Informatics PhD Fellowship Scheme

Proposer: Boris Grot

Motivation: The primary purpose of the scheme is to improve the School's ability to attract top PhD talent, particularly when School, College, Uni and/or DTA money is used for funding. Currently, several problems are limiting our competitiveness:

- Funding becomes available at various points in the year, some of which are quite late. For instance, decisions for both Principal's Career Development and Global Research Scholarships are only announced in May.
- Admission decisions are deferred until funding is confirmed, although ample prior history exists to anticipate the likely amount of funding or number of awards we can expect.
- Our competitors in both UK and USA make the first round of admission offers in the Jan-Feb timeframe. For instance, Imperial's department of Computer Science makes the first round of notifications to PhD applicants by January 31. By delaying our admissions decisions, we lose out on top talent.
- Currently, much of our PhD funding – while highly competitive in practice – carries no particular name that a student can relate to. Meanwhile, many European and US schools use the term "Fellowship" or "Department Scholarship" to attach a title to the funding and hence, increase its perceived value.
- Advertising for our PhD program is currently fragmented, mostly done on an individual basis as funding becomes available. This makes it difficult to achieve truly global reach, which ultimately hurts our ability to recruit.

Proposed Solution: introduce a named Informatics PhD Fellowship scheme to allow us to aggressively pursue top PhD student talent through a unified marketing campaign, early admission offers, and an attractive name to raise the perceived prestige of the offer to the candidates.

A key aspect of the proposal would be for the school to *underwrite* some number of PhD places (both EU and Overseas) based on *expected* funding availability. The latter would include DTA money and the Informatics' quota of PCD and GRS scholarships based on historical data. The money could be further stretched by over-committing it by a certain percentage and making more early-stage offers than the budget would seem to permit, under the assumption that not all offers would be accepted (using historical data for reference). A gathered field approach, with multiple rounds of deadlines and decisions, would be used in complement to make sure that the top candidates get offers as early as possible but late applicants and other worthy candidates are kept in a queue.

By introducing the proposed PhD Fellowship scheme, the School would be able to improve our marketing reach by having both the communications team and the individual staff members aggressively advertise the Fellowship program through a variety of channels *without requiring the funding to be secured first*. In contrast, the current practice is to first secure funding and only then advertise, which often means that the top candidates have already accepted an offer by the time we reach out to them.

In some respect, the proposed Fellowship model resembles recruiting for our CDTs, where there is a predetermined number of places and the goal is to maximize the quality and size of the applicant pool. The proposed Fellowship would scale this idea up to all of Informatics. One consideration is whether CDT applications could also be rolled into this general pool, since often candidates are considered both for CDT admission and direct PhD. Unifying the application process and the deadlines across all CDT and PhD programs would further streamline our advertising efforts and simplify the application process for the candidates.

Finally, an attractive name should be attached to the scheme to raise its perceived value in the eyes of the candidate. Potential names include, e.g., Turing Fellowships or Bayes Scholarships.

Competitive comparison: Imperial's Department of Computer Science already implements the general model outlined here. http://www.imperial.ac.uk/computing/prospective-students/courses/phd/ The applicant sees a single application form (which covers the CDTs) and a common set of deadlines, while the department allocates the various sources of funding behind the scenes. For reference, Imperial's prospectus is attached.

My suggestion would be to roughly follow Imperial's approach. In terms of deadlines, a mid-December application deadline for the first round of funding, with a mid-Feb notification, would be ideal.

PhD

The Department of Computing provides up to 30 fully funded PhD Studentships for UK, EU and overseas students per year.

PhD applications

We are one of the largest computer science departments in the UK and a world leader in academic research, offering an exciting research environment for prospective postgraduate students.

FAQs	›
Scholarships	›
HiPEDS	›
PhD Success Stories	›
PhD Handbook	›
How to Apply	›

The Department is actively involved in a number of Centres for Doctoral Training and hosts the EPSRC Centre for High Performance Embedded and Distributed Systems (HiPEDS). Every year between 40-50 successful applicants are accepted for the PhD programme in the Department. We have a wide variety of scholarships for PhD students, including funding from research councils, research projects, industry, and teaching scholarships. More than 85% of our PhD students receive funding.

Applicants are expected to have a First Class or Distinction Masters level degree, or equivalent, in a relevant scientific or technical discipline, such as computer science or mathematics. Candidates who have only a Bachelors degree will not normally be considered, but they can apply to first do an MSc Degree in the Department.

Application deadlines for 2018/19 entry will be published on this page later this year. Although applications can be made at any time in the year, there will be an initial round of funding for applications made by 30 November. We would particularly advise all students requiring funding to apply by the January deadline, but there may still be some funding available for applications received after January.

Application deadline (Oct 2017 entry)	Notification of acceptance and funding
11 November 2016	31 January 2017
24 January 2017	31 March 2017
28 March 2017	31 May 2017

We have a wide range of funds and we do our best to find the most appropriate for each candidate. To give you an idea of what funds are available please see the scholarships page.