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Doctoral community fund pilot project

1. Overview

1.1. *What is the background to this project?*

1.1.1. LSE results from the 2019 and 2021 postgraduate research experience surveys suggest that LSE doctoral researchers want to feel membership in a School-wide doctoral community, but that the activities and events necessary to foster this sense of community are lacking. This is supported by feedback secured via the Research Degree Students' Consultative Forum.

1.1.2. Historically, inter-departmental social interaction has not been an explicit objective for the PhD Academy. Accordingly, the PhD Academy's doctoral community building activities have not received a designated budget allocation¹, and have not been the subject of clear objectives. Consequently, inter-departmental community building activities have not been prioritised by the PhD Academy's Events and Communications Management (ECM) team.

1.1.3. Discussion with the ECM team suggests while the PhD Academy is the logical organisational locus for *leadership* on School-level doctoral community building activities, direct delivery by the PhD Academy would not necessarily be effective or efficient. Specifically, as relationships between the PhD Academy's administrative teams and their stakeholders are primarily transactional, and the School does not engage in systematic monitoring of the doctoral student experience, the PhD Academy team is ill-equipped to understand doctoral students' preferred modes of interaction as an inter-departmental community. The ECM team itself also currently lacks the administrative capacity necessary to deliver an expanded suite of community building events, beyond the PhD Academy's existing welcome and end-of-term-party events.

1.2. *What has changed?*

1.2.1. Two factors have changed.

- i. Fostering a sense of School-wide doctoral community is now specifically referenced in the PhD Academy's mission statement. Provision of doctoral community building activities is therefore now also an objective for the PhD Academy's ECM team. This objective will be incorporated into the relevant team members' personal continuing professional development review objectives.
- ii. For the 2023/24 academic year, the PhD Academy has allocated £10,000 to support doctoral community building activities. This funding will be allocated to support two workstreams, covering ECM team-organised and department-organised activities.

2. Workstreams

2.1. *Workstream #1: ECM team delivered events*

¹ Prior to the 2023-24 financial year, the PhD Academy's community building activities were funded through a mixture of training and general budget allocations. The specific allocation for this scheme has been made by re-allocating existing planned spend on community building activities, and forecast savings in the overall PhD Academy budget.

- 2.1.1. The PhD Academy will continue to deliver community-orientated events associated with welcome events and end of term parties. The budget for these activities will be £4,000 in total.
- 2.2. *Workstream #2: Doctoral community fund pilot project*
- 2.2.1. The doctoral community fund pilot project will allow departments to bid for funding to deliver activities which promote inter-departmental interaction between LSE doctoral students. The objectives of the project will be to (i) provide opportunities for doctoral students to form new relationships with other doctoral students enrolled in departments other than their own, (ii) increase the overall level of interdepartmental social interaction between LSE doctoral students, and (iii) provide an incentive for departments to deliver inter-departmental social activities.
- 2.2.2. The design of the scheme recognises that the while the PhD Academy is best placed to provide a framework through which to foster the emergence of a School-wide sense of community amongst the School's doctoral researchers, departments and doctoral students themselves are best placed to understand what students want from community building activities, and to plan and deliver them. Accordingly, the doctoral community fund pilot project will allow groups departments to apply for funding to support doctoral community building activities during the 2023/24 School financial year.
3. Workstream #2: Doctoral community fund pilot project
- 3.1. *What is the purpose of the project?*
- 3.1.1. The purpose of the scheme is to foster a sense of School-wide community amongst LSE doctoral students by promoting inter-departmental social interaction between LSE doctoral students. The project will aim to ensure that not less than 105 LSE doctoral students participate in inter-departmental activities funded through the Doctoral community fund pilot project during the 2023/24 academic year.²
- 3.2. *Who can apply?*
- 3.2.1. Any LSE staff member, any MPhil/PhD student, and any MRes/PhD student who has completed the upgrade process and is enrolled in the PhD phase of their programme can participate in an application.
- 3.3. *What are the application criteria?*
- 3.3.1. The requirements of the scheme are as follows.
- i. The proposed activity must aim to provide an opportunity for LSE doctoral students to form new relationships with doctoral students from other LSE departments.

² 105 students represents approximately 15% of the total enrolled postgraduate research student population as of summer 2023. For the purposes of this scheme, enrolled is defined as students who are currently registered, are not interrupted, and have yet to submit their thesis.

- ii. The primary focus of the activity must be to encourage in person, non-academic³ inter-departmental social interaction between at least 35⁴ doctoral students⁵ from at least 2 LSE departments.⁶ Engagement with alumni is not required, but applications which encourage doctoral alumni engagement will be viewed positively.
- iii. A doctoral programme director and the research student staff liaison committee from each participating department must indicate their support for the application.
- iv. One participating department must be designated as the lead organising department, and will be responsible for planning, delivering and reporting on the activity.⁷
- v. The participating departments must collectively commit to match-funding at least 50% of the financial support secured via the PGR community builder fund.⁸
- vi. As the purpose of the community builder fund is to *increase* social interaction between doctoral students from different departments, applications which seek support for existing activities are unlikely to be successful.⁹
- vii. Applications are required to set out whether, and if so how, they will aim to encourage participation by students from global majority communities in the proposed activity.

³ For example, conferences and seminars will not be funded if they are the primary focus of the activity. Departments are welcome to submit applications for activities which will be associated with academic activities. However, the more central the academic element is to the proposed activity, the lower the likelihood of success. This does not mean that activities which are associated with or tied to academic activities will be ineligible. This only means that the focus of the scheme is to encourage interdepartmental *social* interaction. As such, applications which focus strongly on encouraging interdepartmental *social* interaction are more likely to be successful.

⁴ 35 students represents approximately 5% of the total enrolled postgraduate research student population as of summer 2023. For the purposes of this scheme, enrolled is defined as students who are currently registered, are not interrupted, and have yet to submit their thesis.

⁵ Doctoral students are defined as MPhil/PhD students and post-upgrade MRes/PhD students. This does not mean that activities cannot involve MRes stage students. This only means that they must not be the primary target audience.

⁶ There is no requirement for equal participation between departments. However, applications whose target audiences are based primarily within one department are unlikely to be funded.

⁷ This does not mean that departments are not permitted to submit applications which state that a student has/students have agreed to organise/administer/deliver the activity. Student involvement is likely to be viewed positively. However, as the lead organising department would remain responsible for overseeing the activity, helping the organising students (where necessary) and ensuring that the funds are spent for the purposes and in the manner set out in the application approval.

⁸ In practice, this means that if three departments jointly apply for £1,000 in funding, they must jointly commit to providing a matched £500 in funding for the activity. There is no requirement for the departments to contribute equal amounts.

⁹ Applications to transform existing activities will be considered, so long as the decision-making panel is convinced that the application is genuinely seeking to substantively and substantially change the nature of the activity through support from the PGR community building fund.

viii. Applications should set out how, if the activity is successful, the activity could will be embedded into business as usual activity for the applying departments without resource to PhD Academy funding in future.

4. Frequently asked questions

4.1. *Is there a limit on the amount of funding that can be applied for?*

4.1.1. No. However, applicants should note the following.

- i. The total budget for the 2023/24 financial year is unlikely to exceed £5,000.
- ii. The fund will seek to support no fewer than 5 activities during the 2023/24 academic year.
- iii. The fund will be allocated with a view to supporting the largest number of students across the widest spread of departments.

4.2. *Is there a minimum or maximum expected spend per student?*

4.2.1. No.

4.3. *During which period should the activities occur?*

4.3.1. The activity must take place during the 2023/24 School financial year, such that all payment processes can be completed by no later than 31 July 2024. Claims submitted outside this timeframe will not be reimbursed.

4.3.2. Departments are asked to bear in mind that the PhD Academy team will conduct an initial review of the scheme at the end of Winter term 2024, to establish whether a request for Educate for Global Impact to support expanded activities in Spring term should be submitted. Given these timescales, applications for activities occurring during Winter term 2024 are likely to be prioritised.

4.4. *Can applications for multi-year funding from the scheme be submitted?*

4.4.1. No. The PGR community building fund pilot project is for the 2023/24 academic year only. A decision will be taken at the end of the 2023/24 academic year on the renewal of the scheme for the 2024/25 academic year. If the scheme is successful, the PhD Academy will consider requesting expanded funding during the budget agreement process for the 2025/26 academic year, which will run from October 2024 to July 2025.

4.5. *Can departments participate in more than one application?*

4.5.1. Departments are permitted to participate in only one application as the 'lead' organising department. There is no limit on the number of applications in which departments can participate in as a 'supporting' department.

4.6. *What are the reporting requirements associated with the scheme?*

4.6.1. Lead organising departments are expected to maintain participation registers documenting which students engaged in the funded activity, to circulate feedback forms to registered participants within one week of the activity, and to submit a post-action report

setting out their assessment of whether the event was successful.

4.7. *Who will make decisions about allocation of funds?*

4.7.1. The PGR community builder fund will be administered by the PhD Academy's Events and Communications Management team. Decisions on the allocation of funds will be made by the PhD Academy Director, with advice and support from the Research Degrees Sub-Committee Chair, and the PhD Academy Manager.

4.8. *What is the application process for the scheme?*

4.8.1. Departments will be asked to submit applications

4.9. *What are the application and outcome timescales?*

4.9.1. Deadlines for the scheme will be announced following consideration of feedback received at and after the Autumn term meeting of the Doctoral Programme Directors' Forum.

4.10. *How does this project align with the LSE 2030 Strategy and the PhD Academy's mission statement?*

4.10.1. This project aligns with the following LSE 2030 Strategy priorities.

- i. Priority 1, *Educate for Impact*, sub-priority 3, Creating an inclusive home for learning.
- ii. Priority 3, *Develop LSE for everyone*, sub-priority 1, *Investing in our community*.

4.10.2. This project aligns with the PhD Academy mission statement.

- i. Operational priority #3: *"Community and wellbeing. We will provide a physical and digital space and a programme of events and activities which support LSE PGR students' wellbeing, and foster a sense of interdepartmental community amongst the LSE PGR cohort."*

5. Evaluation

5.1. *How will success be measured?*

5.1.1. Success for each activity will be measured as follows.

- i. Total number of students participating.
- ii. Number of students participating compared to targets.
- iii. Feedback on the event. Participating students will be asked to respond to short feedback forms asking them to assess the impact of the activity on their feeling of inter-departmental community with LSE doctoral students in other departments. Department staff stakeholders will be asked to respond to a similar form.

5.1.2. Success for the scheme overall will be measured by the following metrics.

- i. Total number of students participating.

- ii. Number of students participating compared to targets.
- iii. Cumulative event feedback from participants.
- iv. Cumulative event feedback from departments on events.
- v. Feedback from departments on the administrative burden associated with the events and the scheme overall.

6. Questions for the Forum

- 6.1. *Does the Forum have any feedback on the proposed scheme, its objectives, operation or assessment metrics?*

7. Next steps

- 7.1.1. Oral comments will be welcome in the 18 October 2023 meeting of the Doctoral Programme Directors' Forum. All recipients are also welcome to submit written comments to phdacademy.manager@lse.ac.uk up until 13.00 on Friday 3 November. The PhD Academy Director and Manager will consider feedback, and implement the scheme thereafter.

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