HSC Honest Broker Service

Charging Policy

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Version Control

Version	Date	Amendment	Author
0.1	08/11/2023	Initial Draft	Alan Harbinson
0.2	06/09/2024	Review + Update	Alan Harbinson
0.3	12/08/2025	Re-based staff costs and charging calculation	Alan Harbinson
0.4	08/09/2025	Appendix added with data extraction cost bandings	Alan Harbinson
1.0	12/12/2025	Final Review	Alan Harbinson

Related Documents

Version	Document	Comments
1	Health and Social Care Northern Ireland Strategic Board Terms of Reference	Strategic Board, to which this Committee Reports
4	HBS Governing Board Terms of Reference	Previous TOR for this Committee
January 2021	MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING (MOU) FOR AN HONEST BROKER SERVICE FOR HEALTH & SOCIAL CARE INFORMATION	Overarching agreement relating to the operation of the HSC Honest Broker Service
	Honest Broker Service Disclosure Control Policy	

Document Signoff

Name	Role	Signature/E-mail Confirmation	Date
Alan Harbinson	Head of Honest Broker Advice Service		12/12/2025

Overview

1. This document sets out the underpinning principles for the charging policy for the Honest Broker Service. It provides a guide to how projects are costed, however to work out estimated costs for an actual project you should engage with the Honest Broker Service team.

2. Costs will be confirmed during the application stage and formally agreed before processing work continues.

3. For more details on the Honest Broker Service including the type of data available, how to apply and how to contact the service please see below.

   Honest Broker Service - Business Services Organisation (BSO) Website (hscni.net)

Policy

4. The Honest Broker Service is the Secure Data Environment/Trusted Research Environment for Health and Social Care Northern Ireland. It is based within the HSC Business Services Organisation and provides access to de-identified healthcare records for research, clinical audit and service improvement.

5. The following principles apply in relation to charging for access to data via the Honest Broker Service:

   a. Charges are calculated on a cost recovery basis; the Honest Broker Service does not make a profit and is not a commercial entity.
   b. If approval is not obtained for a project, then no charge is incurred.
   c. The Honest Broker Service operate a tenancy of the UK Secure e-Research Platform which provides the technology infrastructure for remote access to data. The tenancy includes provides a number of pre-paid desktops, Stata licenses and storage. Costs for desktops on SeRP are not currently passed on to the researcher, however the service operates on an acceptable use policy and if a project team requires a large amount of licenses and storage space then there may be additional charges. Researcher do have the option of paying for additional resources if required (for example high powered desktops) and for paying for licenses for additional software if required.
   d. The Honest Broker Service reserve right to decline to process any application for data at any stage prior to the approval of the project. In this case feedback will be provided to the project team giving reasons that the application is not being progressed.

Charging Rates

6. The table below sets out the charging framework for the Honest Broker Service for 2024/25.

7. All prices below are exclusive of VAT. Where VAT charges are applicable these will be met by an individual project at an additional cost. The Honest Broker Service will include VAT at a standard rate in project charges unless the project can satisfy (e.g. by provision of a VAT exemption certificate) that a different rate should be applied.

8. **Prices quoted in this document reflect rates for academic access, costs for projects commissioned by a commercial entity or where a commercial entity is the main beneficiary may be charged an additional rate.**

9. **Please contact HBS early if your project has commercial elements so that advice can be sought on the application of these rates.**

10. In normal circumstances a project will be expected to pay all costs outlined in the scoping form in full. There are three exceptions to this i) paid for by another project, ii) costs covered by a prior agreement.

11. Amendments such as extensions or additional services outside the original scoping form, will be chargeable except where the Researcher could not use what they had paid for during the project lifecycle due to a delay by the Honest Broker Service (for example if account did not work for a month, or wrong data was provided and data had to be re-provisioned), then a short cost-free extension reflecting the delay suffered would be granted.

Chargeable elements of the HBS service

12. *Fixed Setup/Running Costs*: These are standard charges applied to all projects which contribute to the costs of the Application Review process, project setup (creation of accounts, initial provisioning of data etc.) and ongoing support including disclosure control output reviews of data which the project wish to export out of the HBS environment.

13. These include:

Fixed Setup / Running Costs	
Project setup – one off cost	600
Ongoing Support and Disclosure Control (Per annum for projects up to 5 active users, additional members will be charged an additional 120 per user per year) *	600
Project Modification Admin Fee (Only applies to significant changes requiring Data Access Committee Approval)	150

*Applies in the first year and then for agreements covering more than one year, and is charged per every complete year beyond the first year. For example, additional payments will be required at 13 months and 25 months on review.

14. *Data extraction/preparation costs*: This charge relates to the cost of extracting data from various systems and preparing the datasets for user access in the safe setting. The overall cost depends on a number of factors and will be up-rated over time due to salary cost increases.

15. If data is being requested from other controllers (e.g. General Practice Intelligence Platform data or HSC Trusts) then they may choose to levy their own cost recovery in addition to HBS costs.

16. Data provided for project modifications requiring additional extraction will be costed in line with point 14.

17. Appendix 1 shows indicative costs based on complexity of project, HBS will provide a quote during the scoping phase of the project for inclusion in grant applications etc. The final cost will be provided with the submission of the completed HBS application and agreed variable list.

18. *Staff resource costs:* This charge covers the cost of the HBS team support for individual projects (e.g., import / linkage of data, data refreshes etc.). Certain special projects involving data matching etc will require cost estimates to be provided based on Full Economic Cost for supporting the project. This also applies to project modification requests requiring significant staff input, for example full data refreshes or adding additional datasets.

19. *Extra technology costs:* This charge covers the cost of any additional hardware, software or licences required by individual projects.

Definition of the SeRP desktop packages

20. The collaboration agreement with Swansea University for provision of the HBS tenancy of the UK Secure e-Research Platform (SeRP) includes a number of floating desktops.

21. There are a number of standard desktops, desktops including STATA licenses and a number of "Large" desktops which provide additional processing power.

22. The HBS team will assign researchers to these as required.

23. If a project has specific requirement for software that requires additional licensing they can discuss this with the HBS team and they will liaise with the SeRP technical team to see if the software can be provided. It is possible to apply your own licenses if these have been purchased in advance.

    Standard SeRP User account: includes a 4-core processor, 16 GB RAM, and Windows operating system. The package comprises 50 GB of file storage. Software licences included are, SPSS, R, Eclipse, DBeaver and MS Office (As mentioned there are a number of specific desktops with STATA licenses).

    SeRP User account with large specification desktop: this includes an 8-core processor, 32 GB RAM and Windows operating system. The package comprises 50 GB of file storage. Software licences included are, SAS, SPSS, R, Eclipse, DBeaver and MS Office.

24. It is possible to purchase additional "extra-large" SeRP desktops however none of these are included in the current Collaboration Agreement. The specifications for these are below.

SAIL User account with extra large specification desktop ⬜ includes a 16-core processor, 128 GB RAM and Windows operating system. The package comprises 50 GB of file storage. Software licences included are Stata MP, SAS, SPSS, R, Eclipse, DBeaver and MS Office.

25. A fair use policy applies. The collaboration agreement is based on a number of floating desktop licenses across all users, if a project has a very large study team additional charges may apply. The same applies for data storage, which is outlined below.

Data Storage Acceptable Use Policy (AUP)

26. As part of each HBS project, file storage of up to two and a half times the size of the project source data will be provided as standard. This storage is provided to enable researchers to work with the data provided (and make copies for analysis) and where relevant, will be where project specific data is stored. It is the project team's responsibility to ensure any data stored is managed within these data storage allowances.

27. Should a project require additional storage, this will be charged at £250 per additional 100GB.

Disclosure Control Acceptable Use Policy

28. The ongoing support and disclosure control charge of £600 applies within an acceptable use policy. Projects can expect a reasonable amount of time for output checking services. If requests significantly exceed normal levels—such as frequent large outputs or repeated non-compliance with disclosure control guidance—additional charges may apply. The Honest Broker Service will notify the project team in advance and provide an estimate of any extra costs.

Appendix 1 – indicative costs based on project complexity

Each data extraction requires input from HBS and Regional Data Warehouse staff. The typical costs for data extraction and preparation for different project sizes can be found below.

Project Size	Total Days	Estimated Data Extraction/Preparation Cost
Mini	<5	Up to £3000
Small	5 - 10	£3 - £5,000
Med	10 - 15	£5 - £7,000
Large	15 - 25	£7 - £10,000
X Large	25+	£10,000 +

Factors influence time required and hence cost include:
- the complexity of the data requested (number of datasets required, data linkage requirements, size of dataset, number of variables, time series),
- amount of manual input required (e.g. bespoke coding or scripting, additional scoping and validation work required for novel datasets)
- and information governance (e.g. HBS input required for additional legal agreements + transfer processes to be adhered to).

The HBS team will work with you during the application process and can provide a quote or letter of support (for example for inclusion in grant applications etc).