



## Research degree interview panel guidance

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### Who should be interviewed?

The recruiting department should have completed a *Research degree applicant shortlisting checklist* (RO-GR-15F)<sup>1</sup> before the applicant was invited to interview, in order to establish that they meet the eligibility criteria for the research degree. This should ensure that no applicant is interviewed if they do not meet the entry requirements, or if there is not sufficient staffing at the University to supervise and examine the project. The shortlisting checklist is not required for the panel's consideration but the chair can ask the department for a copy if they wish.

In addition:

- All applicants for PhD and professional doctorate must be interviewed before an offer can be made;
- All international/EU MRes applicants must be interviewed before an offer can be made;
- UK MRes applicants do not need to be interviewed provided the department has a prior working relationship with them such that it can be satisfied the applicant is academically capable of completing the MRes.

Without a completed shortlisting checklist and, where necessary, a Research degree applicant interview checklist<sup>2</sup> (RO-GR-21F), the Graduate School cannot authorise an offer of a place.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://eshare.edgehill.ac.uk/14139/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://eshare.edgehill.ac.uk/11531/>

## **Composition of the panel**

A research degree interview panel should be composed of:

- a chair. For PhD or professional doctorate this is normally an academic member of the Graduate School, or possibly the Associate Dean (Research) for FAS. For MRes, the chair would normally be the Head of Department; and
- two members of staff who have appropriate subject knowledge to be able to assess the subject-specific quality of the proposal:<sup>1</sup>
  - One of the proposed supervisors
  - Another staff member with appropriate expertise and experience

The chair represents the Graduate School on the panel, and the other members of the panel represent the department or faculty. One of the department/faculty representatives should be a proposed supervisor and one should not have had any prior involvement with the development of the project.

When convening an interview panel, consideration should be made to the gender balance within the panel.

## **Application**

Applicants to research degrees should apply online via the UCAS application portal, and include a research proposal (1,000 words for MRes, 2,000 words for doctoral applications) outlining:

- the current state of relevant thought on the topic under consideration;
- proposed research questions;
- proposed methods of data collection and data analysis;
- relevant conceptual, epistemological and theoretical issues;
- any ethical issues;
- any practical considerations such as equipment, financial matters and timescale.

Each academic discipline should interpret these requirements in a manner that is appropriate to the relevant subject area but each should be addressed (if only to make the case that they are not relevant to the project).

## **Aims of the interview**

The panel should aim to establish the following:

- Whether the applicant has produced an appropriate initial research design.

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<sup>1</sup> This does not apply to studentship applications, including GTAs. In such cases the requirements here would constitute a *minimum*, but additional panel members may be necessary, depending on the nature of the studentship.

- Whether the applicant has an appropriate academic background to conduct the research and whether they display the required intellectual and organisational skills to complete the proposed research project.
  - In *some cases* of PGRs transferring from other universities, an assessment must be made of whether the PGR has the appropriate knowledge and skills to complete the proposed research project *without* the structured developmental opportunities provided to research degree PGRs at Edge Hill. The panel also needs to identify at which stage of the degree the PGR is entering, although deadlines and timescales will ultimately be calculated by the Graduate School.
- Whether the applicant has time to complete the research within the proposed timescale,<sup>2</sup> or, alternatively, within the time restrictions imposed by the Research Degree Regulations.
- Whether the University has the required resources to support the proposed research. Any resources or activities that are integral to the project must be provided by the faculty (or department in FAS) in which the PGR will be registered. In proposing the offer of a place, the relevant Head of Department or Associate Dean commits to providing the necessary resources to complete the research as outlined at the point of interview (in the research proposal and as a result of discussion during the interview). All significant resource requirements should be clearly identified in writing because there are no central funds for these.
- Whether it seems likely that a supervisory team that meets the requirements of the University's regulations can be put in place to supervise the PGR, and whether there is sufficient capacity to examine the PGR.
  - The relevant department or faculty will have made a preliminary assessment of this using the aforementioned shortlisting checklist and the research degree supervision criteria <sup>3</sup>(RO- GRA-12G), but final, specific arrangements cannot be made until after the interview but an interview cannot be arranged unless it has been established that there is adequate supervisory capacity within the University.
  - It is important to note that a supervisory team cannot be formed without the approval of the proposed members of the team, the relevant line manager(s), and the Graduate School Board of Studies.

### **Conduct of interview**

- The chair of the interview panel should complete the Research degree applicant interview checklist <sup>4</sup> (RO-GRA-21F) which will provide the Graduate School with the necessary information to approve an offer, should the applicant be successful. The checklist complements the shortlisting checklist with details of:
  - Whether the applicant will need on campus accommodation in year 1;

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<sup>3</sup> <http://eshare.edgehill.ac.uk/14165/>

<sup>4</sup> <http://eshare.edgehill.ac.uk/11531/>

- Whether the applicant meets the minimum standard of English language proficiency required to join the research degree at Edge Hill. The applicant must be able to demonstrate this *before an offer* can be made; and
- Whether the Academic Technology Approval Scheme (ATAS)<sup>5</sup> applies to the proposed research.
- The panel should plan in advance the specific form of the interview.
- The chair should aim to conclude the interview within 45 minutes (excluding any pre-meeting of the panel). The interview should abide by the University's policy and ethos of equality of opportunity, and should be conducted in a friendly and non-confrontational manner.
- The chair should begin the interview by explaining the process of research degree study at Edge Hill. This should include information on the following: the process of registration (and progression examination for doctoral degrees), mandatory training and the importance of ethical review before data collection.
- When the chair has given the applicant this information the other members of the panel should lead the discussion of the proposed research with a view to meeting the aims of the interview listed above.
- The chair should conclude the interview by offering the applicant an opportunity to ask questions.
- After the applicant has left, the panel should discuss the application and interview and agree upon a recommendation to the Graduate School. The panel cannot offer a place.

## **The decision**

### ***Unsuccessful interviews***

- **Non-GTAs:** the interview chair should communicate the recommended decision to the applicant, with relevant feedback from the other panel members as to the reason for the decision. The chair should also notify the Graduate School of the unsuccessful outcome, so the applicant's record can be closed. Feedback must be given to send directly to the applicant, verbatim.
- **GTAs:** the panel should follow the procedure set out by SRPS.

### ***Successful interviews***

- The panel does not offer a place to the applicant, rather it recommends the offer of a place to be made by the Graduate School.
- The chair of the interview panel should notify [GraduateSchoolAdmissions@edgehill.ac.uk](mailto:GraduateSchoolAdmissions@edgehill.ac.uk) of the panel's recommendation using the Research degree applicant interview checklist (RO-GRA-21F) as soon as possible after the interview. This checklist, along with the aforementioned shortlisting checklist, ensures that applicants are only offered a place when the University can be satisfied that eligibility criteria can be met.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/academic-technology-approval-scheme>

- Upon receipt, the Graduate School will contact the necessary departments – primarily Admissions Office and International Office – to enable them to conduct appropriate checks and, if cleared, an offer will be sent to the applicant by Admissions or International. A delay in providing the checklist will therefore lead to a delay in sending an offer.
- **This must be done even for PGRs recruited via HR processes (GTAs and other studentships) – HR will only send an offer of *employment* which is dependent on enrolment and progression on the PhD.**

### ***Conditional offers***

All doctoral applicants should meet the entry requirements by the time of the offer so the panel cannot recommend a conditional offer.

The panel may recommend a conditional offer for MRes applicants but this will normally only relate to the successful completion of a first degree *prior to the start of the MRes*. English language competency cannot be a condition of offer because the applicant must be able to demonstrate at the point of application. Likewise, the eligibility to enter the UK should not be considered a condition of an offer.

### **Entry point**

There are two entry points – October and February – for new PGRs.<sup>3</sup> **All** new PGRs must ensure their availability for the induction programme at the point of entry; if unable to attend induction, they should defer to the next entry point.

Please note: the fixed entry point does not apply to PGRs transferring their current research degree registration to Edge Hill from another university; they can usually start at any time of year but tuition fee invoicing cycles should be considered. The Fees Team in Academic Registry can advise on this. Similarly, visa matters should be considered for international PGRs, so the Department should discuss it with the International Office at the earliest possible stage.

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<sup>3</sup> There is an exception for PGRs who are externally funded where the contract between Edge Hill and the funder explicitly requires a different start date. In such cases, the only alternative entry point is April and, because the contract is a legally binding document between the funder and Edge Hill, in which the academic commits the University to certain obligations, it should have been lodged with and approved by the Research Office **before it was signed**.