LTA related claims and STT claims from people not affiliated to a UK University would continue to be submitted to RAL using the existing (June 2012) SSC procedures.

Section 2 gives a brief outline of the new process, Section 3 shows flow-charts of the main steps of the various processes, Section 4 describes these and the components in more detail and Section 5 summarises the tasks of the different parties involved. A glossary is given below with definitions of a few special terms and abbreviations used in this document.

Glossary

"Budget Code" – a particular STFC/SSC Project Number/Task Number combination.

"Budget Holder" – the person delegated by STFC to be responsible for a given SSC Budget Code. (Note this should not be confused with the overall Budget Holder for a Project or indeed the Task Manager at any higher level task within the hierarchy of tasks for that Project.)

"Local Claim Approver" – the person at each University delegated to approve claims on a given Budget Code at that University. (In many cases the Budget Holder may be at a different institute, having a Local Claim Approver should ease the processing of claims. Where the Budget Holder is at that University they may choose to undertake this role themselves.)

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[1] In the initial move the small number of claims not related to experiments (typically general programme support on project code STAK00026) will continue to be processed by RAL as previously.

LTA – Long-Term Attachment – normally trips with a duration of more that 3 months

RC – Research Council

SSC – The RCUK Shared Services Centre used by STFC for Financial administration

STT – Short-term Travel – normally trips of less than 3 months

VN – Visit Notice

VN Approver – the person nominated by the Budget Holder to approve VNs on the budget used. In many cases the Budget Holder may wish to do this themselves, but they may nominate someone else if they wish. Note this person does NOT need to be at the same institute as the Traveller.

3) Outline of the New Process

1) Prior to travel the Traveller obtains approval for the trip by sending a Visit Notice to the VN Approver.
2) Shortly after the trip the Traveller submits their claim (using the University's procedure) after first getting it approved by the Local Claim Approver.
3) Quarterly the University prepares an invoice for reimbursement from STFC for their total costs on all trips made on each Budget Code.
4) The invoice is sent to STFC/SSC for payment

4) Flowcharts of the Processes

These to be added later.

5) Main Steps and Components

The New Visit Notice

With budgets under increased pressure Visit Notices fulfil an important role. It is therefore proposed that Travellers should continue to complete a Visit Notice, in a revised simplified format. It should allow VN Approvers (and thus Budget Holders) to keep a check on spend and alert the Traveller of the need to make realistic estimates. This should be reinforced by not paying claims that exceed the amount approved above a 20% tolerance. (Note that the estimated cost should include all costs for the trip to be charged to STFC, irrespective of who initially pays for them, e.g. including airfares even if purchased by the University or via RAL.) The Traveller should send the Visit Notice to the VN Approver for approval prior to the trip. Before approving the Visit Notice, the VN Approver should check the estimate to ensure that it is reasonable and meets any criteria set by the Budget Holder and the STFC guidance[1]. Although the subsequent claims will be paid under the rules of the University it is expected that costs should not differ substantially in either direction from the current PPD travel guidelines and VN Approvers should keep this in mind when approving Visit Notices. Once the Visit Notice is approved it should be returned to the Traveller, who should forward it to the Local Claim Approver.

To date no Visit Notice has been required for trips within the UK; however, when frequent or expensive trips are made the costs can be comparable to non-UK trips. It is therefore proposed that where the total cost of trips within a quarter is likely to be above £200, the Traveller should obtain explicit approval for individual expensive trips (i.e. individual trip above £200) and prior block approval for several lower cost trips. This could be done using the Visit Notice *or by some other mechanism at the discretion of the Budget Holder and Local Claim Approver*.

The Visit Notice has been redesigned as an Excel Spreadsheet that should meet most circumstances, including splitting the costs between two Budget Codes. It is expected that the Traveller will normally send the Visit Notice electronically. A copy is shown in Annex A.

Payment of Claims

Shortly after the trip (preferably with 1 month) the Traveller should submit their claim for the trip to their University according to the normal procedure and rules of the University. Before payment, the claim should be approved by their Local Claim Approver. The Local Claim Approver should check that the amount claimed is consistent with the Visit Notice, including allowance for any earlier claims for the trip and any other costs paid either directly by the University or by STFC. Where there is a significant discrepancy the VN Approver should be informed (unless the Claim is amended to remove the discrepancy).

Trips may involve advance payments such as airfares and workshop fees. It is expected that in the new system these would in general either be paid directly by the University or by an Advance to the Traveller from the University and that consequently multiple claims by the Traveller for a single trip would only arise very exceptionally. (Occasionally some costs may be charged directly to RAL such as Flights booked via the RAL account with the preferred supplier, currently KeyTravel.)

Purchase Orders at RAL

Before any invoice for reimbursement to a University can be paid it will be necessary for RAL to put in place a Purchase Order. Initially this will be done at the time the Invoice is received (see below for invoice details). Thus the invoice should be sent to the appropriate person in RAL PPD (currently Mrs P Shand), who will submit a Purchase Request to SSC to raise the appropriate Purchase Order.

Note that the Purchase Requisition will need to be approved by the Budget Holders via their SSC on-line access. Budget holders should ensure that they do this promptly.

Invoices for Reimbursement

Each University will be reimbursed by STFC for the payments they have made for approved trips made by their staff. The first step is for the University to identify the expenditure to be recharged, this will include all claims paid, plus any other payments made directly by the University (e.g. air fares, workshop fees), but not advances (claims included in the invoice should be at the value before adjustment for any advance).

The invoice itself should contain one line item for each Budget Code to be charged, indicating the Budget description, the Project Number and Task Number and the total to be charged to that Budget Code.

Normally invoices should be raised promptly at the end of each quarter. However, to minimise the amount of spend spilling over between financial years the invoice for March should be prepared early enough for the Purchase Order to be raised by RAL in time for the invoice to be included in that Financial Year (typically this means it should be received at RAL at least 2 weeks before the end of March – *details to be confirmed*).

The invoice should be sent to the appropriate person in RAL PPD (currently Mrs P Shand), who will raise the appropriate Purchase Order (see above), receipt the lines of the invoice and then forward the invoice to SSC for payment. Wherever possible the invoice should be sent to RAL via e-mail (to Tricia.Shand@stfc.ac.uk). The Address printed on the Invoice must be of the form:

> STFC
> c/o RCUK Shared Services Centre Ltd
> North Star House
> North Star Avenue
> Swindon
> SN2 1FF

The Budget Holder, the VN Approver and the Local Claim Approver

The new process requires that a VN Approver be designated for each Budget Code to be used. In many cases the Budget Holder may undertake to take this role themselves, but some Budget Holders may elect to designate someone else – in which case the Budget Holder should give clear guidelines to the VN Approver on criteria for the approval of Visit Notices. In either case the Budget Holder should ensure that the community of Travellers likely to use that Budget Code are informed of the identity of the VN Approver so they know from whom to seek approval for trips.

At each University there should be a Local Claim Approver for each Budget Code to handle the approval of Claims related to that Budget Code from people at that University. The Local Claim Approver should be at the University concerned, so that they can do this and where necessary interact with the University Finance and Admin people. The University may chose to appoint a single Local Claim Approver for all Budget Codes used or they may chose to have a separate Local Claim Approver for each Budget Code. It is expected that the Local Claim Approver is a member of the Physics community at the University, typically a Group Leader or Physics Department Administrator. Budget Holders are being asked to suggest a suitable candidate, but it is accepted that the decision is primarily one for the University. Whoever is appointed should be given/sent the approved Visit Notice, including any specific guidance from the VN Approver. When the Traveller submits their claim it will need to be approved by the Local Claim Approver, to ensure that the claim meets the general guidelines and any guidance from the VN Approver – for example if the Visit Notice has been approved for an experiment meeting where the UK collaboration has set a specific maximum for that meeting. The Visit Notice includes a field where the VN Approver can add any such guidance, or they could include their guidance in an e-mail with the approved Visit Notice. If a Local Claim Approver receives a claim where there is a significant discrepancy with the estimate on the Visit

Notice the Local Claim Approver should inform the VN Approver (unless the Claim is amended to remove the discrepancy).

4) Summary of Tasks

Budget Holder

1) For each University involved in the Project they should draw up a list of the permitted Budget Codes and the maximum likely value to be spent in the financial year (or the fraction remaining). This information should be sent to PPD.
2) They should ensure that they approve any Purchase Requisitions via their own SSC access in a timely way so that a Purchase Order is in place for invoices to be paid promptly.
3) They should designate a VN Approver to approve travel to be charged to the Budget Code – they may chose to do this task themselves. They should inform the community of Travellers using the Budget Code who the VN Approver is.
4) At each University involved in the Project they may nominate a Local Claim Approver to deal with Claims, and interact with Administrative and Finance staff at that University. Note, however, that the choice of the Local Claim Approver is mainly a matter for the University.
5) They should interact as necessary with the VN Approver(s) to monitor and control the spend on their Budget Code. This includes notifying the VN Approver of the allocation they may spend. The details of the interactions are at the discretion of the Budget Holder, but ultimate responsibility for the spend on the Budget Code remains with the Budget Holder.

Traveller:

1) The Traveller should complete a Visit Notice and send it to the appropriate VN Approver(s) for the Budget Code(s) used – this should normally be done electronically
2) Once the VN Approver has approved the Visit Notice the Traveller can proceed with the practical arrangements for the trip (e.g. booking of flights, accommodation, payment of any workshop fees)
3) After the Traveller has incurred expenses for the trip they should submit a claim to their University according to the normal procedure and rules of the University. The claim should be submitted for approval by the appropriate Local Claim Approver of the Traveller's University before it is passed to the usual University channels. The claim should be submitted in a timely way, normally within 1 month of the end of the trip.
4) Note at present it is accepted practice that a Traveller may submit more than one claim for a trip, for example for the air fare and or work-shop fees paid well in advance of the trip. However, it is expected that in general these would in the new system either be paid directly by the University or by an Advance to the Traveller from the University and that consequently multiple claims for a single trip would only arise very exceptionally.

Visit Notice Approver:

1) If someone other than the Budget Holder - Agree with the Budget Holder the criteria to be followed when approving Visit Notices and how the Visit Notice information should be recorded (especially costs).
2) Handle the approval of Visit Notices for trips using the Budget Code.
3) Interact with the Budget Holder as required.

Local Claim Approver:

1) Handle the approval of Claims from Travellers at their University prior to their submission to the University system. This includes checking that each claim is reasonable, and follows any specific guidance given by the VN Approver. If there is a significant discrepancy with the estimate on the Visit Notice the Local Claim Approver should inform the VN Approver (unless the Claim is amended to remove the discrepancy)
2) Interact with the VN Approver and/or Budget Holder as required – normally little interaction should be required. However, if significant queries arise about the amount invoiced by the University to a particular Budget Code the Local Claim Approver would be expected to assist the investigation of the query.

University:

1) To handle claims of trips to be recharged to STFC by their affiliated staff, using the normal rules and procedures of the University. Each claim to be approved by the Local Claim Approver prior to payment.
2) Keep a record of expenses incurred by the University for all trips to be recharged to STFC. In addition to payment of claims to the Traveller this should include any direct payments by the University (e.g. air fares or workshop fees).
3) To retain all relevant receipts for possible audit purposes.
4) To prepare a quarterly invoice showing the amount to be recharged to STFC on each Budget Code.
5) To send the invoice electronically to the designated RAL PPD contact.

RAL:

1) Ask Budget Holders for information on Universities using a given Budget Code and the name of the VN Approver for that code.
2) Inform University groups of the Budget Codes they are expected to book travel to.
3) On receipt of an invoice from a University submit a Purchase Request to raise the required Purchase Order, receipt the lines of the Invoice and forward the invoice (electronically) to SSC for payment.
4) Inform Budget Holders of the amount invoiced by each University against their Budget.

5) Check the total amount to be invoiced by each University, to ensure that if it is likely to exceed the value on the Purchase Order appropriate action is taken – such as adjusting the PO value.

References:

[1] Further information and updates are available via:
http://www.stfc.ac.uk/PPD/23404.aspx

Annex A - Visit Notice

Visit Notice (for Particle Physics Visits paid by STFC)   Rev. 4 (22/06/12) - DRAFT

1) Traveller's Details

Name	Richard Smith-Jones Longname
University/Organisation	Liverpool Metropolitan

2) Visit Details

Destination(s)	CERN				
Departure Date	01/05/2012	Duration (number of nights to be claimed)	4	Return Date	05/
Reason for Visit	To work on ATLAS				

3) Estimated Cost of the Visit(s)

Please ensure that the estimate you give includes all of the costs to be charged to STFC for the Visit(s)
(i.e. including any travel claims to be submitted to your Institute, plus tickets or workshops fees etc
whether to be paid by your Institute or directly by STFC)

Total Estimated Cost	959.30	GBP

4) Budget Details

Project Number	Task Number	Amount	Comment
STAB012345	01.02.03.04	500.00	
STAC67890	05.06.07.08	500.00	
	Total	1000.00	

5) Date Submitted

Date Submitted:		31/12/2012

6) Authorisation - Budget - 1

	Print Name	Date	Signature
VN Approver			

7) Authorisation - Budget - 2

	Print Name	Date	Signature
VN Approver			

Guidance Notes for the Visit Notice

Traveller

Please submit your Visit Notice electronically as a spreadsheet if at all possible
The completed Visit Notice should be sent to the VN Approver(s) for the Budget(s) to be used

When you receive the approved Visit Notice back please forward a copy to your Local Claim Approver.

Visit Notice Approval

To approve this Visit Notice you should be a designated as a VN Approver by the Budget Holder. Your approval of the Visit Notice is subject to any conditions imposed by the Budget Holder.
Once approved please send the form back to the Traveller. (this can be done electronically)