

How to build an organising logic for structuring recognition payments for Public Contributors



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When it comes to setting payment levels for Public Contributors, the UK health research landscape looks much like a free market. On one side stands volunteering, with its clean ethical stance that conscientiously reimburses out of pocket expenses but then invites citizens to volunteer for nothing. On the other side stands the massive National Institute of Health Research, offering payments of up to £450 per day, yet setting no expectations that its delivery partners or anyone else should follow its lead. In between is a muddle of varying payment rates offered by individual research studies.

The matter is further complicated by concerns about the impact on the tax and welfare benefit status of recipients and by employment law, including National Minimum Wage legislation¹. When the Public Contributor is dependent on welfare benefits, there is a risk that a tactlessly worded statement could trigger benefit suspension for up to nine months and render the person destitute. It is worryingly easy to establish an implied, unwritten but nevertheless legally binding contract of employment with Public Contributors that an Employment Tribunal could use to insist that holiday and sickness pay was due, that employer's liability insurance was enforceable and so on.

In this short paper, I am going to set aside all these challenges and determinedly train my spotlight on the question of payment rates. We will consider what would be a defensible approach to take in setting recognition payment rates, and, on the way, explore how others have reviewed these matters. This is a reflection on the findings of an earlier paper² that attempts to catalogue all

¹ See Bates P (2020) *How to make sense of payments for Public Contribution*. Available at https://peterbates.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/how_to_make_sense_of_our_payments_offer.pdf.

² Bates P (last updated February 2021) *How to estimate the costs of public involvement*. Available at https://peterbates.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/how_to_estimate_the_costs_of_public_involvement.pdf

possible expenditure related to patient and public involvement, adding in payment information from a variety of sources³.

The analysis set out in this paper asks five questions and so builds a rational framework for determining recognition payment rates. The examples that have been drawn upon sometimes combine two or more components in their approach, so mapping what is offered elsewhere and making comparisons between the different regimes is not straightforward. Despite this, the purpose of this paper is achieved, which is to isolate five distinct questions that may drive a payment regime. The five questions are presented here and then expanded below.

1. How much time is spent on the activity?
2. How much time is needed for preparation and follow up?
3. What are the demands of the task?
4. What output is delivered?
5. How do payments compare with others?

1. How much time is spent on the activity?

This is the starting point for constructing a framework for recognition payments. Table 1 gives some examples, showing that the central divisions of NIHR⁴ (CCF, NETSCC, CED) have some individual variations but take a broadly similar approach.

Cancer Research UK in an undated document offered definitions of various time periods, including:

- A day is considered to be more than 4 hours
- Half a day is 2-4 hours. In contrast, Oxford BRC consider it to be 2-3 hours.
- Breaks and social time are subtracted to calculate the duration of a two-hour meeting.

Table 1: Rates vary according to the time taken up by the activity

| Duration of the task | CCF 2017 | NETSCC 2019 | CED 2021 | NHS England | Oxford BRC 2017 | North Bristol NHS Trust | Cancer Research UK |
|----------------------|-----------|-------------|-----------|-------------|-----------------|-------------------------|--------------------|
| 30 minutes | | | £12.50 | | | £5 | |
| 1 hour | £25 | £25 | £25 | | | £10-£20 | |
| 2 hours | £50 | £50 | £50 | | £30 | | £30 |
| Half a day | £75 | £75 | £75 | £75 | £50 | | £50 |
| A day | £150-£450 | £150 | £150-£300 | £150 | £150-£225 | | £80 |

Hourly rates are routinely set above the National Minimum Wage levels to meet moral obligations of decency and avoid any criticism from that quarter, although paying a simple hourly rate lends

³ Policies have been found by searching the internet and asking other people. This document will be amended if other material is found. Please send anything relevant to peter.bates@ndti.org.uk.

⁴ This paper is in search of organising principles for payment, so the details of individual organisations or research programmes is not especially important to the argument. Acronyms are used in the body of the paper to keep the sentences short and focus on the issues. Anyone who wishes to decode the acronyms is directed to the glossary at the end of this paper.

credence to claims that Public Contributors are employed, which they are not. Where various payment options are offered for a specific amount of time, this is because additional factors are included as discussed below.

2. How much time is needed for preparation and follow up?

The Public Contributor may need to prepare for a forthcoming activity or follow up on it afterwards. For example, a committee member may be expected to read papers before the meeting and take actions afterwards. This means that the ‘direct time’ would be the duration of a committee meeting, for example, and the ‘indirect time’ would be the time spent in preparation and follow up. It is a feature of direct time that others can confirm that the person was present and active, while indirect time is usually unsupervised and variable, depending on factors such as diligence, reading speed, attention and note-taking, so the payment for indirect time involves more trust.

In many funding regimes, the payment is set by the amount of direct time spent in the meeting and this is assumed to cover some indirect time too. So, as we saw in Table 1, NETSCC pay £150 for attendance at an all-day meeting. They expect the Public Contributor to read minutes of the previous meeting and the agenda beforehand without any further recognition payment for this indirect time. In most cases, the indirect time taken to travel to and from the venue does not attract payment (although travel expenses are covered) and the clock starts at the beginning of the meeting and stops when it ends. In one notable exception, a 2013 policy included the time taken to travel to and from the meeting.

Leeds BRC consider that extra preparation time should attract a payment in its own right, as shown in Table 2, although this example blends the amount of preparation with another factor that will be addressed below – the level of responsibility borne by the person. As the combined payment rates at Leeds BRC match those offered by CCF and CED, we must wonder whether these latter agencies also adopt the Leeds BRC rationale.

Table 2: Leeds BRC offer recognition payments for both direct and indirect time and also factor in the level of responsibility.

| | The meeting itself | Preparation |
|--------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| £75-£100, made up of... | £75 for half a day’s meeting, which includes an obligation to read the agenda and minutes of the last meeting, plus... | If applicable, £25 for any additional preparation beyond reading the agenda and minutes. |
| £150-£450, made up of... | £150 for an all-day meeting which includes an obligation to read the agenda and minutes of the last meeting. In addition to the £150, a separate payment to recognise additional preparation may be offered... | If applicable, the relevant item from the choice below: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £75 for preparation where considerable additional preparation and responsibility are held • £150 for preparation where there is extensive additional preparation required, such as a funding board with an exceptionally large number of proposals |

-
- £300 where preparation involves assessment of multi-stage, complex grant applications.
-

3. What are the demands of the task?

Some tasks are considered demanding and therefore attract greater payments, with NIHR specifically indicating that the various possible activities should be categorised and matched to different payment levels¹ by considering ‘skills, time and responsibility’². In the strict analysis in this paper, these requirements are separated from the output and performance of the individual, which is discussed below under the heading of Productivity. Nine elements appear to increase the demands of the setting as listed below:

Commitment. Some organisations pay larger amounts where, for example, a Board has a defined membership, terms of reference, agenda and accountability.

Skills. At NHS England, the all-day rate of £150 is provided to people who demonstrate “strategic and accountable leadership and decision making”.

Representing a minority. At North Bristol NHS Trust, there are only two places assigned to Public Contributors on a committee, so the usual payment rate is doubled from £10 to £20 per hour. It is not clear whether this is in recognition of a duty to collate material from other Public Contributors before the meeting and feedback afterwards, or in recognition of the emotional labour involved in speaking up in a meeting dominated by staff. For that matter, the policy also indicates that the £20 per hour rate would only be payable if the Public Contributor is required to also carry out preparatory reading for the meeting, so it is not clear which individual or group of factors triggers this increase.

Speaking. While contributing to a meeting by speaking and listening to others is a normal part of the requirement for all members, preparing and giving a presentation is a challenging task that can trigger performance anxiety, especially if the audience is large and the people are high-status strangers. If the audience includes people from outside the organisation, the speaker carries additional responsibility for upholding the reputation of the organisation as competent and courteous. One agency offered Public Contributors £30 for contributing to a conference presentation or staffing a poster, while NIHR report that rates vary from £45 for a short presentation, £75 for a longer one to £100 or £150 for speaking at a national conference.

Reading. The volume of reading to be undertaken as part of the task. Different approaches have been adopted to this, as set out in Table 3. North Bristol suggests that reading and commenting on 20 pages would take about an hour.

Table 3: Payments vary according to the number of pages to be read beforehand⁵

⁵ In Table 3, ‘Bristol’ refers to North Bristol NHS Trust policy dated 2017, ‘Leeds’ means the Leeds BRC rates published in 2020, and ‘CCF’ means the rates published by NIHR CCF in 2018. For the CCF, the payment is offered for preparation and attendance at an all-day meeting where one of the bullet points set out in the relevant row of Table 3 is covered.

| Source | Reading required | Payment level |
|---------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|
| Bristol | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review and comment on 20 pages | £10 |
| Leeds | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review up to 15 pages | £15 |
| Leeds | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review 16-25 pages | £25 |
| Leeds | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review 26-50 pages | £50 |
| Leeds | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review 51-200 pages | £125 |
| CCF | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review up to 10 full research proposals, reading suggested research topics (up to 40) and reviewing up to 8 vignettes for the HTA programme Review up to 20 applications at the scrutiny stage of RfPB Review 1-2 applications for PGfAR | £150 |
| Leeds | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review 201+ pages | £200 |
| CCF | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review between 11 and 14 full research proposals Review 21 or more applications at the scrutiny stage of RfPB | £225 |
| CCF | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review 15 or more full research proposals Review 3-4 applications for PGfAR | £300 |
| CCF | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assessment of multi-stage, complex grant applications. (e.g. reviewing 5-6 PGfAR applications) | £450 |

Writing. At the East Midlands RDS, Public Contributors who are members of the Scientific Panel are required to keep a written record of their judgements about each decision.

Chairing the meeting. At Oxford BRC, committee members attending an all-day meeting receive £150 while the chair is offered £225. A similar distinction is made at CPT, where committee members attending the meeting receive £10 per hour while the chair is offered £15.

Designing events. At CPT, planning, preparing and co-facilitating a training event, workshop or seminar for the purpose of training or developing staff attracts a rate marginally above chairing a meeting. As this description uses the term ‘co-facilitating’ it is likely to require the Public Contributor to work alongside a staff member rather than shoulder the entire task.

Bearing a weighty responsibility, such as serving as a panellist for the recruitment and selection of staff or sitting on a Committee that makes funding decisions. CPT distinguish local meetings from those held at a ‘national level’. Participation in local meetings attract £10 per hour while these high-level national meetings attract £16.51.

Acting as a public co-applicant. In 2013, NIHR Involve suggested that the role of Public Co-Applicant might require 10 days per year at £400 per day.

Table 3 also shows that, even within the same policy, a payment of £150 for an all-day meeting might require a considerable amount of indirect time spent reading documents and evaluating proposals, or the same rate may also be offered for attendance at a meeting that requires almost no preparation at all.

4. What output is delivered?

While some jobs in the open market operate on a piecework basis where payment is directly proportional to productivity, in most employment settings, wages are independent of productivity in the short term and training, appraisal, capability and disciplinary management are used instead. Even where performance-related pay is used, it is rarely used to vary the payment for an individual task, except at the most basic level of paying only those who attend rather than paying people who are unwell and unable to attend or who are absent for other reasons.

Public Contributors are not employed, but a parallel may be drawn, as with volunteers. Public Contributors may be given a role description, and some recognition payment frameworks indicate what outputs are expected, but output specifications are generally not used to evaluate the Public Contributor's performance and derive a payment rate in respect of a particular task.

As a result, although it might be tempting to offer a certain payment rate per page of writing authored by the Public Contributor or withhold the promised payment to someone who attends a meeting but does not speak, these 'productivity-based' regimes have generally not been adopted. Similarly, people who speak or write but do not add value with their words are not deprived of the offer of payment. Instead, the offer of payment is honoured and the person is provided with feedback, coaching and support.

We can divide payments into two categories. The first is a regular payment that is offered to people for their repeated involvement in an ongoing meeting or activity, such as committee membership. In contrast stand individual, discretionary, standalone activities such as when a Public Contributor who is part of a Committee is invited to test an interview schedule. In these ad hoc activities, the offer of payment is honoured, but a poor performance may lead to that person not being invited to participate in future opportunities of this type. However, feedback, coaching and support would normally be made available to help the person to do better next time.

Having said this, there are exceptions listed by INVOLVE, including the following:

- Writing a lay summary of research findings, which attracts £100
- Conducting a research interview as a peer researcher, which attracts £60-£75 per interview or £15 per hour.

5. How do the rates compare with others?

Guidance³ from NIHR indicates that payments should be made at a level that is 'fair when compared to other members of the research team, to acknowledge the value placed on public involvement.' While this is obviously a laudable goal, no advice is given on who to make the comparison with or how to translate an annual salary to a day rate or whether a comparison with contractor day rates would be more suitable⁴.

Only one of the payment frameworks reviewed for this paper gave any indication that this question had been addressed. At CPT, payment rates attached to tasks bearing significant responsibility match staff salary levels. For example, co-designing a training event attracts an hourly rate equivalent to Agenda for Change Band 6, while participants who attend a national, high level meeting are offered Band 7⁵.

Some Public Contributors have recommended that rates are periodically uplifted in response to inflation, or individuals should be offered promotion to higher rates of payment after they have developed additional experience and expertise. Neither of these options have yet been addressed by the organisations we have reviewed.

There is also a potential problem which arises if the distinction between payment rates for different activities appears to be based on arbitrary rather than rational decisions. In the worst-case scenario, those who are offered nothing beyond reimbursement of expenses can feel aggrieved that their contribution is devalued and this leads to divisive resentment amongst Public Contributors and uncomfortable feelings amongst the staff who administer the system⁶. The commonest divisions are:

- Between Public Contributors who coproduce health research (who receive an offer of payment) and people involved in coproducing healthcare, such as recruitment of clinicians, strategic direction and quality assurance activities for health service providers (who commonly are offered no more remuneration than the reimbursement of their receipted expenses). An exception is CPT, where all coproduction activities are eligible for payment.
- Between Public Contributors who enjoy their liberty and those who reside in prison or secure forensic services, where additional rules may limit payment levels in an attempt to manage behaviour or to achieve the appearance of parity within these institutions.

These differences may be dwarfed by inequalities in the welfare benefit system, in which each type of benefit carries its own rules regarding participation payments. A simple offer of payment might be received without impact, trigger a 'pound for pound' cut, cancel entitlement to numerous other benefits or disqualify the claimant from an entire system. So, whilst the host organisation may have adopted equitable principles for setting payment levels, the lived experience of the Public Contributor is one of profound unfairness.

Conclusion

A detailed examination of recognition payment policies finds so much variation that an existing system cannot be simply adopted locally without review and amendment. This variation arises even within a limited comparison of the different arms of a single organisation, the NIHR. The five questions set out in this paper are an effective way of unpacking the logic that drives various payment regimes, while the range of payment, and significantly, the relationship between different tasks and the corresponding payments all serve as a guide to anyone seeking to establish a rational approach to payment rates in their own project.

Glossary

| Acronym | Meaning |
|---------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| BRC | Biomedical Research Centre |
| CCF | Central Commissioning Facility, an arm of NIHR |
| CED | Centre for Engagement and Dissemination, an arm of NIHR |
| CPT | Cambridge and Peterborough NHS Foundation Trust policy CP33, 2019 |
| HTA | Health Technology Assessment, a programme of research run by NIHR |
| INVOLVE | A branch of NIHR tasked with promoting Patient and Public involvement in health research. Involve has been replaced by CED. |

| Acronym | Meaning |
|---------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| NETSCC | NIHR Evaluation, Trials and Studies Coordinating Centre |
| NIHR | National Institute of Health Research |
| PGfAR | Programme Grant for Applied Research, a particular funding award given by NIHR |
| RDS | Research Design Service, an infrastructure body tasked with supporting the development of research proposals |
| RfPB | Research for Patient Benefit, a research programme run by NIHR |

What is the status of this paper?

This is one of a suite of more than 30 *How To* guides that explore practical ways to coproduce healthcare research, delivery, teaching and evaluation. They can all be downloaded from [here](#). Each has been co-authored⁷ in public, is available online from the very first draft and each version is amended as soon as anyone suggests an improvement to the text⁸. They are therefore never finished and always open to capturing tacit knowledge and proven expertise from new sources.

¹ NIHR (2021) *Payment guidance for researchers and professionals*. Page 3.

² NIHR (2021) *Payment guidance for researchers and professionals*. Pages 7-8.

³ NIHR (2021) *Payment guidance for researchers and professionals*. Page 2.

⁴ We might guess that clinician hourly rates are set by simple division of the annual salary on the assumption that this is overtime paid on top of a regular salary, while the hourly rate for contractors is paid in recognition that such work is spasmodic and so needs to cover the costs of non-working days,

⁵ Payments are made at pay point 26 and expenses are offered in addition to this. In 2019, point 26 of Band 6 was £15.77 per hour, while Band 7 was £16.51.

⁶ The [NHSE&I policy](#) defines roles 1-4 and only offer payment for role 4. One commentator remarked that *“patients getting involved find it extremely divisive and disrespectful. It creates a lot of bad feeling amongst those who have been classed as role 3 and see those classed as role 4 getting paid, when actually everyone is giving up their time and making a valuable contribution... It will be impossible to remove barriers to involvement and reduce inequality with a payment policy which has inequality baked into it.”*

⁷ The following people have kindly responded to an inquiry with comments and challenges to this discussion: Matthew Gray, Toni James, Kim Rezel.

⁸ Most of the documents we read are finished pieces of work, carefully crafted and edited in private before being shared with anyone else. This is a different kind of paper – it was shared online from the first day, when the initial handful of ideas were incomplete, poorly phrased and tactless. The work has been edited many times, and, on each occasion, a revised version has replaced the earlier material online. This process is still under way, and so this paper may still be lacking crucial concepts, evidence, structure and grammar. As readers continue to provide feedback, further insights will be used to update it, so please contact peter.bates@ndti.org.uk with your contributions. This way of writing is risky, as it opens opportunities to those who may misunderstand, mistake the stopping points on the journey for the destination, and misuse or distort the material. This way of writing requires courage, as an early version can damage the reputation of the author or any of its contributors. Or rather, it can harm those who insist on showing only their ‘best side’ to the camera, who want others to believe that their insights appear fully formed, complete and beautiful in their simplicity. It can harm those who are gagged by their employer or the workplace culture, silenced lest they say something in a discussion that is not the agreed party line. It can harm those who want to profit from their

writing, either financially or by having their material accepted by academic journals. In contrast, this way of writing can engage people who are not chosen to attend the meeting or asked for their view until the power holders have agreed on the 'right message'. It can draw in unexpected perspectives, harvest tacit knowledge, stimulate debate and crowdsource wisdom. It can provide free, leading edge resources.