

9 August 2005

Dear Vice-Chancellor,

**OVERSEAS RESEARCH STUDENTS AWARDS SCHEME (ORSAS):  
REVISED ARRANGEMENTS IN NORTHERN IRELAND**

1. As you will be aware from the joint letter of 20 June from the four UK higher education funding bodies, arrangements for the Overseas Research Students Awards Scheme (ORSAS) are to be revised with effect from academic year 2006/07. This letter provides more detailed information about the operation of the revised arrangements in Northern Ireland, drawing particular attention to actions which you will need to take in 2005/06 in order to select your award holders for 2006/07. It also provides information about transitional arrangements which will apply in 2005/06.

**REVISED ARRANGEMENTS**

2. The national competition which ran in spring 2005 to select the new ORSAS award-holders for the 2005/06 academic year was the last such competition. From 2006/07 onwards, institutions across the UK will be responsible for the selection of their own award-holders, against assured formula-based allocations.

**Allocations**

3. In Northern Ireland, universities' allocations for 2006/07 will consist of the average value of the ORSAS payments which they have received over the three years 2003/04 to 2005/06, subject to provision for a minimum level of award. These allocations will cover both new awards and renewals (continuing awards).
4. Northern Ireland universities which have received any ORSAS funding during the three years 2002/03 to 2004/05 will receive a minimum award equivalent to the cost of one award at that institution. This will ensure that universities which have held only one or two awards during the period will receive a meaningful level of funding. Such institutions will be able to offer either one new one-year award annually or, in the case of three-year awards for PhD students, one new award every three years.

5. Indicative allocations for 2006/07 are shown at Annex A.
6. The Department will announce provisional ORSAS allocations for 2006/07 in April 2006, as part of the grant letter for that year, to be confirmed in August 2006, once details of actual payments for 2005/06 have been received (see paragraph 24, below). In subsequent years, confirmed allocations will be announced as part of the grant letter in April. This will enable universities to maintain the existing ORSAS timetable, should they so wish, in which offers of new awards are made in April or May each year.
7. It is envisaged that, in subsequent years, allocations will be uplifted in line with GDP, subject to the availability of resources.

### **Terms of Funding**

8. The terms of the funding are unchanged, and can be summarised as follows:
  - the objective of the ORSAS scheme is to encourage high quality overseas postgraduate research students to undertake their research in the UK
  - the funding should be used to provide awards to full-time postgraduate research students who are classified as 'overseas' for tuition fee purposes
  - awards must consist of the difference between the home tuition fee for postgraduate research students and the institution's overseas tuition fee for the relevant subject
  - awards can be held for a maximum of three years
  - ORSAS awards may only be made up to the value of each institution's ORSAS allocation. Additional awards funded from other sources should not be associated with the ORSAS name.
9. Following the allocation of awards on the basis described above, universities may be left with a balance of funding which is insufficient to support a further full award. In such cases, this balance of funding should not be used to fund a partial award, but should be carried over for use in the following year.
10. Award maintenance issues (such as students' leave of absences, suspensions, transfers and withdrawals) will be managed by each university in line with the objectives of the scheme and the terms of funding listed above.

## **Selection of Candidates**

11. Universities will be responsible for selecting their own award holders for 2006/07 and beyond. You will therefore need to take action in the 2005/06 academic year in order to select new award holders for 2006/07. The new arrangements should imply little additional work beyond the formalisation of the procedures which you have used in the past to select candidates for submission to the national ORSAS panels. There will also be the benefit of enabling you to operate on the basis of assured funding.
12. As in previous years, award holders should be selected solely on the basis of academic excellence and research potential, having regard to relevant equal opportunities legislation.
13. The details of operational arrangements will be left to your discretion. However, the Department will provide the NI universities with a generic application form template which you may choose to adapt for your own use.
14. Following completion of selection procedures, you will be expected to notify all successful and unsuccessful applicants of the outcomes.

## **Renewals**

15. As noted above, universities' formula-based allocations will cover both new and continuing awards. Before allocating new awards for 2006/07 (and subsequent years) you should therefore first establish how many of the existing awards will require renewal, as this will determine how much of your allocation is available for new awards.
16. This is equivalent to the provision which applied under the previous arrangements, whereby institutions were required to provide the ORSAS office at UUK with information about planned renewals in spring each year.

## **Publicity**

17. Universities will be expected to continue to refer to the availability of ORSAS awards in their postgraduate prospectus and other relevant promotional material. Additionally, the UK higher education funding bodies have developed a website which will provide information about ORSAS, in order to maintain the visibility of the scheme at the UK level.

## **Payment Arrangements**

18. DEL will release funding for ORSAS as part of the monthly block grant payments. It will no longer be necessary for universities to issue invoices to secure the payment of their awards.

## **Monitoring Arrangements**

19. Universities will be asked to provide the Department annually with a list of their ORSAS award holders — new and continuing — and the value of awards actually paid. This information will be collected retrospectively in July each year, commencing in July 2007 with the list for 2006/07.
20. In July 2007, you will additionally be asked to provide, on a one-off basis, a statement of your procedures for allocating the awards. This is required in order to provide the Department with assurance that the procedures are appropriately fair and rigorous.

## **TRANSITIONAL ARRANGEMENTS**

### **Payment of Awards for 2004/05**

21. The ORSAS office, based at Universities UK, which has been responsible for processing institutions' invoices for ORSAS payments, will close on 31 August 2005, having processed all invoices submitted for 2004/05 awards. From that point, any questions relating to the policy and funding of the scheme in Northern Ireland should be addressed to the Department for Employment and Learning.
22. You are also asked to ensure that any remaining invoices for the 2004/05 academic year are submitted to the ORSAS office by **no later than Friday, 26 August**.

### **Payment for 2005/06**

23. 2005/06 will be a transitional year: the formula-based allocation arrangements described above will not yet have come into effect, but the ORSAS office will have closed. In this year, the Department will make a staged payment as part of the block grant which will amount to 85% of the value of the new awards offered to successful candidates in the 2005 competition, and 100% of the value of the renewals for 2005/06 which institutions have already notified to the ORSAS office. (The figure of 85% for the initial payment for new awards reflects the fact that, normally, a proportion of the awards offered through the competition are not taken up.)
24. In July 2006, the Department will ask you to confirm the value of new and continuing awards actually taken up during 2005/06, and will then generate a single adjustment payment or reclaim funding as applicable.
25. From 2006/07 onwards, the formula-based payment and monitoring arrangements described above will come into effect.

## **REVIEW**

26. The revised arrangements will operate for three years in the first instance, from 2006/07 to 2008/09 inclusive, and will be subject to review in 2007/08. Assuming continuation of the scheme beyond 2008/09, the Department may modify its allocation formula at that point to take account of changes in institutions' shares of postgraduate research student funding and overseas student numbers.

## **UNIVERSITY CONTACTS**

27. Participating institutions will be listed on the new ORSAS web-site and web links will be provided for the benefit of potential applicants and other interested parties. We also envisage listing generic email contact addresses for the person responsible for the administration of ORSAS in each university. We do not propose to list any personal email addresses or telephone numbers.

28. Universities are invited to forward the appropriate generic email address to Martin Fullerton, by email ([martin.fullerton@delni.gov.uk](mailto:martin.fullerton@delni.gov.uk)) by 19 August 2005. This will ensure that an email contact for the University appears on the web-site from the outset.

Yours sincerely,

**David McAuley**

## OVERSEAS RESEARCH STUDENTS AWARDS SCHEME

### INDICATIVE FORMULA ALLOCATIONS

INSTITUTION	ORSAS FUNDING					INDICATIVE ALLOCATIONS 2006/07 £
	2002/03 £	2003/04 £	2004/05 £	2005/06 (estimated) £	AVERAGE 03/04 – 05/06 £	
The Queen's University of Belfast	46,600	70,905	129,300	135,240	111,815	111,815
University of Ulster	8,670	0	0	0	0	8,000
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>55,270</b>	<b>70,905</b>	<b>129,300</b>	<b>135,240</b>	<b>111,815</b>	<b>119,815</b>

#### NOTES:

- i) ORSAS Funding = the amounts actually paid by DEL to universities for the academic year in question. It excludes any awards which were not taken up.
- ii) Estimates for 2005/06 are based upon an estimated take-up rate for new awards of 88% and for existing awards of 93%. These estimates are in line with historical take-up rates.
- iii) The indicative allocation for UU is based upon the estimated cost of a single award. The final figure, which may be higher or lower, will depend upon the actual costs of a single award.