

Why am I being asked to complete a time allocation (TOAST) survey?

The results of TOAST are very important as they affect not only the College as a whole, but also your respective department and yourself as an academic. The output of the survey is a key component of the College's TRAC (Transparent Approach to Costing) return to OfS and UKRI, which is used to inform government policy and influence funding decisions related to the different activities. As well as potentially impacting high level funding decisions, a subset of the data is used to construct the College's full economic cost rate that is then included within certain research grant applications.

Staff costs represent around half of our total cost base and we need to conduct the surveys in order to determine how these costs are divided between teaching, research and other activities. It is essential that we achieve a high response rate in order to ensure we accurately reflect to OfS and UKRI the costs incurred in our respective activities, which then in turn can have a direct bearing on the funding we receive.

Who is required to complete a TOAST survey?

All Lecturers, Senior Lecturers, Readers and Professors in academic departments and divisions are required to complete the TOAST survey, honorary staff being excluded. The list of those being surveyed is based on a staff list extract taken in August 2021. Those joining after that date will not be included in this year's survey. If you are not sure whether you are expected to participate please e-mail TOAST@imperial.ac.uk

How often do I need to complete a survey?

Three weeks will be surveyed for each staff member within the pool eligible to complete a return over a twelve month period starting in October. Members of staff who need to complete a TOAST survey will be contacted by email approximately one week prior to each of their three survey weeks. This will provide information on how to access the survey and guidance.

How should I respond - Is there a preferred answer that would be beneficial for the College?

Your return should be an accurate reflection of how you spend your time across the relevant categories in the particular week selected. You should not try and adjust this to reflect either a week that you consider to be more typical or one that you feel could help the College generate more income. Furthermore, your response should be a true reflection of your specific survey week and not an average reflection of your typical week. Providing we get a good response rate and generate a fair snapshot then that should, in theory, lead to the result that is most appropriate for College.

Is it correct that the more time I write to research, the greater the recovery rate for College will be?

No. In fact the only component that contributes to fEC is the 'Research Support' category. It is true that all involved in research should make sure they don't overlook this category and should allocate their time there according to the definition. Attempts to "game" the result can lead to unintended consequences, so always try and reflect the reality experienced.

Is my return truly anonymous?

Yes, your return is completely anonymous. There will be no analysis on an individual basis and only those working on delivering the TOAST survey will have access to the database output. Heads of Departments will be given an overview of the response rates for their area, as well as non-respondents, but will not have access to data about individual's responses within their department.

Does it really matter if I don't complete my survey?

Yes, it does matter. For the 2021-22 TOAST survey to be statistically valid and accepted by OfS and UKRI as robust, a high response rate is required. If we do not achieve this, we may be asked to repeat the exercise, perhaps using a more labour intensive method. A large number of other institutions already complete annual time surveys and by asking for the data only every three years, as we currently do, we only just meet the minimum requirements set out by OfS and UKRI. More significantly, a robust return which shows the number of hours worked by academic staff and the type of activities that they are undertaking, will present the case for appropriate funding levels from government.

Can I change the week in which I am required to complete the survey?

No, your assigned survey week cannot be changed. The survey weeks have been determined to provide a comprehensive view of the College's activities over a year. Therefore, you should make every effort to complete your survey for the designated survey period.

What if I am away from College and don't have access to the online system?

The completion of the TOAST return can be delegated to another member of College staff (e.g. PA) who can complete it on your behalf. You would simply need to forward the email containing the link to the survey to the delegated individual. This email is sent on the first day of your survey week. The individual can then enter your survey via this link and make your entries for you. If you feel that you will need to do this, you should provide them with full details of your time allocation throughout or immediately after the survey week, to be entered into the survey. If you require further assistance, contact the TOAST team via TOAST@imperial.ac.uk.

I have a part-time contract, or am only at Imperial for short periods of time. Do I have to complete the survey?

Yes – in order to build up an accurate picture of staff time across the college, all staff groups should be represented. This includes those who work part-time, or who only carry out part of their academic commitments at the College. In these cases, the survey should only be completed for time spent undertaking Imperial College activities.

What if I am on holiday or leave, should I still complete the survey?

Yes. The sampling nature of the survey means that some returns should show that some academic staff would be on holiday or sick leave. As we are building up a picture of a whole year's worth of activity it is clear that at any point in the year some people will be on holiday, off sick, on maternity or family leave or otherwise engaged in what might be termed "Non College-Related Activities". Our TOAST survey results must reflect this and a completed survey should therefore be submitted on your return to work.

If your survey week is during non-term time you will find that your diary slot will be open for 4 weeks to take account of the fact that many people will be away and only able to complete the survey on their return. If your survey week is during term-time the diary slot will be open for 2 weeks.

If this is supposed to build up a picture of the whole year, why don't we sample the whole year?

Survey weeks are chosen using a robust statistical method to obtain good coverage over the whole year. This means that some weeks will be allocated during non-term, exam weeks and times when the University is closed. Even though a particular survey week may not be typical of an individual's working week, the data collected across the University as a whole provides a reasonably accurate reflection of how academic staff spend their time across the year. Using sample survey weeks, ensures a less onerous survey process whilst still ensuring accurate survey results.

Why are there so many activities to allocate my time to?

The aim is to make it as clear as possible and to reduce the ambiguity about where to allocate your time. The activity list has evolved over time to ensure we take into account all possible types of activity undertaken by academics.

How do I record the time spent on holiday or on leave in the survey?

Time spent on holiday or leave should be recorded as "Non College-Related Activities", unless you spent some of your leave time doing work related activities. Examples of this might include checking e-mails relating to a Charity funded research project while on holiday or reading professional/work related literature while on leave. In these cases, the time should be split between "Non College-Related Activities", and the appropriate Activity Headings.

What if I have problems accessing the online survey?

If you have problems accessing the online survey, please contact TOAST@imperial.ac.uk. If you are unable to access the survey during the survey week, please keep a paper record of your time allocation. You can then enter this at a later date, or delegate to another person for entry into the online survey.