A JOINED-UP APPROACH TO FUNDING

The University is reviewing its postgraduate strategy and as part of that, the Postgraduate Funding Project seeks to address how we can work together more efficiently to streamline our postgraduate applicants’ route to securing the funding they need to study here.

We need to compete globally to continue to attract the very best postgraduate students. Access to funding is an incredibly important factor affecting their decision about where to study, and it is an area in which we want to improve, and which can help widen access to postgraduate study at Cambridge.

We have a significant amount of funding available, and we are seeking to raise significantly more, but our uncoordinated and complex approach can make it hard to find and laborious to apply for in comparison with our major competitors. This is reputationally damaging, both amongst our applicants and their referees.

The Postgraduate Funding Project is going to require some deep thinking about the processes we adopt, and plans to introduce a new unified application and funding management system. As a consequence, I expect there will be some significant changes to our practices and behaviours.

“What I really want is for a postgraduate applicant just to say ‘I want funding to support my application’ and then not to worry about the processes beyond that point.”

I am asking everyone involved with the allocation of funding for postgraduates around the Collegiate University to come on board, support the aims of this project and to play their part in shaping the future of postgraduate funding at Cambridge for the benefit of all.

Professor Graham Virgo
Senior Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education)
Executive Project Sponsor
I applied for Oxford, Harvard, Cambridge and LSE. Cambridge took six months to make a decision on my application. LSE was three weeks. Oxford was two months. Harvard was three months.

It is absurd that one could be accepted to a course in November and then have to wait until the end of July to find out that one cannot attend due to lack of funding. When visa applications are involved -- as well as relocating 3,000 miles -- this is not acceptable.

Applicants apply to competitions that they are ineligible for, and miss out on the ones they are eligible for. It seems an overly complicated process that wastes a lot of time for both students and admin staff alike. When I heard that it would be centralised, I was delighted, and fully support this proposal.

I would love to get rid of all these little spreadsheets and Moodle platforms which are taking up so much time and they are preventing the student getting to the supervisor as quickly as possible and getting the decision.

The university’s aim is to attract the best students to Cambridge, particularly PhD students; we’re in a very tight time frame to get the offers out as soon as possible, so that we don’t lose them elsewhere.

I think if there was a way to go it would have all the funding in one system so you could follow someone right from applicant ... to student, in the same system.

Funding bodies
CHALLENGES

- **Disjointed and inefficient administration**
  Risks reputational damage among students, referees and funding bodies

- **Slow decision-making**
  Can mean we lose applicants to competitors

- **Poor communication**
  Candidates feel uninformed during the process

- **Information is not shared in real time**
  Results in duplicate applications and awards

- **No authoritative source of data**
  For management reporting and strategic planning

- **Difficult to match funding to eligible candidates**
  Funding gaps cannot easily be addressed; some funding is unallocated

- **Lack of openness and trust between Collegiate University institutions**
  Fosters an unwillingness to collaborate
OPPORTUNITIES

• **Improved applicant experience**
  To attract and retain the very best students

• **Transparency of information and processes**
  To ensure fairness, equality and true widening participation

• **Collaboration across the Collegiate University**
  To provide full funding packages for the very best applicants

• **Efficient and agile funding distribution**
  To be able to adapt to changes in the funding landscape over time

• **Efficient and effective processes and systems**
  To improve the administrative experience and support the opportunities
THE JOURNEY

Putting postgraduate applicants at the heart of our funding process to ensure we continue to attract the best students to Cambridge

DISCOVERY

• Learning about current issues with postgraduate funding at Cambridge
• Understanding applicants’ needs and expectations
• Understanding the academic and administrative needs of our institutions and internal funding bodies
• Understanding interdependencies with other systems and external funding bodies
• Creating a shared vision for a better postgraduate funding experience for applicants, administrators and fund managers
• Building the business case for changing our approach to postgraduate funding
• Starting to build the collaborative environment necessary to realise our vision
BUSINESS CHANGE

- Collating a single source of data about the funding available within the Collegiate University
- Identifying which funding would benefit from being managed via a unified system
- Analysing funding eligibility together with admissions data
- Harmonising funding application and administration processes

DELIVERY

- Designing an applicant-centric, integrated experience for admissions and funding that is straightforward to use
- Adopting common working practices to ensure funding decisions are made quickly, are transparent and are targeted most effectively
- Expanding the self-service postgraduate application system to incorporate funding
- Introducing a modelling tool to help funding bodies match available funds to eligible postgraduates
- Introducing a more streamlined collegiate university-wide funding administration service
NEXT STEPS

1. **August: Internal funding data entry**  
   Internal fund managers to ensure all their funding is entered into the Funding Search system by **31 August 2018**, so the University has a complete data set on which to base future strategic decisions.

2. **September: Launch of improved Funding Search tool**  
   Our newly-enhanced search tool will go live, providing applicants with transparency about the funding available to enable them to assess their eligibility.

3. **Michaelmas: Engagement with the Collegiate University**  
   Continuing the conversation with our internal funding bodies and stakeholders.

4. **Ongoing: Driving the business case for change**  
   Working towards achieving the University’s aim of increasing postgraduate numbers and funding availability.

**Further information**
https://www.uis.cam.ac.uk/postgraduate-funding-project

**Feedback**
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