

Defra Finance

Defra Staff Expense (Travel & Subsistence) Policy

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Introduction

This Policy applies to Defra and its Agencies.

All expense claims must adhere to the following two key principles set out in the Civil Service Management Code:

1. Departments and agencies must reimburse staff only for the expenses which they actually and necessarily incur in the course of official business;
2. Departments and agencies must ensure that their rules provide for claiming recompense, including verification and authorisation.

The Treasury principles, building on the Code, are:

1. Departments will reimburse **actual** costs only;
2. Only costs which are necessary and **additional** to normal daily expenditure should be reimbursed;
3. All claims for expenses should be receipted and independently approved;
4. Departments should manage reimbursement by exception rather than by reference to entitlements – i.e. policies should not cover every eventuality;
5. Claims should include a clear business reason where travel is other than standard class;
6. The onus should be on local management to oversee the frequency of travel and associated expenses.

This means that staff cannot claim flat rates for domestic and overseas travel and subsistence costs, but will be reimbursed for **actual** expenditure only up to the stated ceiling. **All claims must be supported with receipts.** No-one can self approve T&S claims. All rail travel should normally be standard class.

Purpose

The purpose of this Policy is to establish firm ground rules, guiding principles and procedures for incurring travel and subsistence costs in the course of official business and to address the sustainability and environmental issues relating to such travel.

This policy details the expenses you may claim and supersedes all other previous guidance.

Ownership

This policy is owned by the Defra Finance Director.

Scope

Staff are expected to comply with this policy and to use only the authorised travel and accommodation booking services put in place by the Department.

Travel and subsistence principles

1. If possible travel should be avoided, using a more sustainable and cost effective means of achieving the business objective such as telephone or video or web conferencing.
2. All travel outside of policy should be avoided as far as possible. Prior approval (unless clearly not possible in the circumstances) should be sought from your line management. Line management should ensure that budget holders (usually at Director or Deputy Director level) are aware of instances of travel outside the policy and should ensure that appropriate steps have been taken to ensure that suitable options within the policy have been exhausted and the decision would stand up to public scrutiny
3. The traveller should take steps to ensure sustainability of travel as set out in the Sustainability section below
4. Staff should take all necessary health and safety precautions before travelling.
5. Deliberate disregard of travel and subsistence policies may lead to disciplinary action.
6. Staff can only claim for the additional costs incurred when compared to their usual personal expenditure when travelling to and working at their permanent workplace.

Responsibility and liability – individuals' responsibilities

Individuals are expected to:

- Comply with this policy
- Obtain any appropriate approvals from their manager or approver
- Submit their own claims promptly in person, with scanned receipts, through iExpenses
- Comply with GPC rules and procedures
- Use authorised travel and hotel booking services to book travel and accommodation

Managers' responsibilities

Managers and approvers are expected to:

- Ensure travel is necessary and justified;
- Check mileage rates being claimed;
- Ensure claims are justified and within set limits;
- Challenge appropriately when claims above ceiling are being claimed;
- When satisfied, promptly approve claims through iExpenses;
- Ensure that individuals carry out their responsibilities as set out above.

SSCL responsibilities

Shared Services will:

- Give first level advice and guidance to individuals in relation to claims through the SSCL Enquiries centre;
- Process payments in accordance with Key Performance Targets;
- Carry out audit of receipts on sample basis to assess compliance with requirement to support claims with receipts.

Sustainability

Defra and its Network are committed to adopting travel behaviours that support the Government's sustainability objectives.

The policy is to strike an appropriate balance between the costs and the benefits, taking into account:

- Cost
- Convenience
- Carbon emissions
- Care of staff

Travel should only be undertaken when there is no other practical business alternative and, where travel is necessary, sustainability and environmental issues are to be taken

into account when planning meetings and journeys. Rail travel is lower in carbon emissions than flying or road journeys and cheaper, especially when travel to and from airports is factored in. Advance fares offer best value for money.

Travel initiation and events

If a business trip is essential then care **MUST** be exercised to ensure that the mode of travel selected is the most cost effective option. It should also take due account of carbon emissions and the amount of time spent travelling (e.g. in most cases rail is preferable to travelling by car):

- External meetings should utilise Defra Network premises to avoid the high cost of commercial venues.
- Expenditure on external and internal events falls within Spending Control rules and central approval is required, see link:
<https://intranet.defra.gov.uk/how-to/correspondence/communications/spendingcontrols/>

Refreshments should not normally be provided for internal meetings.

Travellers are responsible for managing their behaviour in relation to reducing their carbon footprint. Defra and its Network will actively seek changes in line with government sustainability targets, and monitoring systems have been put in place to measure the rate of emissions.

Sourcing arrangements

All travel and hotel arrangements should be booked through the approved booking agents. Approved booking agents are in place for the following:

- Rail and Air Travel
- Hotel accommodation
- Venue Finding (for meetings, conferences and events)
- Car Hire

Rail and air travel, including class of travel

Travellers should adhere to the following rules:

- If possible travel should be avoided, using telephone or video conferencing instead
- Air travel between locations on mainland England, Wales and Scotland is not permitted unless approval by exception is granted by a director

- Where travel is unavoidable rail is the preferred means, being lower in carbon emissions than air travel and better value for money, when travel to and from an airport is factored in.
- There is a supplement applied to collecting '**Tickets on Departure**', therefore please try to arrange to collect your tickets from your local kiosks as far as possible.

The lowest **practical** fare/rate should be selected within the permitted class of travel.

| Air | Class of travel |
|---------------|--|
| All Employees | |
| All Journeys | Economy Class/Business Class |
| | <p>All air travel requires prior approval from a manager or approver.</p> <p>There is a complete ban on first class air travel. In exceptional circumstances, where it is necessary when overseas to take a flight and the higher seat class provided by the airline may be described as "first class" but is akin to business class (this situation would be most likely to arise on some overseas internal flights), regardless of the description used by the airline, the higher class may be used in accordance with Defra policy on the use of business class. This exception does not apply to travel where there is a genuine business class as well as first class.</p> <p>Air travel for journeys of less than 5 hours should be via economy class only. For journeys of between 5 hours and 10 hours a business class flight may be purchased where:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • bookings are not available in the lower class and the timing or date of the journey cannot be changed • if staff will be required to work immediately on arrival. • on disability/medical grounds. <p>For journeys of over 10 hours a business class flight may be purchased subject to approval from a manager or approver.</p> |

| Rail | Class of travel |
|------|-----------------|
|------|-----------------|

| | |
|---------------|--|
| All employees | |
| All journeys | All rail travel should be booked as standard-class. Any exception will need strong business justification and SCS prior approval. |
| | This includes international rail journeys by Eurostar and other international and overseas rail operators. However, Eurostar Standard Premier is permitted where good value for money can be demonstrated. |

Advance purchase rail tickets should be purchased when possible and staff are strongly advised to book as far ahead as possible in order to obtain the best price. Last minute travel should be avoided as far as business will allow.

First class travel carries a reputational cost to Defra and resource cost (in producing explanatory briefings) even if first-class tickets are occasionally cheaper than standard class (sometimes the case when booked on the day of travel). Any manager who approves first class travel can expect a challenge from the Defra Finance Team or from the Chief Operating Officer.

Railcards

An appropriate Railcard should be purchased by staff who are eligible where there will be a saving to the department over the course of the year. The cost of an annual Railcard is £30, which reduces by 1/3 the cost of Standard Anytime, Off Peak and Advance fares. The cost of purchase of the Railcard should be reclaimed through i-expenses provided the card is to be used for Defra business purposes only.

There are three types of Railcard most likely to be of use for Defra staff: A Senior Railcard for travellers aged 60 or over; 16-25 Railcard for travellers between those ages. There is a third type of card, a Two Together Railcard, for two named travellers – however, this type of card can only be used by the same two individuals travelling together on every occasion. A Disabled Persons Railcard is available at an annual cost of £20 (£54 for 3 years) for individuals who may qualify.

A 3 year 16-25 or Senior Railcard may be purchased at a cost of £70 but should only be considered if there is sufficient certainty about the individual's business travel requirements for the next 3 years.

Follow the link for further information: <http://www.railcard.co.uk/?gclid=CKjnjei-7MYCFbQatAodo7wHaw>

The Redfern screen allows for a Railcard discount to be applied. Railcard holders must always remember to tick this box and select the appropriate card from the menu otherwise the full price will be charged!

Please note that Railcards are not valid for travel on Eurostar.

Oyster cards

Journey costs can now be claimed by submission of the top-up receipt. Approving managers are required to carry out periodic checks to ensure that the charges reflect the reasonable cost of business travel by the claimant.

Mileage claims

Mileage claims should comply with the overarching rule of being **additional** to everyday commuting costs. An individual who does not incur any additional cost on a trip out of the office should not claim for any mileage.

The use of private cars and full rate mileage claims are discouraged. If the job requires more than 3000k miles travel a year a lease car would normally be more cost effective.

The use of a lease car also gives more assurance that it will be well maintained and therefore safer.

| | Mileage Claims (PUS Drivers) |
|---------------|--|
| Applicable to | All staff provided with a Private Use Scheme (PUS) car |
| All journeys | |

| | Mileage Claims |
|---------------|---|
| Applicable to | All staff who use their privately owned vehicle. |
| All journeys | Travel using private vehicles is discouraged unless essential. Staff should adhere to Health and Safety guidance for driving and travel. |

| | |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| Passenger and equipment supplements | A supplementary mileage payment may be claimed when a private vehicle is used on official business and the claimant is accompanied by one or more passengers or needs to carry heavy and/or bulky official equipment. |
|-------------------------------------|---|

| Types | First 10,000 business miles in the tax year | Each business mile over 10,000 in the tax year |
|---|--|--|
| PUS rate | 11p | 11p |
| Private cars and Vans- rate where no public transport alternative* | 45p | 25p |
| Private cars and vans- public transport rate* | 25p | 25p |
| Private motor cycles | 24p | 24p |
| Passenger supplement | 5p | 5p |
| Equipment supplement** | 3p | 3p |
| Bicycle | 20p | 20p |
| | <p>*NB the 'rate where no public transport alternative' for car and van travel may only be claimed where the use of a private vehicle for the journey is essential e.g. on grounds of disability or where there is no practical public transport alternative. If the use of a vehicle is not essential the 'public transport rate' should be claimed.</p> <p>**Under HMRC rules this expense is taxable.</p> | |

| Car rental | Class of travel |
|--------------|--|
| | All employees |
| All Journeys | See guidance on car hire |

| Taxis | |
|--------------|--|
| | All Employees |
| All Journeys | Taxi fares should be claimed ONLY where the manager or approver is satisfied that such costs are necessary, for example, journeys where there is no other suitable method of public transport. |

Additional provisions for travel by car

Parking and speeding fines

Travellers will NOT be reimbursed for any parking fines or speeding tickets.

Car parking, congestion charges and tolls

Car parking, congestion charges and toll charges necessarily incurred on official business are reimbursable.

Car hire accidents

If involved in a hire car accident travellers MUST stop and immediately contact the hire car company who will advise the traveller on completing the necessary formalities and documentation.

The traveller MUST also report the matter to their manager or approver and the Health and Safety Unit at the earliest opportunity.

Subsistence

Subsistence may be claimed where the following conditions apply:

The expense arises necessarily from the proper performance of the claimant's duties

The expense is incurred whilst away from the claimant's regular place(s) of work or whilst staying away from home

The expense incurred is reasonable and additional to the employee's normal expenditure. For instance, where a person normally eats a packed lunch or prepares a meal onsite but does not have the facility to do so whilst away and they have to purchase food at significant extra cost.

The claim is fully supported by receipts submitted with the claim.

The claim is within the limit for each category, as set out below.

Staff who spend most of their time out of the office (eg inspectorate type duties) should not claim for lunches.

All ceiling rates are based upon time necessarily spent away from the permanent workplace on official business and are not related to specified meals.

The ceilings increase as the time spent away increases up to a maximum of 24 hours. For periods in excess of 24 hours a new period begins and the ceilings apply as before.

Reimbursement up to the appropriate ceiling is for additional expenditure necessarily incurred in respect of food and drink (excluding alcohol) consumed during the absence:

over 5 hours out of office: up to £5 over 10 hours out of office: up to £10 over 12 hours out of office: up to £15

over 24 hours out of office: up to £20 – a person can only claim under this heading if there is an overnight stay at a hotel where lunch and/or dinner is not included in the hotel charge from the agent.

Only one ceiling rate can be applied in any 24 hour period, they cannot be combined. These rates apply to all areas of the country.

The Period of Absence is defined as the elapsed time from leaving home or normal operating base to return.

These expenses **cannot** be claimed if:

- The out of pocket expenses that you incur are not additional to your regular personal expenditure

- The meal does not constitute additional unavoidable expenditure. For example, if staff usually eat in the canteen in York they should not claim for eating in the canteen in Nobel House on a visit or claim for a bought sandwich that costs no more than their usual lunch outlay.
- The “staying with friends or relatives allowance” is claimed (in which case the 24 hour claim is not allowed).
- Meals have been taken at home.
- Meals are provided during a training course, conference or similar activity. Meals are provided on the train or plane and included in the ticket cost

Additionally:

- Alcohol cannot form part of any claim

Hotel rates

| Hotel upper limits | |
|---|---|
| Location | Upper limit |
| London (bed and breakfast) | £130 per night |
| Rates for specific cities (bed and breakfast) | Bristol £100 per night Weybridge £100 per night Warrington £90 per night Reading £85 per night |
| UK other (bed and breakfast) | £75 per night for all other locations |

All bookings over the hotel ceiling rates should have express line management approval and where deemed appropriate approval of the relevant budget holder.

Any bookings over the ceiling rate should also seek approval from Defra Group Commercial: Network.ProcurementSupport@defra.gsi.gov.uk, to ensure all appropriate booking options within the ceiling have been exhausted. **Please note travel and subsistence spending data is regularly published**. It is therefore expected that individuals have taken all necessary steps to mitigate the risk of media scrutiny of expense claims outside the policy ceilings.

Lodging allowance

This may be claimed where staff are required to undertake detached duty.

Staff will be reimbursed the actual cost of rent and utility standing charges at the detached duty location (if a double commitment exists at the home and detached duty station) up to the following daily ceilings:

- £42 for London
- £31 for elsewhere

If a claimant's family joins them at the detached duty station, managers or approvers may authorise reimbursement of actual rental costs and utility standing charges, within the limit of the ceiling for the lodging allowance for that location, only where the employee is also incurring home rental/mortgage costs.

Foreign travel

Foreign T&S claims should be submitted on an actuals basis using the existing HMRC rates as ceilings. These rates are available to view at the following location:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/scale-rate-expenses-payments-employee-travellingoutside-the-uk>

In line with the Treasury principle of managing by exception, managers or approvers may exceptionally allow claims that are outside the ceiling amounts provided the amount is reasonable and there is sound business justification.

There should be prior approval for all foreign travel by managers or approvers.

Friends and family allowance

When individuals choose to stay with friends or family while on official business they are entitled to claim a flat rate allowance. The current allowance is £42 per night. This expense is taxable and the rate has been set to reflect this.

Tips and gratuities

Discretionary tips at restaurants, if appropriate in the circumstances, should be requested to be properly incorporated into the bill (it would automatically be the case where payment is made by credit card and you choose to add the tip before entering the PIN number). The maximum should be 10%.

Claimants should still keep within the ceiling amounts for claims which would include any such gratuity.

Alcohol

Costs relating to Alcohol will not be reimbursed.

Telephone calls

Business calls will be reimbursed. Receipts should be submitted unless this is not possible. Regular business users should use a mobile phone supplied by the business.

Other incidental expenses

Other unavoidable expenses may be claimed exceptionally, at the discretion of the normal approver on an actuals basis for a reasonable amount provided that receipts are produced.

Amendments to the policy

If you have recommendations for amendments to the policy, please email the T&S policy shared mailbox (T&SPolicy@defra.gsi.gov.uk) with details. Decision on ceilings are based on evidence of spending patterns and circumstances, so please ensure your cases are appropriately presented with relevant evidence.

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