Academic Consultancy – Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

1. Why does City have a policy relating to the management of academic consultancy activities?

This policy, introduced in 2008, has been specifically designed to support and encourage academic and research staff to undertake consultancy work, both as part of City-directed initiatives and as private activity. It makes no changes to existing terms and conditions of employment or Financial Regulations and has been designed to clarify various issues concerning consultancy activity. It defines the expected minimum approval procedures required within Schools for authorising consultancy, sets out appropriate frameworks, defines responsibilities, and provides guidance relating to the types of activity which may be undertaken. New arrangements for University consultancy including the distribution of consultancy income were approved by City in October 2012 in order to provide further incentives to staff to carry out such activity. The policy has been updated to incorporate these changes.

2. Why does City insist on me providing proof of my professional indemnity insurance before it permits me to undertake private consultancy?

It is essential that both you and City are fully protected in case any problems occur during your private consultancy work. Significant legal and financial problems could potentially occur and whilst City is prepared to allow staff to undertake private consultancy, it will only do so if both you and City are fully protected in cases where this is necessary.

3. As a Head of Department, why should I support my staff to undertake private consultancy work when I consider they should be concentrating on their teaching and research?

City hopes to encourage staff participation in consultancy activities which bring benefits and opportunities to City, its staff and its clients, thereby aiding staff retention and benefiting career development. Amongst other benefits, successful consultancy helps develop useful business and academic contacts, as well as creating opportunities for future partnerships with City, helping extend our knowledge base and enriching intellectual activity. However, academic and research staff are not permitted to undertake consultancy activities without the appropriate approval of their Dean (or equivalent Senior Manager), and such work must not impair performance of their academic duties, nor may it adversely affect the interests of their School or the wider City, University of London.

4. I’m still confused by what City considers to be “consultancy”. How can I distinguish between private consultancy and University consultancy?

In simple terms, University consultancy is that which is undertaken in City’s name and where City issues the contract, whereas private consultancy is that undertaken by a member of staff in their own name. However, in both cases approval for such activities must be obtained prior to commencement of work through the individual’s Dean of School. Further information can be found in sections 4 and 5 of the Policy for the Management of Academic Consultancy.

5. Who owns the intellectual property rights to my work if I engage in private consultancy activity?

This is a complex issue. If you are undertaking private consultancy then you do so as a private individual and you therefore might normally expect to own the intellectual property rights (IPR) of your work. However, if your work is based on IPR owned by City, then City would normally expect the ownership of such IPR to remain with City. Furthermore, you should be aware that most companies wishing to engage you as a consultant will seek to own the IPR of any work you undertake at their request. As a result, it is essential that you always seek the advice of the City Research Office before entering into any contractual agreement which in any way relates to ownership of the City’s IPR.

6. The company for which I am doing private work have given me a contract to sign. How can I get advice and what should I look out for?

As stated above, it is essential that you fully consider all aspects of any agreement to ensure both you and City are properly protected. The City Research Office can advise on contractual issues but you must also discuss matters with your Dean prior to undertaking the specified work.

7. If I undertake some private consultancy work can I opt to transfer some funds into my local departmental budget or discretionary balance account? And if so, can I then have a say in how that money is spent, such as buying equipment for my team or supporting a PhD student?

If you undertake private consultancy you cannot divert private income back into local departmental funds. You could always elect to make a charitable donation to City but you would have no say on how this money was spent. However, you may elect instead to undertake the work from the outset as a University consultancy through the City Research Office and to have income transferred to a discretionary balance account. It may then be spent in accordance with City purchasing requirements in support of your research activity. Where the School operates a similar type of account at School or Departmental level, you may also choose to have some of the income transferred into this account for School or Department use in support of research and enterprise activity.

8. If I earn less than £2000 on a personal consultancy project do I still need to obtain permission to undertake the work and is it still worth putting it through City?

Yes, permission is still required prior to undertaking the work, but City would expect Deans to manage such requests sensibly.

9. Do I need indemnity insurance cover for work of less than 4 hours?

Yes, if the work is of a nature where indemnity may be required. If you engage in any consultancy activity, or give advice in any professional capacity, even responding to a single question from another party, then you could be personally liable for any subsequent consequences.

10. I see that the policy says I can spend up to one day per week undertaking private consultancy work. Can I decide when I want to do this and can I do anything I want on that day?

No, you must obtain approval from your Dean first. City terms and conditions of employment only allow consultancy or other externally remunerated work to be undertaken provided it does not conflict with the interests of City, and provided permission is obtained in advance. Furthermore, such work must not impair the performance of normal duties and to this effect and in accordance with Financial Regulations academic and research staff are only normally allowed to undertake up to one day per week on private consultancy work. Your Dean will decide what time, if any, is appropriate for you to work on projects of this nature.

11. Does this policy cover School to School consultancy as well and how does this work?

Activities shared across Schools, whether as consultancy style projects or joint initiatives, would not normally be considered to be consultancy within the framework of this policy. It is therefore recommended that a flexible solution be found between the relevant Deans of the Schools undertaking any joint working.

12. I see that under City's Financial Regulations I can earn up to 40% of my salary through private consultancy with permission. Can I negotiate on this?
Your Dean may be willing to discuss these principles with you if exceptional reasons exist and there are clear benefits to City. But such a level of private consultancy work would be considered unusual due to the expected time this activity would take to complete, which could very likely lead to an adverse impact upon core duties. You must remember that your commitments to City have priority.

13. I have a long-standing consultancy agreement which was approved years ago, do I really need to get it approved all over again?

Yes, you must re-register this work each year. Requests to undertake private consultancy will not be unreasonably withheld but any recurring or long-term consultancy work will still need to be subject to review. Arrangements change over time and despite any successful arrangements you may have had in the past your Dean will wish to review these with you, and discuss ways of varying your commitment to the mutual benefit of all parties if problems exist.

14. If I have an entitlement to undertake up to 1 day per week of private consultancy work, can I save up my consultancy days in order to undertake larger, more intensive consultancy projects?

No, this is clearly not in the spirit of this policy and whilst there may be certain exceptional circumstances which require special consideration by Deans, particularly in the case of intensive consultancy work, such requests would not normally be granted as this level of activity would normally conflict with an individual’s primary duties.

15. I operate a clinic for private patients from my home on Saturday mornings. I recognise that the work I do is related to the subject expertise of my role at City, but am I still required to seek City’s approval for this work as it is clearly my own personal business?

Yes, where staff are providing advice and expertise in an area connected to their employment at City, University of London then there is a requirement under this policy that staff consult their Dean in order that any issues and conflicts of interest can be discussed and considered. If you are in doubt in any way you should ask your Dean for advice at the earliest opportunity.

16. Does City expect me to declare all work I undertake outside of City?

No, staff are only required to declare with City those activities which relate, or could relate, to individual’s employment at City, University of London. For example, the fact that a member of staff is working in a charity bookshop on Saturdays is clearly not relevant or related to City and therefore there is no need to declare this activity. If you are in doubt in any way you should discuss matters with your Dean at the earliest opportunity to ensure there are no issues or conflicts of interest in your undertaking such activity.

17. My Line Manager allows me to work from home one day per week. Am I still required to seek approval for any consultancy work I undertake during this time?

Irrespective of whether you are undertaking consultancy work at City or at home, you are required to seek approval from your Dean of School first.

Further Information:

Please contact the City Research Office on 020 7040 3023. We're here to help!