Postgraduate Strategy

Our aim is to create and maintain – through St Leonard’s College; the Students’ Association, in particular the Postgraduate Society; and discipline-based academic groupings – a diverse, vibrant and confident community of postgraduate students.

Over the past decade, the number of students on Postgraduate programs – both PGT and PGR – has grown steadily as a proportion of our activity in St Andrews. The proportion of research students in an HEI is regarded as a key performance indicator (KPI), although the causal relationship is complex. Certainly, it seems obvious to state that research activity and income drives research infrastructure which underpins and funds PGR recruitment and training. It is also true that PGR students significantly contribute to the intellectual wealth of an HEI, which in turn drives more research activity. This is assumed to be a virtuous cycle: a policy to heavily invest in and aggressively recruit PG students will ultimately result in positive feedback and self-sustaining growth. Thus, the strategy is to increase the number and proportion of PG students, without compromising research quality, so reshaping the overall student population and enhancing the research potential of the University.

This overall strategy must, however, be viewed in the context of the wider environment, and making reference to other relevant University strategies (e.g., the Student Experience Strategy and Employability Strategy) in order to articulate the strategy as a set of objectives. Most obviously, other HEIs are similarly investing so that competition for students is keen and increasing. The economy and, in particular, employability considerations is a key factor in decisions of individuals to pursue higher qualifications. Population demographics are also a consideration, with declining numbers of university-aged people. Finally, the strategy must be viewed over a medium to long-term, as the contribution of PGR to research output will be slow to be realised.

Objectives:

Recruitment

The University of St Andrews will foster and promote its reputation as a leading provider of supervision by researchers who are world leaders. Our students will receive appropriate supervision with expectations on engagement and completion clearly articulated at the outset.

In seeking to be a first choice destination of applicants, we will review processes to improve the ease of application, speed of responses and effective communications to
ensure that offers convert into attendance. We will also ensure that our postgraduate students are appropriately qualified, with the required background and approach to learn effectively and contribute successfully to their chosen area of study and the life of the University.

Acknowledging that the PGT provision should reflect varied demand, we will review our range of taught programs and areas of research supervision annually, as part of the routine School planning meetings. The University-wide objective to expand the PGT offering will be managed through collaborative discussion at the School-based strategy meetings where we will identify areas of established research strength to focus recruitment, which will improve the cohesion of the student body by ensuring that cohorts of students have critical mass. We will additionally seek out potential niche markets to ensure that balance is maintained across the University in a range of disciplines.

**Quality**

Our approach to learning and research is collaborative and hence successful progression and completion are the standard expectation of all those engaged in it – students as well as staff. There is no room for tolerating poor supervision that does not meet the needs of successful progression and completion of the well-qualified student. All research students will have a supervisory team, comprising a Primary Supervisor (who is the main point of contact) and, for PGR, at least one other academic member of staff acting as a joint or secondary supervisor. Additional members of staff (e.g., the Director of Post-graduates or other School officers) will also be involved in the regular monitoring of students’ progress and the quality of the supervision being provided to the student. We will monitor data for supervisory contact time to drive improvements in the quality of research engagement. There will also be no tolerance of non-engagement, non-delivery or poor attendance without reason from the students.

PGT students writing dissertations will have access to appropriate academic guidance, supervision and contact time, which will be clearly set out prior to application.

Given the international trends of growing PG numbers moving into non-academic employment, we will annually review our provision of training in ‘transferable’ skills, tailored for the needs of PG students. CAPOD and the GradSkills/MSkills programs provide institutional contexts for the delivery of such training and the Careers Centre provide employability enhancing resources. Their importance will be highlighted in our public literature and communication. These areas will receive further investment, noting their value for recruitment as well as destination statistics.
**Student Experience**

We will regularly review our provision of support and services (e.g., accommodation; study space; library holdings; IT provision; music, sport and leisure facilities) for postgraduate students, as a distinct population from the undergraduate students, to ensure that their needs are considered.

We will not neglect the intellectual environment: space and opportunity for innovative and collaborative thinking, as well as constant reflection on the changing landscape of higher education in its broader social and economic setting, will be a hallmark of our interactions with the PG community. The recent restructuring of postgraduate governance, under the leadership of St Leonard’s College, provides a framework within which attention may be paid to each of these priorities. The physical and human elements of the environment must be considered in the context of the University’s development and spending plans.

To increase the cohesion of the academic community at St Andrews University, we will raise the profile of PG students and ensure that it is understood that PG students are included in student societies and sporting clubs that might otherwise be perceived as ‘for undergraduates’.

We will ensure that orientation and induction events are tailored so that they recognise the needs of PG students and held at multiple levels (e.g., St Leonard’s College, Students’ Association, Schools and Institutes, and societies and sporting clubs) and with appropriate frequency to reflect flexible start dates.

Non-traditional patterns of learning are relatively unusual for PGR students, although more common in some PGT areas where blended and distance learning options are available. We will investigate new models for advanced education and survey demand, noting that widening participation and inclusion will become a greater challenge in the context of increasing student indebtedness.

**Engagement and Representation**

To ensure that we are engaging students and understand their needs, we are committed to fostering excellent mechanisms of postgraduate student representation in Schools, in the Students’ Association and on relevant University committees. We will monitor the committee structures and business to ensure that process is effective, kept to a minimum required and compatible with our core mission. Representation of PGT and PGR students will be the norm, to ensure that decisions are right first time. We will also monitor informal channels of decision and policy making to ensure that the body of PG students also has a voice in these.
Related Strategies
Academic Strategy (Learning and Teaching)
St Andrews Experience Strategy
Quality Enhancement Strategy
Employability Strategy