

Transparent and accessible funding: a collaborative approach for a centralised system.

Proposer: Alessandro Ceccarelli, President, University of Cambridge Graduate Union

Seconded: Siyang Wei, GU Open Portfolio Executive Officer, 'PG Access and Funding'

The Graduate Union notes:

1. Cambridge colleges and departments have a significant amount of funding available, and they are seeking to raise significantly more, but the current uncoordinated and complex approach can make it hard to find and laborious to apply for in comparison with other Universities. This is reputationally damaging, both amongst applicants and their referees and funding bodies.
2. At the PG level, only a partial Government loan is available (less than 50% of the cost of a typical Masters course) and the limited University funding available is allocated on a merit basis rather than a needs basis - indeed there is no household income information available from the SLC or other sources on which to base an assessment of need.
3. For the University as a whole, 80% of the annual Masters intake is self-funding (data taken from CamSIS from student self-declared information in 2017/8).
4. The amount of self-declared self-funding for UK Masters students starting in 2017/8 was £14m and this does not include the funding gap for those students who could not meet the financial requirement.
5. Cambridge does not as yet have targeted funding available for Widening Participation at PG level, nor is financial need assessed in a systematic way.
6. The current lack of openness about funding availability and trust between the Collegiate University institutions have a negative impact on funding transparency and advertisement. This has been fostering an unwillingness to collaborate.
7. 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.
8. In 2019, the University has started the [Postgraduate Funding Project](#). The collegiate university is working to (see <https://help.uis.cam.ac.uk/projects/pg-funding>):
 - a. Reform the Funding Search tool, so as to enhance the Funding Search system and enter funding data during July and August, ready for the 2020/21 admissions cycle.; and
 - b. Create a unified application system for postgraduate funding so that applicants can apply for internal funding as part of their application for admission (this is currently limited to a few of the larger funders).

The Graduate Union believes:

1. That Colleges and Faculties have a duty to improve applicants' experiences, and to attract and retain potential postgraduate students
2. That transparency of information and processes should be guaranteed at all stages, so as to ensure fairness, equality and true widening participation and funding opportunities.
3. That collaboration across colleges, departments, and faculties should be agreed and sustained, so as to provide full funding packages for applicants.
4. That funding search tools and application process should be more efficient and more widely distributed, so as to be able to adapt to changes in the funding landscape over time.
5. That there should be improvements for providing students with efficient and effective processes and centralised systems, so as to improve the administrative experience and support them to take up available opportunities.
6. That colleges, departments, and faculties should collaborate with and actively support the *Postgraduate Funding Project* 2019, so as to promptly communicate their funding availability and advertise them via a centralised and easily accessible system.
7. Do we want to say anything about means-tested funding here?

The Graduate Union resolves:

1. To lobby for increased awareness of the existence of a centralised *Funding Search Tool*, see <https://www.student-funding.cam.ac.uk/>
2. To encourage governing bodies of colleges, senior and graduate tutors, and heads of departments and faculties to set up a transparent and active channel of communication with the *Student Funding Search* team and with the *Postgraduate Funding Project* so as to make their funding opportunities available and easily accessible for potential postgraduate students (e.g. Sally-Ann Gannon, postgraduatefundingproject@admin.cam.ac.uk).
3. To encourage Academic Rep and MCR/Students representatives to urge their colleges, faculties, and departments to collaborate and share their postgraduate funding availability so as to advertise them in a transparent and accessible way.
4. To support the *Postgraduate Funding Project* so as to improve the existing *Funding Search Tool*, to reform the application process and system, and to make the search for funding more accessible.