

From: [Secretary's Office](#) on behalf of [Dean Graduate Studies](#)
To: [Academic-staff](#); [Admin-staff](#); [Additional-TCD](#)
Subject: Changes to funding for PhD researchers
Date: Wednesday 22 February 2023 13:55:50

Dear Colleagues,

At a meeting of the College Board today, two key proposals brought forward under the Postgraduate Renewal Programme were approved. These proposals, which will now be implemented, represent an important first step in changing the funding landscape of PhD research in College.

The Provost asked that I write to you to share information about what today's decisions mean.

Decision 1: Waiving Postgraduate Fee Differential

Today the College Board approved a proposal to waive the fee differential charged to Schools for postgraduate researchers recruited through Science Foundation Ireland, Irish Research Council and Health Research Board awards. This fee waiver will be introduced on a pilot basis from September 2023 for all new entrants (EU and Non-EU fee bands).

This represents a significant shift in College policy. For many years, researchers and Schools have struggled to bridge the gap between what funding agencies pay towards PhD fees and the actual fee that is charged at a College level. As a result, decisions about specific students rest heavily on considerations of affordability to the School, rather than being driven by student eligibility. I know this shift in a long held College policy will go a considerable way to addressing this issue.

Decision 2: Living Stipend for PhD Researchers on centrally-funded internal College Awards

A proposal to consolidate the University's three internal postgraduate research schemes into one and increase their associated stipends to €25,000, with effect from September 2023, was also approved by the College Board today.

The change in the rate of stipend will apply to all new students recruited to this new, consolidated award, as well as to those students who are continuing on the register on any of our three existing schemes - the Ussher, the '1252' Postgraduate Research Studentships and the Provost PhD awards - for the remaining years of their award entitlement.

None of the three internal college award schemes had to date offered a stipend that kept pace with the cost of living in Ireland and as a result, many PhD researchers have faced enormous financial pressures.

I know that a shift to €25,000 will be welcomed by many PhD researchers on these schemes as well as by the staff who support their research endeavours. I know too that the cost of living crisis particularly in Dublin is having a severe impact on PhD researchers and so there is much more that needs to be reviewed to support the PhD community to thrive and excel.

A separate email will shortly issue to those PhD researchers currently in receipt of one of the three listed awards, to advise them of the uplift in stipend payment from September onwards.

Wider implication of decisions

We are acutely aware that the PhD researchers who will benefit from this stipend uplift represent only a small proportion (<15%) of our overall cohort of research students. Given the chronic under-funding of this sector, it is inevitable that in committing to providing a living stipend we are also accepting that we cannot continue to offer the same number of awards – until now numbering 70 new awards per annum across the three schemes (i.e., ca. 280 awards at any one time).

However, I want to reassure you that the Postgraduate Renewal Programme team is actively engaged with Trinity Development and Alumni to develop a strategic plan to return to our baseline of 70 awards per year within a five-year timeframe.

In the meantime, we are pleased to have secured at least one new award per School each year and are currently developing plans to launch a range of schemes to offer a number of additional awards.

Today's decisions impact the three Trinity-funded awards. There are many PhD researchers funded by other agencies and we have no control over their stipend rates. A national review of the funding supports for PhD researchers is underway and we will continue to advocate through this forum as well as through the Irish Universities Association for living stipends for all funded PhD researchers as an essential policy move.

Some final thoughts

I want to say that as Dean of Graduate Studies, the decisions of the College Board today are hugely significant. Both decisions carry significant cost implications for the university and both also represent the change in mind-set needed towards the value placed on PhD researchers, not just here in Trinity but across Ireland.

Neither outcomes could have been achieved without the unwavering support of colleagues across College and the Provost's support for us to do this, for which I want to say thank you to you all.

Kind regards,

Martine

Prof Martine Smith
Dean of Graduate Studies

An tOllamh Martine Smith
Déan an Léinn Iarchéime