

Introduction

The Specialist Training Program (STP) seeks to extend vocational training for specialist registrars into settings outside traditional metropolitan teaching hospitals, including regional, rural, remote and private facilities. The program aims to improve the quality of the future specialist workforce by providing registrars with exposure to a broader range of healthcare settings. STP also aims to have a positive influence on future workforce distribution¹.

The Commonwealth Department of Health appreciates that trainees in rural and remote settings will face additional barriers and higher costs in accessing training resources than those in more traditional training situations. They will have to travel further to attend seminars, or access information online. They (or their employers) may also face additional costs in arranging accommodation.

The STP therefore allows a Rural Support Loading (RSL), based on the amount of time the trainee in a post spends in regional and remote Australia, to assist in meeting these additional costs.

Purpose

The purpose of the RSL is to assist in meeting additional costs which may be incurred by or in respect of a trainee during their training in regional and remote areas.

RSL Administration

The responsibility for administering the RSL is with the Medical Colleges which administer the STP posts in each specialty.

Each College is expected to:

- include arrangements for the distribution of RSL in the STP Funding Agreements which the College enters into with each eligible training facility; and
- report to the Department every six months on
 - the distribution of RSL funding through the STP
 - the level of achievement of the STP objectives.

Eligibility

Eligibility for RSL is determined by reference to the Australian Statistical Geographical Standard (ASGS) 2011 status of the facilities where training takes place. This eligibility definition for RSL has been determined by the Commonwealth Department of Health.

STP posts where a trainee spends time in an RA2-5 setting are eligible for RSL.

RA classifications can be checked by visiting the Department's [DoctorConnect website \(https://www.health.gov.au/resources/apps-and-tools/health-workforce-locator/health-workforce-locator#hwc-location\)](https://www.health.gov.au/resources/apps-and-tools/health-workforce-locator/health-workforce-locator#hwc-location).

¹ Commonwealth Department of Health, STP Operational Framework, p. 3, (accessed May 2020).

Funding

The maximum RSL for an STP post is \$25,000 (GST exclusive) per FTE per annum pro rata for training in a RA2-5 setting.

- The actual RSL paid to a training setting each year is based on the principle of 'reimbursement of expenditure' up to the maximum allowance.

If an STP post providing training in a RA2-5 setting is not filled to the full FTE originally approved under the STP, only a pro-rata amount of the RSL will be paid.

If a Post is vacant for the whole semester or year no RSL is available for the semester / year, even if the training facility has incurred expenditure on, for example, accommodation.

If an STP post includes a training rotation outside RA2-5 settings, the RSL is pro-rated by reference to the aggregate FTE of training in RA2-5 settings.

The Funding Agreements between the settings and the RACP provide for the recovery of funds if the post is not filled to the FTE in RA2-5 originally approved.

It is acknowledged that the RSL is only a contribution towards the cost of training in RA2-5 settings.

Use of RSL

RSL is intended to support the delivery of education and training in RA 2-5 settings and does not represent a direct financial benefit to the training setting. Also, the RSL is attached to specific STP training posts but is focused on supporting trainees.

Eligible & Ineligible Expenses for RSL

It is important that training settings only seek RSL funding (reimbursement of expenses) for those expenses that are eligible.

Expenses that are eligible for RSL are listed in **Attachment A**.

Ineligible expenses are listed in **Attachment B**.

Questions regarding eligibility?

If a Training Setting is considering spending RSL funding on matters that are not clearly covered in **Attachments A or B** they should seek confirmation from the STP Unit in writing that this expenditure is eligible RSL expenditure **before** proceeding to incur expenses.

Reporting requirements

All sites eligible to receive RSL funding are required to submit an RSL Validation Report in November each year.

- The Validation Report is lodged through the STP Web Portal.

Validation Report: New Validation Process from 2020

- In 2020 the Validation Report process will be streamlined.
- The Validation Report for each Post will require Liaison Officers (Primary or Secondary) to complete the following in the Portal:
 - Attach a completed and signed Financial and Compliance Declaration
 - Complete the table showing actual expenditure by major category
 - Complete the Section titled 'How has this funding provided benefit to the STP trainee?'
 - Tick the box 'terms and conditions'
 - Submit the report.

- The **Financial and Compliance Declaration** covers each post in the Funding Agreement in respect of which the RSL is paid.
 - is signed by an officer authorised by the rules governing the organisation.
 - Subject to the organisation's rules this may be the Chief Executive Officer, Chief Financial Officer, Director etc
 - a template for the Declaration is included in **Attachment C**.
 - Simply add STP Post Numbers and Total RSL expenditure for each in the table that is part of the template.
 - Note: The wording of this Declaration is required as included and cannot be changed.
- The **major categories of expenditure** are:
 - Trainee Relocation and Accommodation
 - Trainee Development - Professional Development Allowance
 - Trainee Development - Attendance at external educational activities (e.g. courses and conferences)
 - Trainee Development - Online courses & resources (online and hard copy)
 - Trainee Work Travel – travel expenses to outreach clinics / facilities
 - Training: Medical Training Equipment & IT

What is included in each category is shown in Attachment A.
- Liaison Officers must hold all the **records of expenditure** that support the 'Actual Amount' of expenditure recorded in the Validation Report.
 - Records of expenditure include for example, invoices, internal expense claim forms, internal generated expense reports and extracts from payroll systems. See **Attachment D** for acceptable supporting documentation.
 - These records **must** be held as per regulatory requirements (for example, financial audits by the organisation's auditors).

Audit of Validation Reports

- Each year the College will select a number of STP posts to conduct an audit of the relevant RSL Validation Report.
 - It is expected that every Funding Agreement that receives PICS funding will be involved in an audit at least once every three years. Those that have multiple Posts may be involved in the audit process every year.
- If a post is selected for an audit the Liaison Officer will be advised by the STP Unit.
 - The Liaison Officer will be required to email the STP Inbox all the relevant invoices and other documents that support the RSL claims for that Post.
 - This must be done within 14 days of being requested.
 - The documents must be collated and aggregated by Major Category of Expenditure. If necessary, a summary table should be provided for those Categories that have a large number of invoices and other supporting documents (for example, Flight / Accommodation / Car Hire bookings by Trainee).
 - Only appropriate and relevant documentation must be attached for each claimed expense.
- If there are problems in meeting the Audit requirements for the specified Post, the RACP may audit additional Posts that year.
 - Also, the Funding Agreement may be involved in audits for one or more Posts in subsequent years.
- If, in the view of RACP in its absolute discretion, the audit does not support any part or all of any claimed RSL expense the Fund Holder will not be paid the amount of the RSL expense claimed. The view of the RACP of the eligibility of an RSL expense is final and binding.

Timelines

- RSL Validation Reports are required to be submitted in November each year.
 - The STP Unit will advise Liaison Officers of the actual closing date for submissions each year.
 - The STP Portal will include the closing date from early in the year. Email reminders may be sent closer to the deadline.

Payments

- RSL payments are made to organisations which have entered into a Funding Agreement with the College. **RSL payments will not be made to individual trainees.**
- The RSL and PICS payment for each Funding Agreement, covering all eligible Posts, will be made in one payment.
 - Note. Payments are made at the Funding Agreement Level. All Post payments are made at the same time. It is not possible to make payments for a Post outside of this process. For example, if a Post is involved in an audit no payments can be processed for any other Posts covered by the Funding Agreement until the audit has been completed.
- For those Funding Agreements not involved in an audit of a Post Validation Report (for RSL and/or PICS) the target is to complete all initial assessments within 2 weeks of receipt of a Validation Report. Subject to a satisfactory assessment for every Post covered by the Funding Agreement, the payment should occur within another 2 weeks.
- For those Funding Agreements involved in an audit of a Post Validation Report the payment will occur once the audit process has been satisfactorily completed.
 - It is expected the audit process will be completed for all Posts about 2 months after the closing date for the Validation Reports. However, this timing is dependent on the quick turnaround by Liaison Officers for requests for advice and additional supporting documents.

For more information

For any enquiries regarding RSL funding, please contact the STP Unit at the RACP on STP@racp.edu.au or (02) 9256 9665.

ATTACHMENT A

Eligible Expenses

All expenses are to be GST exclusive. Expenses to support expenditure are required to be stated as 'GST exclusive'. Please note that the College will pay GST to the organisation, but this is added onto the payment once it has been approved.

Trainee Relocation and Accommodation

- Trainee Relocation costs
 - Domestic flights, including those for family members
 - Moving household goods
 - Vehicle transfer
 - Temporary accommodation
- Accommodation
 - Reimbursement or subsidy for rental accommodation during the STP training period, including their partner and family members who are residing with the Trainee
 - Notional rent for accommodation owned by the hospital / training facility
 - Reimbursement or subsidy for utilities

Trainee Development – Professional Development Allowance

Many organisations provide Trainees with a regular allowance (included in their 'pay') to cover professional development expenses rather than reimburse and/or pay for courses and associated travel, accommodation etc. This category covers this type of expense.

- Professional Development Allowances provided through the payroll system to the Trainee (usually every pay)

Trainee Development - Attendance at external educational activities (e.g. courses and conferences)

This category covers only those training activities where the venue is not at the Trainee's normal workplace e.g. hospital. The training venue may be intrastate or interstate.

- Membership fees to access training
 - excluding RACP
- Registration fees
- Transport and accommodation to access training
 - including domestic flights, train, taxi/uber, car hire
 - including hotel/motel room rates / Air BnB
 - other incidental expenses that would be reimbursed under the hospital / training facility policy / guidelines.
- If a Liaison Officer is unsure about whether an external course for a trainee is eligible, it is suggested that the supervisor be asked whether they support the trainee's attendance at the course. A record of that support, say an email, should be kept as a supporting document.
 - alternatively, if the hospital approved the trainee's leave to attend the course and/or reimbursed associated travel expenses that would be considered adequate.

Trainee Development - Online courses & resources (online and hard copy)

This category covers those training activities completed online, accessing resources online and the purchase of 'hard copy' training resources such as textbooks, medical journals.

- Membership fees to access training
 - excluding RACP
- Online course registration fees
- Fees / charges associated with accessing online library, journals and other medical training resources.
 - If access is purchased for a group or organisation the eligible cost is on a pro rata basis between the STP Trainee and all users.
- Textbooks, medical journals and other hard copy training resources
 - These resources are not to be considered the private property of STP Trainees but to be available to other trainees.
- If a Liaison Officer is unsure about whether an online or hard copy resource for a trainee is eligible, it is suggested that the supervisor be asked whether they support such a purchase. A record of that support, say an email, should be kept as a supporting document.

Trainee Work Travel – travel expenses to outreach clinics / facilities

Many STP Posts involve travel to a number of rotational facilities. Some of the rotational facilities are located very far away from the 'home' training facility that require flights or significant car trips and overnight or weekly accommodation etc. Examples of eligible travel for this category are for a Trainee based in Adelaide but has a rotation in Darwin and a Trainee based in Cairns but has rotations in Cape York.

- Transport
 - including public transport, domestic flights, car hire and taxi/uber
 - car hire is usually for use to/from the destination airport, rotational facility and accommodation.
- Accommodation
 - including hotel/motel room rates / Air BnB
 - other incidental expenses that would be reimbursed under the hospital / training facility policy / guidelines.

Training: Medical Training Equipment & IT

- Medical Training Equipment
 - Simulation and other training equipment available to STP trainees
 - Please note
 - Major equipment, such as mannequins, are eligible for a claim once every three years.
 - Claims deemed excessive will be subject to follow-up and may be rejected or amended.
 - New equipment for each trainee rotating through the post is deemed excessive
- Broadband access / IT upgrade
 - Equipment, installation, software, relating to the trainee or training position but not for the entire training site.
- Video conferencing facilities
 - Equipment, installation, software that is directly benefiting the STP Trainee

- **Computers**
 - Purchases limited to once every 3 years per Post
 - Desktops, Laptops, iPads are considered the same for the purposes of this eligible expense.
 - Claims deemed excessive will be subject to follow-up and may be rejected or amended.
 - A new tablet for each trainee rotating through the post is deemed excessive
 - Annual leasing expenses are acceptable if that is the organisation's approach to the provision of computers to all medical staff.
 - Licenses to access software and/or educational resources.
 - The cost attributed to the STP Post / Trainee must be on a pro rata basis
- **Telehealth**
 - Usage costs
 - must be reasonably allocated to trainee, say on a pro rata basis, and expensed accordingly.
- **One off in 1st year: Trainee Office/Desk equipment (filing cabinets, chair)**
 - Setting up an office or workstation for the STP trainee. Such costs will only be allowed in first year the Post is established / funded by STP. Otherwise, such costs would be ineligible for a claim.

ATTACHMENT B

Ineligible Expenses

Listed below are activities, equipment, etc. that are ineligible for support under STP-RSL. The list has been categorised into 6 groups. The categorisation is aimed at assisting Liaison Officers to comply with the RSL requirements. However, all items listed, irrespective of the category, are ineligible for STP-RSL support.

Please note that GST is ineligible. Expenses to support expenditure are required to be stated as 'GST exclusive'. Please note that the College will pay GST to the organisation, but this is added onto the payment once it has been approved.

Administration

Administration	Costs of managing the Post and the Trainee.
STP Expression of Interest (EOI)	Costs associated with preparing an EOI for STP funding.
Staff costs	Additional costs of Management and Staff because the hospital staff is larger.
Recruitment of Trainees	Charges from recruitment consultants. Internal charges for management and administration staff.
Accreditation	Expenses incurred in ensuring RACP accreditation requirements are met, including organising the initial accreditation and reaccreditation of positions.
Office consumables	Purchase of office consumables, such as stationery, printer cartridges, telephone line rentals and phone calls.

Clinical Supervisor

Supervisor	Additional time spent by Supervisors because they have an additional trainee.
Supervisor Travel and Accommodation	The cost of Supervisors travelling to outreach clinics / rotational facilities with the trainee(s).
Supervisor Professional Development	Clinical, training and management skill development.

Trainee

Trainee Salary	RSL funds cannot be used to 'top up' trainee salary
Travel Time	'Travel time' to outreach clinics cannot be funded from RSL

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Locum Costs	Costs of covering the trainee's position whilst they are travelling or attending courses etc.
Grand Rounds & Clinical Reasoning	Trainee salary cost for attending / participating in these activities.
Internal training	Training required to be completed by all employees as part of their site induction will not be allowed.
RACP Registration	Trainee registration fees
RACP Exams	RACP examinations fees.
RACP Exam - Travel	Cost of travel, accommodation and other related expenses for RACP exams.
Publication Fees	Cost of publishing article(s) in journals etc
Home internet	Establishment and ongoing costs for access, download capacity and improved speed at home.
Storage	Storage costs for household goods, vehicles etc.

Travel

International Travel	<p>International travel and attendance at training courses, meetings, conferences held outside Australia</p> <p>The Commonwealth has specifically excluded international travel and attendance at training courses, meetings, and conferences held outside Australia.</p>
Family Members Travel	Travel expenses for family members, except for relocation.

Hospital

Hospital Equipment & Consumables	Camera, doctor's bag, sphygmomanometers and cuffs with case, pulse oximeter, measuring mats, tendon hammers, tongue depressors, ear specula, urinalysis strips and other items used in treating patients. Please note that not all items have been listed but this should provide information about the type of items that are ineligible.
Office Consumables	Purchase of office consumables, such as stationery, printer cartridges/toner/ink, telephone line rentals and phone calls.
Dictaphone and translation services	Cost of purchasing Dictaphones and cost of preparing transcripts.

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Catering	Catering costs for meetings, seminars and exam preparations. However, light refreshments are eligible where attendees are mainly Trainees in STP Posts. Alcohol is not eligible.
Clinical Rooms	Cost of hiring clinical rooms for trainees at the hospital/ main training facility.
Computer on wheels	Computer on wheels (COW) are considered to be an operating cost not specific to training.
Telehealth Network	Telehealth Network development, implementation and ongoing support costs.
Training room upgrades	Minor upgrades to facilities and fit out. Except in the first year the Post is established / funded by STP when Office/Desk equipment (filing cabinets, chair) is allowed.

Other

Occupancy expense	Overhead costs generally calculated on a per person basis by the organisation's budget or finance area.
"Duplicate Claims"	Expenses claimed under PICS cannot also be claimed under RSL.

ATTACHMENT C

'ORGANISATION LETTERHEAD'

Dear RACP – STP Manager

Financial and Compliance Declaration: Rural Support Loading (RSL) & Private Infrastructure and Clinical Supervision (PICS)

Funding Agreement: (insert FA number e.g. FA-NSW-99)

I, <insert officers full name>, and <Title e.g. Chief Executive Officer> from <insert organisations name> declare that;

1. The RSL and/or PICS Validation Report submitted for our organisation is an accurate statement of actual expenditure for RSL and/or PICS STP funds for the current year.

A summary of that expenditure is shown in the table below.

STP Post Number	RSL \$	PICS \$
Total	\$	\$

2. I am authorised by the rules governing our organisation to sign this declaration
3. The total expenditure for RSL and/or PICS specified in the Validation Report was spent in accordance with the STP Funding Agreement (FA) and the RACP RSL and/or PICS Guidelines.
4. I understand that RACP may conduct an audit of our RSL and/or PICS expenditure, from time to time, for a post(s) supported under the FA and that this organisation is required to keep records of all documentary evidence for RSL and/or PICS expenditure (including receipts and invoices as per regulatory requirements).
5. I understand that if selected for an audit our organisation must provide RACP with a copy of all relevant documentary evidence of RSL/PICS expenditure within 14 days of receiving a request to do so.

I note that the STP Liaison Officer for this organisation will complete, by the due date, the online requirements for the Validation Report, including a breakdown of RSL and PICS expenditure by category.

Yours sincerely

Chief Financial Officer / Chief Executive Officer / Director

Date: ___ / ___ /20xx

ATTACHMENT D

Supporting Documentation - RSL

Introduction

In recent years a wide range of documentation has been provided to support expenses claimed under RSL. Many of the documents provided in the past have not enabled the College to determine that the funds have been spent in accordance with the Guidelines. This situation required the College to follow up with Liaison Officers to provide further documentation and explanations. Thereby increasing the administrative workload of all involved and delaying payments to the organisation.

The information below is aimed at providing guidance to Liaison Officers on what is acceptable supporting documentation for all expenses under RSL.

Financial and Compliance Declaration

It is noted that under the new approach to validating RSL expenses the Chief Executive Officer (or an officer authorised to do so) has signed a Financial and Compliance Declaration confirming the expenditure for RSL specified in the Validation Report was spent in accordance with the STP Funding Agreement (FA) and the RACP RSL Guidelines. The Declaration covers all Posts in the Funding Agreement.

The Declaration further states that the RACP may conduct an audit of RSL expenditure, from time to time, for a post(s) supported under the FA and that the organisation is required to keep records of all documentary evidence for RSL expenditure (including receipts and invoices as per regulatory requirements).

GST Exclusive – Amount to be included in the Portal

Expenses to support expenditure are required to be stated as 'GST exclusive'. Please note that the College will pay GST to the organisation, but this is added onto the payment once it has been approved.

Foreign Currency

Some goods and services, such as journals, are purchased in foreign currency. These purchases need to be converted and shown in Australian dollars. Bank statements usually show both the foreign currency as well as the Australian dollar equivalent, including any transaction fees. If this type of supporting document is not available then a statement showing the foreign/Australian dollar exchange rate, including date and source of the rate, needs to be provided. The exchange rate used must be for the day the payment was made.

Supporting Document - Is it acceptable? Overarching Test

In considering whether a supporting document is acceptable there is one overarching question that you must ask:

- Would a financial auditor accept the document as evidence that the funds have been spent or the organisation has entered into a commitment to pay that amount?

Quotes

Quotes are not acceptable supporting documents.

Summary Document

If there are a large number of documents supporting expenses under a major category it can be useful for the Liaison Officer to create a covering spreadsheet showing a list of expenses and other relevant information.

These should be formatted so the reader can easily comprehend the spreadsheet and locate / identify the relevant supporting document as well as show total expenditure.

This document does not replace the need to provide supporting documents for each expense.

Used by STP and other Trainees?

For many goods and services purchased with RSL funds both STP and other trainees use them. In these instances, the Liaison Officer should apportion the expense between STP and other trainees. This may be done on a ratio basis or another methodology. The Liaison Officer must outline the methodology used as well as the actual STP expense calculation.

Invoices

Invoices are readily available for many purchases of goods and services and usually show all the information required.

It is expected that invoices will usually be used to support purchases of all equipment, including information technology as well as installation. Also, the purchase of training resources, both online and hard copy, will be completed with invoices.

Invoices showing the following information are acceptable supporting documentation.

- Brief Description of good / service acquired
- Amount paid (GST Exclusive)
- Payment confirmation
- Name of recipient entity / organisation

Other Supporting Documentation

Where invoices are not readily available the following documentation is acceptable. However, for these documents it is important that Liaison Officers check that relevant information is included and easily identified. Additional information or explanation may be sought during the audit process.

Travel for work or training purposes usually incur expenses for air travel, accommodation, car hire, course / conference registration fees. Please note that during the audit process the assessment will include cross referencing dates for these expenses.

Air travel bookings

For this type of expense, the supporting documents may be a booking document, but it must show:

- Passenger's name
- Departure & destination airports
- Dates of travel
- Cost of travel

Accommodation bookings – short term.

Accommodation for work & training are usually for short periods. For this type of accommodation, the supporting documents may be a booking document, but it must show:

- Name of Trainee
- Location of hotel / accommodation
- Dates / nights of accommodation
- Cost of accommodation

Accommodation – long term.

In regional and remote locations accommodation for Trainees is often provided by the hospital / setting or the Trainee is reimbursed for rent and some utility expenses.

For accommodation owned by the hospital / setting the supporting documents could be either:

- address details of the property and type of accommodation provided (e.g. 2 bed Unit, 3 bed home) plus notional rent
 - notional rent is based on:
 - 'Realestate.com.au' assessment
 - letter from a local real estate agent indicating rent for that type of property in that general area.

For reimbursement of rent the supporting documents may be:

- Lease agreements showing the location, period, rent, and utilities to be paid as well as one of the following:
 - spreadsheets showing reimbursements paid that have been downloaded from the hospital finance system and annotated as such
 - claim forms lodged by the Trainee
 - invoices sent to the Trainee by the agent / landlord (at least one invoice must show that the previous payment had been made).
 - NOTE: the documentation may be based on month / quarter/ half year with a note signed by the Liaison Officer on how it has been extrapolated to cover the Trainee's training period.

Car hire

For this type of expense, the supporting documents may be a booking document, but it must show:

- Passenger's name
- Booking period dates
- Cost

Travel for work or training purposes - incidental expenses.

Supporting documents for incidental expenses may be:

- reimbursement claim form approved by the manager/supervisor.
- the receipt for the expense but annotated by the supervisor / manager agreeing to it being reimbursed.

Training course / conference registration fees

Training registration fees supporting document(s) should show:

- Name of attendee
- Course, conference, etc
- Date(s)
- Cost

If it is necessary that the attendee must also be a member of the training organisation, details of those **membership fees** must also be provided. (Note: RACP membership fees are an ineligible expense.)

Relocation

Relocation expenses are intended to cover the Trainee as well as their partner and children.

Air travel, car hire (short term), accommodation (short term) for all members may be necessary and the documentation to be provided is outlined above. If the organisation reimburses the Trainee for the use of their own vehicle to relocate then the approved reimbursement form is required.

Removalist expenses are also likely to be incurred and an invoice for this expense would suffice but would need to include those items noted above for an invoice.

Training – Professional Development Allowance

Professional Development (PD) Allowance is usually paid through a payroll system. An extract from the payroll system showing the name of the Trainee and the amount paid for PD Allowance is an acceptable supporting document.

- NOTE: the documentation may be based on month / quarter/ half year with a note signed by the Liaison Officer on how it has been extrapolated to cover the Trainee's training period.

Spreadsheets

Spreadsheets are acceptable supporting documents subject to the following requirements:

- downloaded from the organisation's finance or human resources systems
- easily understood
- expenses easily identified

Downloaded documents must be annotated or a title inserted to state that it has been downloaded from a specific source.

Many downloaded spreadsheets are difficult to understand. It may be useful to create a new tab that extracts data from the spreadsheet thereby making it easier to understand and track expenses back to the source. Colour coding often assists in this process as well as text describing the process of aggregating and allocation. The inclusion of formulas for individual cells showing the calculation may be helpful. The final expense (and categories) should be clearly stated.