GPC Regulations Changes Q+A

Use of Preferred Suppliers

Travel related

Q1. Can I clarify the position with staff and students who book their own travel and then claim this from the department as expenses. Are we permitted to pay these expenses or not? If the answer is "no" then I will need a period of grace to inform all staff and students and collect in any expense claim forms which still have travel with non-approved suppliers on them. Could we have to the end of January 2018 to enforce this change?

A1. No you are not permitted to book travel and claim it back via expenses where that travel could/should be booked via one of our preferred suppliers. But if there are travel legs that can not reasonably be booked via the preferred suppliers (buses, taxis, overseas local travel, etc), that would be fine to continue to claim expenses. We would expect this to apply immediately for new bookings but clearly there will need to be a period when earlier travel arrangements work their way through the expenses system, if that has been the route used.

Q2. Staff don't like the £10 admin charge which used to be levied by NYS travel (I don't know if this is still the case).

A2. There is no admin charge / transaction fees for departments from either travel agent.

Q3. Using the two travel management companies entails more work for our admin team as they have to action the setting up of staff and research students with usernames and passwords. We will clearly do it if we have to, but I was just asking, as up to now we haven't had to!

A3. There should be no work for the admin teams. End users can self-register for access to both agents - they should ask their departmental travel rep for the necessary links to register or they can email business-travel@york.ac.uk and we will email the links to them.

Q4. Is it possible to purchase rail tickets through NYS and collect them at the train station ticket machine rather than on campus?

A4. Yes - just select the ToD ticket delivery option when booking online or make the travel desk staff aware that you need to collect from the station if booking by phone / email. We encourage collection on campus wherever possible as there is no transaction fee to the University for this whereas. Ticket on Departure incurs a small fee. However, your department would not pay for this – transaction fees are paid for out of the central Procurement budget.

Q5. Can I check that hotels for interview applicants/external panel members would not be included within the business travel preferred supplier arrangements. This is accommodation not for staff. We
have a number of agreed rates and established relationships with hotels directly within York for this purpose. We need to be able to book suitable venues dependant on the level of the position etc (Prof/Chair appointments).

A5. The University's travel policy explains who the policy applies to. As well as staff, this includes:

‘other representatives of the University (e.g. visitors and honorary fellows) where the travel is directly related to academic (learning and / or research) purposes organised or authorised by the University.’

The University does have an additional policy relating to interview expenses and what applicants are allowed to claim if they book themselves. However, if they prefer you to book the accommodation for them, we would ask you to book through NYS or Selective. Firstly, this allows us to negotiate better rates in the future because we know our true volume of bed-nights and secondly, if there was a problem such as flooding / terrorist threat in York, the travel agents contact us immediately to tell us who may be affected and we can take appropriate action.

We do have preferred rates set up with a number of York hotels now and these have been negotiated by NYS and Selective - you can check the hotels and rates on each supplier’s home page of their online portal or by emailing business-travel@york.ac.uk. The list includes a range of hotels for all budgets, some of which would be suitable for higher-level appointments.

If you use any hotels regularly that aren’t on the list, please let us know so that we can put a rate in place to benefit all university departments.

Q6. If all travel now has to be booked through NYS or Selective, does that obviate the need to complete a Travel Log?

A6. The Procurement Office is currently working with our Health and Safety Department, IT Services and our two travel agents to integrate the booking systems with our internal travel log database. The main reason the travel log needs to be completed is to ensure that the traveller has business travel insurance cover in place for their trip, so until the integration work has been completed (likely to be 2-3 months) the travel log should still be completed to ensure the traveller is covered.

Q7. A member of staff is overseas for her research. She is concerned about the rules around booking travel and accommodation, given that she is based overseas and not in regular contact with the Department or University, so using YEP or Selective to book her travel is not really a viable option for her. Please can a special case also be made for her, to allow her to keep her card even though she doesn't use it very often, and to adopt a slightly more flexible and trusting approach with regard to travel bookings?

A7. The T&E policy allows for international rail network tickets to be purchased overseas by purchase card or personal credit / debit card and reclaimed on expenses. Flights and accommodation can usually be booked via NYS or Selective because they supply e-tickets or hotel booking vouchers via email. We’d be happy to discuss this further if this isn’t workable.
Q8. Dr X is based in our Brussels Office. Are NYS / Selective able to book his travel and how will he get his tickets when he needs to travel as he won’t be able to collect them on campus?

A8. With both agents, you can phone / email their travel team to make bookings or register for the online booking tools and book your own travel and accommodation. The online booking tools work wherever you are in the world. It's just like using Expedia or similar.

Obtaining tickets is no problem for flights or accommodation. Flight tickets are e-tickets sent via email, and accommodation booking confirmations would also be emailed. If the flights originate from a different country, Selective Travel would be the recommended agent as they have a system that enables them to access fares that originate in other countries. In terms of rail travel, both agents can book Eurostar and some international rail operators but it may be significantly cheaper to buy tickets locally if travelling regularly on international rail networks and reclaim on expenses.

Q9. I have a query regarding PDRA's who are based in Industry. The PDRA's are employed by York but based away from York e.g. I have one who is based in Oxford. Do they still need to use the TMC's? Although this is easy enough for flights etc. it is not for rail tickets. Not all stations have TOD and of course as the PDRA's are not on campus, they cannot use the campus ticket machines. Presumably as they are not York-based, they can still buy tickets and claim back on expenses?

A9. It would be worth checking whether mobile or print-at-home ticketing is available for their route. They could then just order their ticket online and show the conductor the ticket bar code on their mobile phone or present the ticket they've printed onto plain paper. If not, let them carry on with the expenses route until mobile and print-at-home ticketing becomes more widely available. This is due to be fully rolled out across the UK rail network over the next two years.

Q10. The reasons provided for the mandatory use of approved suppliers for travel seem surprising given that staff members also need to complete a travel log and a fairly lengthy risk form for exactly the same purpose. While filling in those forms may not cover all journeys by staff, mandating the use of systems that consistently overcharge (often by a lot more than 20 percent) as a substitute of a simple travel log does not seem to be in line with the principles of prudent financial management. I am sure all procedures have been nicely followed and everything has been properly signed off but a good auditor should immediately spot this kind of inefficiency. The best way to save staff time and university resources is to allow market-based solutions and, for example, collection of tickets online or at train stations. For the sake of transparency, it would be nice if the finance department made available detailed data on journeys and costs before and after the introduction of the system of preferred suppliers.

A10. We would be more than happy to investigate any instances of pricing that is 20% different from what you have found yourself. We have also done this comparison and have found that often for flight costs, the comparison is not like for like in terms of ticket flexibility / cancellation policies or the flight price doesn’t actually exist when you get through to the website and by the time you’ve added your bag / seat options. There are some instances in the past where certain train operating companies were able to offer cheaper advance tickets but this was addressed as part of our recent retender and the
Selective Travel team can book these tickets for you using their credit card. Rail tickets for some routes are now available as mobile phone or print at home tickets (for example, York - London route). As soon as more operators and stations can accept these ticket types, they'll be available for most journeys and our campus printers will no longer be required.

Q11. Conferencing: We use a lot of outside venues for conferences and events, for example The Principal Hotel York, the Merchant Taylors Hall, etc. This is mainly due to the unavailability of space on campus or the suitability of the rooms or the date not being available. Sometimes the dates cannot be flexible due to speaker or collaborator availability. Or it may be an away day and they want it to be off site not an away day on campus! Can we only use our facilities now? Is there no flexibility in using other venues?

A11. There is no problem with using another venue if YCL can’t provide what you need. There is another approved conference provider that you can use if YCL don’t have relationships in place with your venues – this is STA Travel who have an office in York. They were the top-ranked supplier appointed to the SUPC framework for booking hotels and conferences and will do the hard work in sourcing suitable venues for you. There are also other other suppliers on this framework - see https://www.hecontracts.co.uk/

Q12. Catering: you state that three suppliers were successful in the tender process, but only give the link to Cucina - who are the other two and how should we order with them?

A12. The table at the bottom of the p-card communication confirms the external suppliers – Bells and Divine Dining. Both suppliers are on the YEP system and a purchase order should be raised for any food orders, but we’ll add some information to our procurement website to confirm the contact details.

Q13. IT equipment: we have in the past had need of specialist IT kit, which is unsupported and which (hitherto) Stone and others have been unable to supply. Presumably we can use that, or the ‘significantly cheaper’ reason (as previously we have found the preferred suppliers to be substantially more expensive) if we need to purchase elsewhere? As an externally-funded centre, every penny counts!

A13. Please speak to IT’s Desktop & Printing Manager to discuss any specialist requirements as Stone, Getech and Academia can supply devices and specifications other than the recommended standard specs on the IT Services pages. If they are unable to supply what you need, it would be acceptable to go to another supplier. Regarding cost, we are very mindful of cost constraints for some departments but equally, IT and DCOs have incurred significant time costs trying to deal with non-standard devices that just don’t work when they arrive on campus. It’s a question of balancing departmental cost versus whole University costs. If you find a like for like spec device with extended and enhanced warranty at a cheaper price, please contact the Procurement Office so that we can take that up with the supplier. The enhanced warranty service means a no-quibble replacement next day should your device fail which most high street stores don’t give.

Q14. Printing: Regarding the use of Design and Print Solutions (DPS): much of our work is in interpretation schemes and we use specialist suppliers (who are on YEP) to provide the printed panels
etc our clients require. I assume if the order is placed through YEP this supersedes the requirement to use DPS? We do use them for routine printing where appropriate.

A14. Please see https://www.york.ac.uk/admin/procurement/staff/supplier-contracts/ which explains that preferred suppliers should always be the first choice. If DPS can’t provide the goods / services, only then can a YEP supplier be used. Please check with Carolynn Nowill at DPS whether they could do the work and proceed with your specialists if not.

Card Usage Rules

Q15. Although I use my card most months, there are periods when I don’t, so how flexible is the ‘two month use’ rule? Is it aggregated over a year, for example? It would be enormously annoying and a huge admin burden for you if I had to keep reapplying for a card.

A15. Cards won’t just be withdrawn in a draconian manner. The idea would be to monitor usage and then have the conversation with the cardholder prior to any further decision. The reason that we need to monitor that cards are being used regularly is because it is a Barclaycard condition that we maintain a minimum level of average usage and spend levels are also a concern. For example, some of our cardholders only used their card once in the last financial year and other cardholders spent less than £65 during the year. These cardholders are unlikely to need their own card and would be encouraged to use a colleague’s card instead if they needed to pay using that method.

Q16. One colleague only uses his purchase card while he is away from the country on fieldwork, between 1 August and 1 November each year. Other than that the card is unused. However, he does use it a lot when he is away on fieldwork and it would be difficult for him if his card was withdrawn. Can a special case be made for him to keep his card?

A16. Cards won’t just be withdrawn in a draconian manner. The idea would be to monitor usage and then have the conversation with the cardholder prior to any further decisions. The reason that we need to monitor that cards are being used regularly is because it is a Barclaycard condition that we maintain a minimum level of average usage and spend levels are also a concern.

Q17. The HoD is hosting an interview candidate for a senior position in the Department. This will involve a meal at a restaurant in York and the HoD is planning to use his University GPC card to pay for this – all perfectly acceptable under the regulations as there are no preferred suppliers for off-site catering.

A17. Yes, this is fine.

Q18. I use my purchasing card when I am working out of our Brussels Office, this means therefore that I probably don’t use it twice a month but it is essential I have one as previously I was incurring substantial expenses from my personal bank account due to subsistence and local tax for hotels when I am in Brussels.
A18. Please be assured that cards won’t be withdrawn in a draconian manner. The idea would be to monitor usage and then discuss things with the cardholder prior to any further decision.

Q19. Dr X and I currently approve each others transactions, please could you advise me who should approve Dr X’s purchases in the future?

A19. Dr X’s line manager should approve their transactions. If there are any complexities e.g. the person reports to somebody external to the University, it may be appropriate for your management accountant to approve the transactions. Please seek assistance from pcard@york.ac.uk.

Q20. I want to order some goods from a supplier’s website but it only offers Paypal as a payment option. Is that ok?

A20. It is fine to use your card if suppliers only offer Paypal as a payment option but you should do this as a one-off transaction and should not set up a Paypal account linked to your card. When coding your transaction on BSM, please ensure you put the website supplier’s name in the ‘Comments’ field and a full description of the goods / services purchased as BSM only records the supplier as ‘Paypal’.

Q21. I am an approver and have just received a transaction to approve for a Paypal transaction. Is this ok to approve?

A21. Many suppliers only offer payment by Paypal and because they are the payment beneficiary, their name will appear as the ‘Supplier Name’. Please ask the cardholder for evidence of the invoice / receipt for the purchase and ensure they have put the actual supplier’s name in the Comments field. Approvers should not approve a Paypal payment where there is no evidence or if they suspect the payment could be fraudulent (i.e. into an individual’s own paypal account).

Q22. The recently-issued rules on card usage refer to timely approval of card transactions but not coding of transactions. Is there a time limit for the coding of transactions?

A22. You will receive an email from the BSM system as soon as a transaction is available for coding. This should be done as soon as possible as the University has to pay the full amount spent with Barclaycard every week and that payment can only be reconciled when transactions have been coded and approved. If you do not code transactions quickly enough, Accounts Payable will generate an accrual for your management accountant to post uncoded transactions within that statement period to the default workorder you gave when applying for your card. This will be done at the end of the month after the statement date, which means you have approximately 5 weeks to code your transactions to the correct workorder.

If you are a cardholder that always struggles to code transactions in a timely manner, it is possible to delegate this task to a departmental colleague if you have the resource available. Please seek their
approval and then complete the Change of Details form on the Procurement website. The Pcard team will add your delegate’s details to your BSM account so that they receive the transactions for coding.

**Q23.** I will soon be moving to another department within the University. Is it ok to use my card with me and do I need to notify anybody?

**A23.** A purchase card is usually a requirement of the post you hold which is why the application has to be signed by the Head of Department. If you move, please ask your new Head of Department to email pcard@york.ac.uk to confirm that your card will still be required for your new role and who the new approver for the card will be. The Pcard team will then amend the BSM system so that coded transactions are routed to the correct new approver.