

## **SCHOOL OF INFORMATICS**

### **Strategy Committee**

**Wednesday 22 February 2017**

**Subject: Proposed revisions to PGR student desk allocation policy for 2017/18**

**Author:**

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**Background**

The School's PGR cohort has increased significantly in recent years, which has placed pressure on available desk space within the Informatics Forum. This is in part due to the increase in CDT student numbers as they will be entering their fourth intake year without yet having a graduating cohort, and also due to the planned increase in PhD student numbers through the increase in available scholarship funding. It is expected that by September 2017, it will not be possible to continue with the existing desk management practices while offering an allocated desk to every eligible PGR student. Therefore, a change to desk management practices is needed in advance of the new intake arriving in September.

**Action requested from the committee**

Strategy Committee is asked to consider the proposed options for changes that the Graduate School could make to the management of available desk space in 2017/18 in order to meet expected student numbers and to agree on whether the preferred option set out below should be supported.

**Discussion**

Outline of desk numbers

There are 285 PGR desks in the Informatics Forum. After taking account of current allocations that are not due to end and space made available for the new CDT cohorts by current CDT students moving out of MScR space, we will require approx. 76 desks for 2017/18 (26 desks for CDT students moving to PhD space and approx. 50 for new PGR students).

There are currently 17 desks that are vacant or only in temporary use and therefore approx. 59 desks need to be found to meet expected numbers. The preferred option for meeting this is outlined below.

Preferred option for 2017/18

The current student desk allocation policy<sup>1</sup> states that students are entitled to their own desk during the prescribed period of study, plus a maximum of 12 months to write up or until the point of submission, whichever comes first. It further states that periods of extension cannot always be taken into account. In practice, a large number of requests for extensions beyond 48 months are received and accommodated, where possible.

From September 2017, it is proposed that all students who have passed their 48<sup>th</sup> month (excluding any periods of interruption), have submitted and are preparing for their viva, or are working on corrections will be asked to vacate their assigned desk and make use of hot-desking facilities. To help with this, room 2.33 will be converted into a PGR hot-desking office with capacity for 8-10<sup>2</sup> desks.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://web.inf.ed.ac.uk/infweb/admin/policies/student-desk-allocation-policy>

<sup>2</sup> Exact capacity to be confirmed as dependent on furniture and layout options

Requests for extensions to desk space will only be granted in exceptional circumstances and after all other options have been exhausted (such as offering remote access to the student's machine). Extensions will require the approval of the student's supervisors, the Graduate School Administrative Officer and the Deputy Head of the Graduate School.

This would make up to 58 desks available for new students (44 students' desk allocation is due to end by 31 August 2017 and a further 12 by 31 December 2017), which would meet the expected need.

#### Alternative options

While the above represents the preferred option, alternative approaches are available. However, it was felt that these would not sufficiently address the desk shortage problem or would have a negative impact:

- Make new PGR Office space available in the Wilkie Building
  - This would split the cohort over two sites and could potentially harm the sense of student community or create resentment amongst those not based in the Forum.
- Require new students to hot-desk
  - This could be difficult to manage as many new students require a self-managed machine for their projects and therefore it is anticipated that the number of requests from first year students to have an assigned desk for this reason would make the management of this unwieldy.
- Offer remote access to self-managed machines
  - It is anticipated that students will be offered remote access to their machines as part of any discussion with those who request an extension to their desk allocation but it was felt that more was needed to address the shortage.
- Offer desk shares
  - This could prove complex to administer and it is currently not clear that offering this would generate enough uptake or free up enough desks.

#### **Equality and diversity implications – No**

#### **Resource implications (staff, space, budget) – Y/N**

Converting room 2.33 from a meeting room into a hot-desking office would require resources for purchasing new desks and computing equipment, plus the cost of any works required for converting the space.