Attendees discussed various methods and strategies their departments/programs have adopted to fund graduate students.

- Some programs require their faculty members to commit to providing $5,000 (usually in the form of a research assistantship) for each graduate student they wish to take on to assist in making funds provided by the School of Graduate Studies (SGS) go further.
- When programs receive their funding memo from SGS, they “do the math” to confirm funding commitments to students and to identify any funding shortfalls.
- Students solely interested in the funding amount may go elsewhere since we don’t have the ability to fund at the same level as some of our competitors. We need to sell our programs on more than simply how much funding we can provide.
- Faculty are required to sign off on funding commitments. In this way, they know what their own students are getting and their contribution (if any) to the package.
- Some programs use historical data to help determine funding needs and how they will most effectively use the Queen’s Graduate Awards (QGA) (e.g. about 60% of students receive some form of external funding support).
- QGA money flows to the faculty member who, in turn, distributes it as (s)he feels is best.
- Funding memo information is used in allocating different funding levels to students. If packages are lower than ideal, then some programs push the quality of Queen’s which may help influence the student’s decision-making.
- Some programs use research money to top-up doctoral students in order to compete with the University of Toronto.
- Recruitment challenges not limited to financial packages – students ask good questions about employment post-degree and make choices accordingly.
- If the job market is poor, some students may take longer to complete.
- Reaching Higher applies pressure to meet domestic numbers. If we reduce enrolment, then funding drops and support funds become scarcer. This is compounded by restrictions on the number of international students we can take on due to a limited number of available ITAs and other funding for international students.
- Need also to account for changes in external funding framework (e.g. Tri-Council funds for Master’s students is one year only). We need to plan accordingly.
- Attendees noted that doctoral degrees often take longer than 4 years to complete, but there is no additional funding for these students.
- Departments/Programs may opt to distribute some of their QGA allocation to fifth year students (although this is not required). For example, a program could offer students $5,000 for one term only in year 5 to complete their thesis, a Thesis Completion Fund (TCF).
- Some programs flow funds to fifth-year students if good progress is being made.
• Important to strategize about how to use TCF as incentive to complete, or other ways of providing ‘bonuses’ when milestones are meet
• There was some discussion about the notion of providing carrots to improve completion times rather than sticks when they go over time and are no longer funding eligible
• Declining Teaching Assistant (TA) budgets poses challenges to forming funding packages. Some programs try to stretch TA budget by altering delivery of tutorials, but acknowledge this could have negative impact on undergraduates. Other programs “decouple” Teaching Assistantships from the funding which means a declining budget becomes less of a concern to graduate students and program health
• Some programs have difficulty filling their TA positions because some of their graduate students have professional credentials and they can make more money working a few hours as a clinician