

UNIVERSITY LEADERSHIP TEAM

Attracting New Postgraduate Research Students Joint Funding Initiative

Context

1. [Strategy2020](#) sets out clear ambitions around the objective to grow our academic reputation, through a number of priorities including growth in the research postgraduate student population.
2. [The 2017/18 Corporate Plan](#) specifically states the following key action against the objective to grow academic reputation:

*“Grow Postgraduate Research student population to **over 300** students with a greater focus on engagement opportunities to recruit and attract international PhD students”.*

Background

3. Over the past four years, the University has made a significant strategic investment into a number of initiatives in pursuit of the strategic objective to grow research student numbers and to invest into areas of research excellence.
4. This includes a full and part-time fee waiver scheme, launched in 2013, as well as two further cohorts of fully-funded 50th Anniversary Studentships in 2014 and 2015, studying on a full-time basis over three years.
5. Philanthropic funds have also been invested into the 50th Anniversary initiative, with emphasis on pre-determined research themes identified by the sponsoring donor.
6. In addition, a number of Schools are using their annual allocation of Research Excellence Grant, Research Overheads or Commercial project surplus (URI) to fund studentships or partially fund them in collaboration with sector sponsors.

Academic Year 2016/17

7. Encouragingly, in 2016/17, the total number of Research Postgraduate student enrollments across the University was **299** against an in-year KPI target of 270.
8. However, a modelling and sector-comparison exercise occurred earlier this academic year to review the 2020 target of 300 RPG students. This exercise resulted in a revised target of 450-500 RPG students by 2020, reflective of the sector.
9. The introduction of School-based PGR student number targets have taken effect from February 2017 with progress now being reported through the Research and Innovation Committee on an annual basis, in order to maintain oversight and track trends.
10. Furthermore, the 2017 **PRES overall satisfaction rate increased to 84%** from 80% in 2015, showing improved practice in research degree supervision.

11. In addition to a review of supervisory capacity and the proposed introduction of a Professional Doctorate (anticipated for launch in 2017/18), RIO in collaboration with the University Research Degree Committee has been actively progressing a number of key initiatives to improve the holistic PGR student experience and to promote attraction and retention of PGR students through to completion.
12. One such initiative is the PGR student journey, which maps the full cradle-to-grave student experience from pre-application through to alumni in order to identify any areas where better/ alternative provision of service is desirable to promote application rates.
13. Plans are now being put in place to increase the number of Research Postgraduate students to meet the new targets, with a particular focus on international Postgraduate Research student recruitment.
14. The University Professorial Lead for International Research Degrees is also leading a project in collaboration with the International Operations team, to review how Edinburgh Napier markets itself internationally as a place to undertake research study and how best to align processes and deploy resources to achieve the growth outlined in the revised Strategy 2020 target.

Growing PGR student numbers to 2020 Joint-Funded Studentship Proposal

15. Whilst the University is currently exceeding against the in-year KPI PGR enrollment target for the initial 2020 research student target, there is an imminent need to ensure replacement of the aforementioned studentship initiatives, which are now approaching completion and to grow to meet the new target.
16. Analysis of the annual progression of both the fee waiver initiative and the fully-funded studentships, in addition to feedback received from supervisors, has found that PGR students are more likely to progress and complete under a full-time, fully-funded scheme (fees and stipend), as compared with the fee-only scheme. Often, because they do not need to supplement their 'waived fee' with an income source, such as part-time work. Where the fee-waiver is on a part-time basis with the student self-funding, such as is common in SACI, this appears to function well.
17. With this in mind, RIO is proposing a joint-funding scheme as outlined in **appendix A**.
18. The proposal recommends that the annual, full-time PGR fee rate (home/EU) should be centrally 'waived' in its entirety on a three-year basis, on the condition that the associated School contributes the full doctoral stipend (at the UK research council minimum rate) for the same three-year period. Part-time students could be self-funded, with fees waived on a 5-year basis.
19. Further, it suggests that the stipend contribution should be sourced from an appropriate external funding stream. For example from industry, research funders or alternatively from School Overheads or Unrestricted Income (URI) (which result from external income generation).

20. The proposal currently does not include fee waiver for overseas students, as they do not attract RPG funding from SFC, however could be opened up to include them if felt appropriate.

Alignment to University Strategy

This proposal aligns directly to the University's ambition to grow the Postgraduate student population against the strategic objective to grow our academic reputation. Furthermore, it promotes appropriate and effective use of Schools' overhead/ URI budget in pursuit of the strategic KPIs.

Equality Considerations

21. Allocation of the joint-funded studentships will be through a fair and transparent process, based on demonstrable areas of research excellence, appropriate supervisory capacity and on the strength of the application aligned to the Schools R&I plan.

Recommendation

22. ULT is invited to consider the joint-funded studentship proposal and the associated accounting mechanisms to support central 'fee-waiving' in order to support this initiative.

Paper Sponsor: Professor Alistair Sambell
Vice-Principal and Deputy Vice-Chancellor

Appendix 1 – Joint-funded PGR Studentships

1. The University is offering fee waiver studentships for new, full or part-time research students (Home or EU) intending to study at PhD level. Fees will be waived by the University for three years of full-time study and five years of part-time study.
2. As a condition to receipt of a University-funded fee waiver studentship for full-time students, the associated School must commit to joint funding in the form of an **annual stipend at the Research Council minimum rate for the full three-year period**. Part-time students could be self-funded, with fees waived on a 5-year basis.
3. The stipend should be financed from **external funding sources** or from the Schools associated **Overheads** or **Commercial surplus (Unrestricted Income)**.
4. The aim of the scheme is to increase research student capacity in strategic areas of research. The successful applicants will be expected to **register with the University for start dates from October 2017**.
5. Deans of School/Directors of Research should submit applications for the joint-funded initiative **detailing the anticipated numbers of fee-waivers they are requesting** and a detailed business plan of the funding to support the stipends for the new students and existing students which are supported by the School (including centrally supported 50th anniversary students).
6. The fee waiver may be used to fund a prospective student who has already applied to the University to begin study in 2017/18 or to attract candidates who have not yet applied.
7. Directors of Research will be responsible for ensuring the quality of research students appointed and that the research students support the research strategy of the school.
8. Applications will be considered by a ratification panel of:
Vice Principal and Deputy Vice-Chancellor; Dean of Research & Innovation and Prof Lead Research Degrees.
9. Directors of Research should submit a document (no more than two sides of A4) that is presented using the following headings:

Anticipated number of fee waiver studentships requested

Additional Support for Student Stipend

Schools must be able to demonstrate that there is sufficient funding within the School to support an annual stipend for the full three-year period of the studentship. This may be through external sponsorship of the postgraduate

research student stipend or through a package comprising partial sponsorship plus School support or through use of School Overheads or Unrestricted Income.

Research Topic/s

The application should identify the topic area/s and how this relates to an area of research excellence within the School or University Themes.

The application should demonstrate the strategic value of the proposed topic in alignment to the School R&I plan and to the Schools future REF submission.

Applications are particularly welcomed that show how existing research strengths might be enhanced through the recruitment of a new research student.

Supervisory Team

The application should indicate the proposed supervisory team/s, their expertise in the topic, their capacity to undertake supervision and their experience of supervision. The scheme is especially interested in supporting proposals that can demonstrate a high quality of supervision for the student.

Dean of School Support

It is important that the application has the support of the Dean of School and School Director of Research. Support for the prospective student needs to be shown for the life of the project.

All documents will be considered according to the following criteria:

- the fit with the University's research and innovation strategy and the research priorities of a School;
- the opportunity to build research and researcher capacity;
- assurance about the quality of the supervisors' experience and their capacity to undertake the supervision;
- the level of additional resources available to the student (such as funding or teaching or researcher development opportunities).

Applications that leverage external support, directly or in-kind, are particularly welcome.

Directors of Research will be informed promptly by the ratification panel to allow either confirmation or selection of a suitable candidate, in adherence to the University's applications and admissions processes for research students.

Applications (no more than two sides of A4) should be sent to Ceri Bain, Policy Officer, RIO (c.bain@napier.ac.uk).

Prof Alistair Sambell, Vice-Principal and Deputy VC
Prof Jessie Kennedy, Dean of R&I