A Proposal for Decentralization of Internal Grants Management at SQU

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This document presents a brief description of the current issues in dealing with internal grants (IGs) and suggests a proposal to decentralize the process.

Definitions

- ADPSR: Assistant Dean for Postgraduate Studies and Research
- AC: Administrative Committee
- CRC: College Research Committee
- DR: Deanship of Research
- DVCPSR: Deputy Vice Chancellor for Postgraduate Studies and Research
- IG: Internal Grant
- LCC: Language Center Committee
- PI: Principal Investigator
- RCC: Research Centers Committee
- R.O: Omani Rial
- SQU: Sultan Qaboos University

1. Introduction

Internal grants are derived from the University's annual budget and other internal resources, as well as unconditional research donations made to the University by outside bodies, without stipulating specific restrictions on the research topic. Internal grants are used to support academic research which is expected to yield original results or findings that generate new knowledge and to develop concepts consistent with the research and educational objectives of the University. Results obtained are also likely to generate interest in a subsequent research project of a broader scope to be considered from other funds.

The internal grant activities in terms of the total number of approved projects, the total amount allocated and the average percentage per college/center for the period between

2010 to 2015 are presented in Table 1. It is obvious that research activities vary from one unit to another and the amount allocated per project is very small.

Table 1: Total number of approved projects, total amount allocated and the average percentage per college/center for the period between 2010 to 2015.

No.	College/Center	Total No. of Approved Projects in 2010-2015	Total amount allocated in 2010-2015	Average Percentage allocated in 2010-2015
1	College of Agricultural & Marine Sciences	56	412,300	14.4%
2	College of Arts & Social Sciences	14	105,000	3.7%
3	College of Economics & Political Science	18	101,298	3.5%
4	College of Education	33	256,505	8.9%
5	College of Engineering	68	384,999	13.4%
6	College of Medicine & Health Sciences	76	462,285	16.1%
7	College of Science	134	482,647	16.8%
8	College of Nursing	13	71,243	2.5%
9	College of Law	1	8,000	0.3%
10	Research Centers	13	107,900	3.8%
11	Language Center	4	19,837	0.7%
12	Joint Projects with UAEU		250,311	8.7%
13	Contingency		208,597	7.3%
Total		430	2,870,922	100%

Several issues have been raised by different colleges/centers regarding the IGs. These can be summarized as follows:

1. The amount of IG allocated to each college/center is very limited.
2. IG management is complicated.
3. IG applications take almost one year from proposal submission till final approval.

4. Need to allocate IG funds to colleges or Principle Investigator (PI) to spend within the regulations. Post audit can be done after that.

Taking into account the above issues and due to the fact that part of the IG budget is used to support collaborative projects with UAE, a new proposal is suggested to restructure the process of IG. The proposal aims to alleviate the above challenges by:

1. Increasing the amount allocated to IG.
2. Decentralizing the selection procedure.
3. Providing general and internal guidelines to maximize the benefit and to use grants to facilitate the development of promising projects as a bridge for external funding.

2. Rationale for Increasing IG Budget

As reported in section 1, the annual budget allocated to IG is very limited. It is essential to increase this budget for the following reasons:

1. SQU is constantly expanding with the numbers of academic programs, research centers, researchers and students continuously increasing. Furthermore, the costs of research materials, consumables and equipment are also continuously increasing. On the other hand the amount allocated annually for internal grants remained the same (R.O 500,000) since its establishment in 1999.
2. Due to budget limitations, small amounts are allocated to IG projects. In the College of Science for instance, the average amount allocated per project is about 3,600 R.O.
3. Some colleges reduce the requested budgets by up to 50% (see Figure 1). Notice that the difference between the requested and allocated budgets illustrated in Figure 1 does not reflect the real disparity between what is needed and what is allocated since researchers take into consideration the budget restrictions when preparing proposals.
4. Due to budget limitations, some colleges have put restrictions on the number of researchers applying for this type of grant and/or on the maximum amount that can be requested per project. The College of Engineering, as an example, allows only 2 to 3 proposals per department.
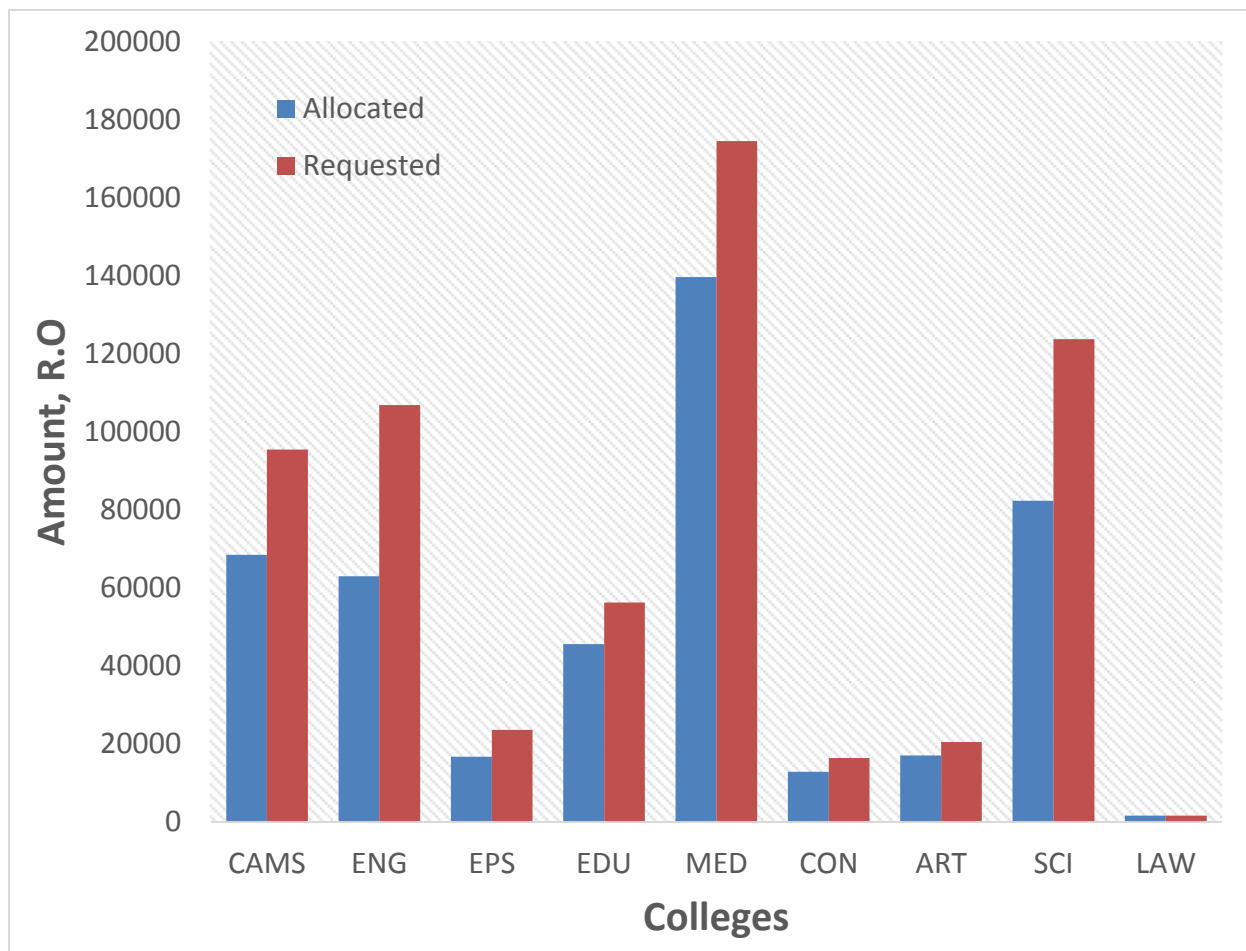
Figure1: Average amounts requested and allocated per college for the period between 2010 and 2015.

3. General Guidelines

The aim of these general guidelines is to provide a common general framework for efficient decentralized management of IG. All research centers are treated as one unit. Thus, it is proposed to establish a Research Centers Committee (RCC) to play a role similar to the role of the College Research Committee (CRC) for a college. The following are the general guidelines:

1. Each college should develop internal guidelines that are not conflicting with these general guidelines. The internal guidelines must be approved by the College Board and should be forwarded to the Deanship of Research.

2. A common set of internal guidelines will be developed for the research centers by the RCC and must be approved by the DVCPSR.

3. The Language Center should develop internal guidelines that are not conflicting with the general guidelines. The internal guidelines must be approved by the Administrative Committee (AC) of the Language Center and should be forwarded to the Deanship of Research

4. IG Applications from other units (other than colleges, research centers, Language Center and SQUH) should be submitted to the DR through their units and will be processed as usual. IG Applications from SQUH should be submitted and processed through the College of Medicine and Health Sciences.

5. The IG proposal submission and approval deadlines are given in the Appendix.

6. The refereeing/selection of IG proposals submitted by researchers from a given college/center will be conducted by the CRC/RCC/AC based on these general guidelines as well as on the college/centers internal guidelines.

7. Each college/center must adhere to the maximum allocated annual budget (see fund distribution policy).

8. A multidisciplinary project can be jointly funded by different colleges/centers.

9. The fund allocated to a multidisciplinary project jointly funded by more than one college/center up to the sum of the maximum allocations of the participating units.

10. Financial support for conference attendance is not allowed from internal grants. However, conference registration fees for up to 400 R.O may be allocated from an IG budget.

11. The IG budget breakdown must adhere to the budget caps set in the research regulations.

12. The PI of an ongoing IG project cannot be awarded a new IG grant.

13. Each IG grant must have a Co-PI. The Co-PI must act as PI during the periods of temporary unavailability of the PI with a written approval of the PI and the Co-PI must

take over as the new PI when the PI becomes permanently unavailable in which case a new Co-PI must be assigned.

4.   Requirements for Developing Internal Guidelines

In reference to the general guidelines in points 3.1 and 3.2, the followings are required for the development of the internal guidelines.

1. The internal guidelines may include in the selection criteria a priority scheme identifying for example which type of researchers have priority (such as giving priority to a fresh graduate, a newly appointed faculty/researcher, or to a researcher not holding other grants). The priority scheme may also identify which type of research (basic, theoretical, applied, with economic impact, etc.) has priority.
2. The internal guidelines should include selection criteria which take into consideration output from previous projects (publications, patents, community service, etc.) as well as the efficiency in using the budget in previous IG projects.
3. The internal guidelines should stress on the point that IG is intended as a bridge rather than an alternative to external funding. After establishing themselves, researchers should seek external funds and refrain from applying for IG grants. The selection criteria should give low priority to senior researchers able of acquiring external grants.
4. The internal guidelines should encourage submitting proposals from a research group within the department or in collaboration with other departments/colleges/centers.
5. The internal guidelines should specify an upper budget limit per internal grant.

5.   Fund Distribution Policy

Based on the history of previous IG funding (see Table 1), around 20% of the IG budget was given to the research centers, Language Center, joint projects with UAEU and the contingency budget while the rest (80%) was distributed to the colleges. In this revision of the fund distribution policy, 20% of the total fund is allocated to the research centers and to the joint projects with UAEU (8% to the research centers and 12% to the joint projects with UAEU). The rest which is the 80% of the fund is distributed between the colleges based on two indices representing the size of the college and its research output over the

last 2 years. The size of the college is calculated as the total number of academic staff. The research output of a college is calculated as the total number of papers receiving the Journal Publication Award by the college divided by the college size. The Language Center, is allocated a total amount of 4,000 R.O. based on history (see Table 1).

Therefore, the IG budget is distributed as follow (see Table 2):

1. 8% is allocated to the centers. This allocation is based on the average JPA percentage of the centers from the total JPA.
2. 12% is allocated to the joint projects with UAEU.
3. 4,000 R.O is allocated to the Language Center.
4. The rest (80%) is distributed between the colleges using the following equation:

Percentage allocated to each college

$$= \left[0.5 \times (\text{percentage of academic staff of this college to the total academic staff in all colleges}) + 0.5 \right.$$
$$\left. \times (\text{percentage of} \frac{\text{JPA}}{\text{academic staff of this college}}) \right] \times \frac{80}{100}$$

Table 2 shows the fund distribution based on a total IG budget of 500,000 R.O.

This distribution is calculated annually by the Deanship of Research and approved by the DVCPSR.

Table 2: Proposed IG fund distribution for colleges, centers, Joint Projects with UAEU and contingency.

No.	College /Center	No. of academic staff	Percentage of academic staff	No. of JPA for 2013 & 2014	Percentage of JPA for 2013 & 2014	No. of JPA divided by No. of academic staff	Percentage of JPA per academic staff	Percentage of the proposed allocation	Estimated amount based on a total IG budget of 500,000 R.O
1	College of Agricultural & Marine Sciences	66	7%	154	14.6%	2.3	25.5%	13%	65,000
2	College of Arts & Social Sciences	169	17%	57	5.4%	0.3	3.7%	8%	40,000
3	College of Economics & Political Science	89	9%	42	4.0%	0.5	5.2%	6%	30,000
4	College of Education	146	15%	76	7.2%	0.5	5.7%	8%	40,000
5	College of Engineering	118	12%	175	16.5%	1.5	16.2%	11%	55,000
6	College of Medicine & Health Sciences	88	9%	204	19.3%	2.3	25.4%	14%	70,000
7	College of Science	213	21%	257	24.3%	1.2	13.2%	14%	70,000
8	College of Nursing	61	6%	21	2.0%	0.3	3.8%	4%	20,000
9	College of Law	41	4%	5	0.5%	0.1	1.3%	2%	10,000
10	Research Centers	-	-	67	6.3%	-		8%	40,000
11	Joint Projects with UAEU	-	-	-	-	-		12%	60,000
	Language Center								4,000
Total		991	100%	1058	100%	-	100%	100%	504,000*

*The extra 4,000 R.O will be taken from the Research Fund account.

6.   Procedures for Internal Grants Management

In the new proposal, it is suggested that the colleges/centers will play a bigger role in IG management. The following sections describe the role of the colleges/centers and the role of the Deanship of Research in managing the internal grants.

6.1 Role of the CRC/RCC:

Each college/center CRC/RCC/LCC is responsible of the following:

1. Announce submission deadlines
2. Receive the proposals
3. Conduct the refereeing process
4. Select proposals for funding and allocate budgets for them from the unit's budget
5. Forward the selected proposals to the Deanship of Research for approval
6. Approve budget re-allocation requests as per the University research regulations
7. Evaluate progress and final reports and submit them to the Deanship of Research with clear recommendations regarding the continuation/termination of the project.

6.2 Role of the Deanship of Research:

The Deanship of Research will be responsible of the following:

1. Receive the selected proposals from the college/center CRC/RCC/LCC
2. Obtain approval for the selected proposals from the DVCPSR
3. Assign project codes
4. Send approval letters to the ADPSRs/DCs to commence the projects
5. Approve/reject payments based on the budget breakdown plan and the research regulations
6. Facilitate administrative, legal and financial operations related to conducting the IG projects
7. Review progress/final reports and take action based on College/Center recommendations

Appendix: Deadlines for Submission and Approval of IG Proposals

For 2016: The following are the deadlines for the submission and approval of IGs in 2016:

1. **By 15 May 2016:** The Deanship of Research to organize workshops for the PIs of the 2017 IG proposals (only) on how to use the new electronic Research Management System (RMS).

2. **By 31 May 2016:** The PIs of the 2017 IG proposals to enter their IG proposals in RMS.

3. **By 30 November 2016:** The research committee of each unit (college, center, SQUH) to complete the following:
   a. refereeing of the unit's IG proposals,
   b. selection of proposals to be funded
   c. distribution of the unit's IG budget among the selected proposals, and
   d. submission of the selected proposals and their budgets to the Deanship of Research.

4. **By 15 December 2016:** The Deanship of Research to do the following:
   a. obtain approval of DVCPSR for the selected proposals,
   b. assign codes to approved proposals and record them in the Deanship database, and
   c. notify each unit about its approved proposals and assigned codes.

5. **By 31 December 2016:** The ADPSR/Director to notify in writing the PIs of approved proposals requesting them to start the projects

For 2017 and onwards, items 3, 4 and 5 of the schedule will be the same as the above. Items 1 and 2 will be:

1. An online demo on how to use RMS will be provided for researchers.
2. The Deanship of Research will announce the distribution of the annual IG fund among the units by 1st of May every year.
3. The deadline for the initial submission of the proposal by the PI is as the unit's internal guidelines.