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Circular

Overseas Research Students Awards Scheme

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To: Heads of higher education institutions in Wales
Response by: 10 November 2008
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This Circular announces our Council's decision on the future of the Overseas Research Students Awards Scheme in Wales.

This document is available online, in large print, Braille, on CD and on audio CD and cassette. Should you or someone you know require this in an alternative format, please contact us on (029) 2068 2280 or email info@hefcw.ac.uk.

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Introduction

- 1 This Circular announces our Council's decision on the future of the Overseas Research Students Awards Scheme in Wales.

Background

- 2 The Overseas Research Students Awards Scheme (ORSAS) provides partial fee awards which meet the difference between Home and Overseas fees for postgraduate research students from outside the EU. The scheme, which has operated on a UK-wide basis, was established in 1979 in response to concerns that the introduction of full-cost fees for students from outside the EU might deter high quality postgraduate research students from studying in the UK.
- 3 HEFCW currently provides around £375k per annum for ORSAS in Wales. The funding is allocated to eligible institutions by formula.
- 4 The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) decided in July 2008 to phase out ORSAS funding in England from 2009/10 and to redeploy the funding for other purposes which it considers to be of higher priority. In view of HEFCE's decision, the other UK funding bodies each need to determine the future of the scheme in their own sector.

Future of ORSAS in Wales

- 5 In considering options for the future, HEFCW's Council had regard to the following:
 - A recent evaluation of ORSAS, commissioned by the higher education funding bodies in 2007/08, found that institutions and students receiving the awards were generally highly appreciative, but it also identified a number of weaknesses with the scheme. It found that ORSAS was only partly fulfilling its objective of attracting the best students to the UK, since more than half of the awards were received by students who had already chosen to study in the UK; that the level of awards is not high enough to allow ORSAS to compete with leading UK and international scholarship schemes; and that the ORSAS brand image is very weak.
 - In Wales, the scale of the budget for ORSAS is comparatively small, and consequently impact across the sector as a whole is limited.
- 6 Our Council considered the possibility of rebranding and retaining the scheme in Wales. However, a significantly larger budget would be required for this to be genuinely effective, which would imply additional top-slicing at a time when budgets are already tight.

- 7 Taking account of these factors, the HEFCW Council has agreed that the ORSAS scheme in Wales will be phased out from 2009/10 and the funding transferred to the postgraduate research training (PGR) funding stream. Institutions will, at their discretion, be able to use the enhancement to the PGR funding stream, or the funding which this may free up elsewhere in their budgets, to continue to provide international studentships.

Timing

- 8 The ORSAS allocations which have already been announced for 2008/09 will not be affected. However, there will be no funding for new awards in 2009/10, and funding will be phased out progressively from 2009/10 onwards as existing awards expire. We will take account of institutions' individual commitments, as described below, but in broad terms the funding will reduce to around two thirds in 2009/10, one third in 2010/11, and zero in 2011/12. The funding will be transferred to the PGR funding stream as it is released from ORSAS.

Action by institutions

- 9 During the period in which the funding is being phased out, we will ask institutions in receipt of ORSAS funding to provide us with an annual estimate each autumn of the funding which they require for continuing ORSAS students in the following academic year. The institutions concerned are listed at **Annex A**. Estimates should take account of any unspent funding which institutions are already carrying forward.
- 10 The institutions listed at Annex A are asked to provide their estimates for the funding required for continuing ORSAS students in 2009/10 by **Monday, 10 November 2008**. The estimates should be submitted by email, addressed to Emma Morris (emma.morris@hefcw.ac.uk).

Further information

- 11 For further information contact Linda Tiller (linda.tiller@hefcw.ac.uk; tel 029 2068 2228).

Institutions in Receipt of ORSAS Funding

University of Glamorgan

Aberystwyth University

Bangor University

Cardiff University

University of Wales, Lampeter

Swansea University

Glyndŵr University