

# 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 March.
- 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, potentially, the Informatics' quota of PCD, GRS and/or Englightment scholarships based on historical data. It is understood that we may not be able to "rebrand" university scholarships (e.g. Englightment), so the actual number of fellowships we can offer will be constrained by such practicalities.

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.

**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.

### **Proposed plan of action:**

- Named scheme: Introduce a named scheme called the Informatics PhD Fellowship. The name will help raise the perceived value of the fellowship in the eyes of the candidate, and will also simplify internal logistics in terms of steering applications into the correct application pool.
- Web page: I have started working with Ségolène Gallus in the Informatics Comms team on a web page providing informational and promotional content for the scheme. The web page will include links to Informatics institutes' information pages and a direct link to apply for the scholarship.
- Application process: To simplify the online application process without breaking the current administrative setup of institutes and selectors, I suggest that the applicants select a preferred institute (as is the case now); however, we can simplify the application process by taking advantage of a known start date (September of the next academic year) and status (full time PhD). So instead of navigating a maze of program choices, an applicant will simply check-box an area of study (corresponding to an institute) and hit Apply, which will take them to the correctly prefilled form in Euclid.  
Note that this aspect of the functionality does not require any changes to Euclid, nor does it infringe on our internal administrative processes. It is simply a way to prefill the existing application form using known parameters.  
To reduce the dependence on Computing Support, I will work with Tom Spink and one of my web-savvy PhD students to implement the required functionality.
- Timeframe: Work with the IGS and Comms to roll the scheme out by the start of November. Comms will then advertise.  
I suggest the following application & notification dates. There may constraints or considerations that I'm not aware of that may dictate a better set of dates.

Application deadline (Sep'18 start)	Notification
Dec 7, 2017	Jan 31, 2018
Jan 15, 2018	Mar 15, 2018
Mar 15, 2018	May 15, 2018

## 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](#).