

## Guidance for Applicants

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### Eligibility

You must possess:

- A good honours degree (upper 2nd class honours or higher)
- A masters level qualification is preferred for applicants to doctoral degrees
- If English is not your first language, or if you are from a country whose national language is not English, you will need to be able to demonstrate English language proficiency to a minimum standard of IELTS 7.0 (or any equivalent recognised by the University). The [International Office](#) can offer advice.

### ***Do I need to do an English test if I have a degree from a UK university?***

You don't need to prove your knowledge of English if you've completed a qualification equivalent to a UK degree in:

|                     |                    |             |                               |                     |
|---------------------|--------------------|-------------|-------------------------------|---------------------|
| Antigua and Barbuda | Australia          | The Bahamas | Barbados                      | Belize              |
| Dominica            | Grenada            | Guyana      | Ireland                       | Jamaica             |
| New Zealand         | St Kitts and Nevis | St Lucia    | St Vincent and the Grenadines | Trinidad and Tobago |
| UK                  | USA                |             |                               |                     |

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## **What is the selection panel looking for?**

*At the point of application to decide eligibility* for interview we are looking for well designed, feasible, projects that are aligned with the research interests of members of staff that are qualified to supervise research students and have capacity to do so. You can look at possible supervisors by checking staff research profiles on [Pure](#). We have to ensure that we have *at least* two members of staff able to supervise and two further members of staff who would be appropriate internal examiners. Following the guidance below in relation to the application form and the proposal and consulting appropriate staff is the best way to ensure that you make a strong application. If we think that an application should be considered in a different subject area from that indicated in your application, we will ensure it is considered in both areas.

*At the point of interview* we have already established that your proposed project is well designed, appears viable, proposes a suitable original contribution to knowledge, and seems to be something we could supervise and examine. The focus at interview moves to whether the panel feels that you are well equipped to complete the project in good time to achieve a successful outcome. That means that the panel wants to know whether you have the necessary knowledge, skills, abilities and temperament for doctoral/MRes research.

## **Application process**

All research degree applicants must apply online, submitting the with the following:

- A 'Research Proposal' which should not exceed 2,000 words (doctoral) or 1,000, in the case of MRes.
- A full academic curriculum vitae
- Qualifications certificates
- IELTSs, or [equivalent](#), paperwork **and** a scanned copy of your passport (*international and EU applicants only*)

## **The research proposal**

The research proposal should not exceed 2,000 words in length for doctoral applications and 1,000 for MRes applications.

The specific content and structure of the document should be discussed with prospective supervisors, as they will be able to make recommendations regarding the most suitable form for the proposal to take given the academic discipline in which you are working. There are, however, some general recommendations that can be made. We would normally expect the research proposal to include the following:

- An abstract of no more than 200 words outlining the design of the research, including a clear statement of the proposed contribution to knowledge that will be made by the work: details should be in the proposal itself but should also be summarised in the abstract. An independent, significant and original contribution is required at doctoral level. The abstract is in addition to the proposal and so does not count in relation to the word limit on the proposal.

- Some evidence of familiarity with relevant literature and the place of the proposed research within a body of existing work: in designing research it is important to do so in light of existing work on the topic. The proposal should show a familiarity with relevant literature, the ability to critically evaluate that literature and the ability to identify gaps in existing research. It should not simply be a report on what others have said on the topic or the research that they have completed. Rather, it should show your ability to identify patterns in existing research, evaluate those as points of departure for new research, and place your proposed research within the context of that work.
- A clear statement of research questions and, where appropriate (but only where appropriate), hypotheses: the proposal should also indicate the relationship between each research question and the methods of data collection and analysis that have been designed to address them. Where appropriate, an indication of the relationships between the various research questions should be given. For example, there may be a primary question, elements of which may be addressed by tackling various subsidiary or ancillary questions. In addition, one might expect some discussion of how existing work in the relevant field relates to, and influences, the research questions.
- A rationale for any theoretical choices made in designing the research.
- A rationale for the methodological and epistemological choices made in designing the research.
- Evidence of some degree of awareness of conceptual issues relevant to the research: a central differentiating feature between doctoral level work and research at lower levels is the emphasis on conceptual matters at doctoral level. Many of the problems faced by researchers, even those engaged in work that is principally empirical, are conceptual rather than empirical. A high level of conceptual sophistication is a major element in distinguishing research that makes an original contribution to knowledge from research that does not. While we would expect your proficiency with conceptual matters to develop during the course of doctoral study, being able to show some familiarity with conceptual issues relevant to your proposed project provides some advantage at the point of application.
- Where relevant, details of the methods of data collection and the nature of that data, plus an account of the rationale for the choice of those methods.
- Where relevant, details of the methods of data analysis, plus an account of the rationale for the choice of those methods.
- Where appropriate, brief discussion of the primary ethical issues raised by the design of the research, along with an indication of how those issues might best be addressed.
- A discussion of practical issues, such as any financial or resource requirements, or requirements for additional training on the part of the student, along with timescales (e.g. Gantt chart) and any health and safety issues.

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- All proposals with any significant resource requirements should include a fully itemised projected budget as an appendix to the proposal (not counted in the word limit). What we are looking for here is a realistic assessment of any costs, not an unrealistic attempt to be efficient, or, for that matter, unrealistic extravagance. Good financial planning is an important part of the design of a viable project. Here is a [template budget spreadsheet](#) which can be used to layout these costs.

## **The interview**

Should you be invited to interview, it will last for 40 minutes in total (including your presentation). Following introductions, you will be asked to give your presentation, then the members of the panel will each ask you a few questions. The primary focus of the questions will be on the research, but there will also be some questions skills development (you should familiarise yourself with the [Researcher Development Framework](#) and the skills development agenda in doctoral/MRes education prior to interview).

It is very important that you keep your presentation to **no more than ten minutes**. We pay close attention to that because failing to do so demonstrates an inability to manage time and a disregard for the requirements. It also means that you will have less time in the interview to demonstrate to us that you are a suitable candidate. The interviews run to a tight schedule and we cannot extend any interview to allow us to complete our questions when a presentation has run over time.

It is important to realise that what we are particularly looking for is evidence that you are a rigorous thinker who understands what it is to design good research and so a good performance at interview is not a matter of defending your initial research design at all costs. It is better for the panel to see that you have recognised a problem and are thinking of solutions by identifying adjustments or alternatives to the design of the research than it is for the panel to have identified a problem and you to try to defend the design of the research in the face of that problem when that is really a lost cause. We are not looking for a perfectly designed project; research rarely proceeds exactly as it was initially designed, so our primary focus is on your potential for development, not necessarily on where you are now.

## **After the interview**

The Graduate School will review all outcomes and communicate them to you in conjunction with the Admissions team.