

Exploration and Practice of the Reform of Postgraduate Award System – Taking Wuhan University of Science and Technology as an Example

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Abstract: China began to implement the charging policy for postgraduate students in 2014. Various universities at all levels have formulated a scholarship and stipend system for postgraduate students, which is in line with the needs of schools in talent training along with the spirit of relevant documents of the Ministry of Education and the actual situation of the schools. This study investigates and analyzes the advantages and disadvantages of the postgraduate funding by Wuhan University of Science and Technology. This article then provides advice for the reform of the scholarship and stipend system from improving the precision funding system, to increasing funding, to expanding the scope of postgraduate funding, and standardizing the treatment of deferred postgraduate students in hope that it would provide a basis for the funding system and provide guarantee for postgraduate students to complete their studies successfully.

Keywords: Postgraduate; Scholarship and stipend system; Standard; Reform

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1. Introduction

The Ministry of Finance, National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC), and the Ministry of Education jointly issued the *Decision on Improving the Investment Mechanism of Postgraduate Education* in 2013. Since September 2014, schools have been charging tuition fees for newly enrolled graduate students. It marked the beginning of a fee system for postgraduate education in China. In view of that, the funds for postgraduate training have entered the era of coexistence with awards, grants, and loans ^[1]. Wuhan University of Science and Technology has conscientiously implemented the Ministry of Education's *Opinions on Deepening the Reform of Postgraduate Education, National Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development program (2010-2020)*, and the spirit of the relevant documents of Hubei Provincial Education Management Department. The university has developed a scholarship system for postgraduate students based on guaranteeing the life needs of postgraduate students, motivating their learning and research, and improving the quality of talent training. The university comprehensively examined various aspects of students' life, learning, and scientific research along with specific opinions and suggestions of students, tutors, and school leaders who are in this system as well as referred to relevant experience in the construction of the award system for postgraduate students in China's local universities.

The current financial aid system includes scholarships, grants, research allowance for tutors, job allowances for “three aid” and student loans.

2. Structure of the scholarship and stipend system

The current composition of the postgraduate scholarship and stipend system and the disbursement of scientific research allowances for tutors at Wuhan University of Science and Technology are mainly based on scientific research results. It encourages postgraduate students to focus more on scientific research and outstanding students to grow better. The bursary is mainly used to subsidize the daily expenditures of postgraduate students. The “three aid” job allowance mainly encourages postgraduate students to cooperate with teachers to carry out teaching guidance and other work during their spare time, exercise their communication, coordination skills, and sense of responsibility in practice, as well as provide better employment and entry into the society in the future. Student loans are designed to help students whose family has financial issues to support the completion of their studies smoothly and respond to the State’s call to prevent any student from dropping out from schools due to financial difficulties.

According to relevant national and school management regulations, some schools of Wuhan University of Science and Technology have implemented the dynamic adjustment of academic scholarships during the second and third year of postgraduate studies. Among them, the first-class academic scholarship is mainly to reward postgraduate students who have outstanding achievements in scientific research. If there are no outstanding students in a particular year, the first-class academic scholarship can be vacant. Principally, the award ratio of the first-class and second-class academic scholarship is not lower than the total number of grades, which is 40% of the total coverage. The overall coverage would be adjusted by the college in line with the actual situation. This rule has greatly encouraged students to participate in learning, scientific research, and in social activities. However, the evaluation of students’ social activities lacks quantitative evaluation standards. Its requirements for students’ ideological education and moral quality are unclear.

3. Advantages and disadvantages of the scholarship and stipend system

3.1. Advantages

3.1.1. The evaluation of various scholarships and grants fully reflects the principles of openness, justice, and fairness

Students at Wuhan University of Science and Technology would apply for various postgraduate scholarships and stipend in writing every academic year, and all tutors of the academic committee of the college would participate in the public oral defense. Freshman admission scholarships are evaluated based on the ranking from the admission scores. The evaluation of various scholarships and grants comprehensively reflects the quality of students’ ideological and political performance, academic performance, scientific research results, etc. It focuses on the orientation of scientific research results.

3.1.2. Financial aid evaluation reflects inclusiveness

Postgraduate grants are mainly used to subsidize the daily expenditures of postgraduates who have no fixed income. The postgraduate student grants from Wuhan University of Science and Technology include national grants and school grants. School grants are mainly for doctoral students and postgraduates who have outstanding scientific research. The evaluation for the grants is related to the financial status of the students’ family and their academic performance. At the same time, the school grants from Wuhan University of Science and Technology have realized a combination of school funding support and tutor funding support. It beneficially embodies the stimulating effect of the scholarship.

3.1.3. Increasing donations of off-campus resources to improve the treatment

On the basis of national scholarships and degree scholarships, Wuhan University of Science and Technology has also incorporated the actual situation of the school and absorbed high-quality corporate resources from outside the school. Freshmen with excellent admission scores and postgraduate students with outstanding performance in scientific and technological achievements, academic papers, academic performance, social activities, etc. are rewarded.

3.2. Disadvantages

Based on the characteristics of the development of local universities and the current scholarship and stipend system at Wuhan University of Science and Technology, there are also several shortcomings. The first is the inadequate investment by tutors in grants. Insufficient research funding for some tutors and flawed supporting systems have led to limited coverage of school grants. The scholarship evaluation system needs to further refine the achievement incentive standards. It must be able to comprehensively evaluate students' results in journal articles, patents, works, etc. Second, the treatment standard for postgraduate graduate students is unclear. At present, Wuhan University of Science and Technology has not issued any official documents on the treatment standards of postgraduate graduates in the evaluation of various scholarships and grants. Postgraduates generally suffer from high academic pressure and economic pressure.

4. Enlightenment from the reform of postgraduate scholarship and stipend system

4.1. Universities should increase investments in postgraduate scholarships and stipends as well as the amount of tutor allowances

Schools should make full use of high-quality social resources to increase investments in postgraduate scholarships and grants. They should appropriately increase the number of scholarships and grants as well as expand the coverage of various scholarships and grants. Except for national scholarships and bursaries, the quotas and funding ranges of other types of scholarships and bursaries are set independently by schools. Wuhan University of Science and Technology, as a provincial local university with distinctive school characteristics, can give full play to its advantages in discipline construction, draw on the support of local governments at all levels and school-enterprise cooperation platforms, absorb various advantageous social resources, as well as strive to achieve rewards for excellence and funding for difficulties ^[2,3].

The research subsidy for tutors must be paid on time and in full. Each school has formulated a unified standard for the research assistant allowance based on the actual situation and the funding situation. Through this standard, the current issues of inconsistent payment of research assistant allowances for postgraduate tutors can be solved along with the high pressure faced by students who are carrying out scientific research but have insufficient sources for living expenses. The research assistant allowances issued for all tutors shall not be lower than this standard. At the same time, the university has established a public account for research assistant allowances, where the tutors remit them to the account on schedule, and the university directly issues allowances to postgraduate students. This is to avoid the existence of individual colleges and universities from mentors and students reaching an agreement to allow students to give up research assistant allowances. Furthermore, even if the research assistant subsidy is paid according to the requirements of the document, it is an unpleasant phenomenon that it is recovered under other names. The school must implement the subsidy for postgraduate research, strengthen the supervision of the distribution, and truly implement the tutor responsibility system in all aspects of scientific research in order to ensure that all postgraduate students carry out learning and scientific research activities without any worries ^[4].

4.2. Universities should refine the management system

Postgraduate scholarship evaluation is based on scientific research incentives. The granting of bursaries must not only reflect the incentives, but also highlight the charity funding. The evaluation of scholarships for graduate students needs specific and quantitative evaluation standards to ensure the objective and fairness of the results. In the process of stipend evaluation, schools should refer to the scholarship evaluation method and conduct a quantitative inspection of students' learning and scientific research achievements. At the same time, the assessment of the bursary needs to be considered with the actual difficulties of the students. The school can give priority subsidies based on the degree of difficulties faced by the families, such as long-term poverty, returning to poverty due to illness, survivors of martyrs, single-parent families, and students or their family members who have lost part of their labor force. In addition, schools can also provide aid for students with family difficulties. For example, schools can encourage students to actively apply for "three aid" and obtain the corresponding subsidies or actively participate in school-enterprise cooperation projects to obtain corresponding scientific research subsidies. At the same time, the evaluation of scholarships and bursaries should also introduce a moral education scoring mechanism. Schools can use democratic appraisal methods to conduct comprehensive inspections on the political literacy and moral accomplishment of the participating students, so that the students who receive awards and subsidies can become role models for the other students [5].

Moral scoring methods are based on the model of "basic score and reward plus points." The basic score can be set to 10 points, and postgraduate students who played exemplary and leading roles in serving the students would receive extra points. In particular, the sense of service should be highlighted. The judges' scores are the weighted averages. The rules for the bonus points are detailed in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Rules for adding points for postgraduate students' moral education scoring

| Extra points | Extra points standard | Bonus points |
|---|--|--------------|
| Ideological progress plus points | Members of the Communist Party of China play an exemplary and leading role | 0.5-1.0 |
| | Excellent team member pacesetter | 0.5-1.0 |
| Advanced individual or advanced collective bonus points | Excellent league cadres | 0.5-1.0 |
| | Excellent league branch | 0.5-1.0 |
| | Outstanding student party member | 0.5-1.0 |
| | Other advanced individuals assessed by the school | 0.5-1.0 |
| Extra points for college level graduate cadres | Serving as a member of the Bureau | 0-2.0 |
| | Minister and Deputy Minister | 0-1.0 |
| Extra points for school level graduate cadres | Serving as a member of the Bureau | 1.0-3.0 |
| | Minister and Deputy Minister | 0-2.0 |
| Served as party secretary, professional leader, etc. | Serious and responsible, and effectively served the students | 0-0.5 |
| | Won the school-level outstanding party and league branch award | 0.5-1.0 |

The determination of the extra points and deductions must be supported by authentic and effective certification materials and should be uniformly recognized by the academic department. Based on the relevant grading rules in **Table 1**, the Academic Affairs Office would then add up the student's scientific research performance score and moral education score to obtain the total score, which is the total score of the student's participation in the evaluation of scholarships and bursaries for a particular academic year. Their academic works are ranked according to the total score, and the highest ranking would receive scholarships or bursaries [6,7].

4.3. Universities should standardize the treatment standards and funding period of postgraduates

According to relevant regulations, postponed postgraduates would not be granted scholarships or bursaries except for the tutor's research allowance. How then to guarantee the life of postgraduate students who postpone and are unable to graduate on time due to illness, absence, marriage, and childbirth? The failure to complete the thesis on time is one of the key issues in graduate training. Colleges and universities should begin increasing the postponement basic treatment for postgraduate students^[8]. On the one hand, for postponed postgraduates, tutors' scientific research allowances can be raised, and an internal scientific research award system for the research group can be established to reward students with outstanding scientific research results during the postponed graduation period to ensure the basics of these students and motivate them to complete their dissertations. On the other hand, colleges can also provide a one-off living allowance to ensure that postponed graduates are able to support their basic life needs, or schools can prioritize postponed graduates to apply for "three aid" so that they can obtain subsidies^[9].

5. Conclusion

This article combines the construction and operation of the current postgraduate scholarship and stipend system of Wuhan University of Science and Technology, and comprehensively considers its discipline construction and talent training. There is a need to increase investments in postgraduate scholarships, refine the evaluation system for postgraduate scholarships and grants, as well as clarify the extension of various postgraduate scholarships and grants. On the premise of adapting to the social and economic development of the region, it is important to provide strong support to promote the cultivation of innovative talents, improve the overall quality of graduate students, and ensure the smooth process of their graduations.

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Disclosure statement

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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