

Studying for a research degree at Oxford, OU or Brunel, and applying for a Grand Union ESRC Studentship



Is a PhD /DPhil for you?



- Why do a PhD? It's a long and sometimes tough 3-4 year journey. You need to be clear about where you want to go next and how the PhD training can help you prepare you for that future.
- Many PhD programmes courses can now be studied on a part-time basis, and all our partner universities are committed to widening access to postgraduate (and undergraduate) study.
- These slides are designed to help you decide if 1) applying for a PhD/DPhil is the right thing for you, 2) to help you develop a strong application 3) to tell you about ESRC funding opportunities.

If so, which PhD is for you?



- We fund students to do doctoral studies across the social sciences. Start at the Grand Union pathway and course admissions pages to learn about the programme of study
- Think about your own profile – including relevant academic and work experience – and how it strengthens your profile, and supports your current interests
- Do you want/need to start with a taught postgraduate degree to get research training experience, or directly begin a DPhil/PhD programme?

Do your homework..



- Find out about the academic research expertise in your chosen department
- Does your application and research area 'fit' the departmental profile?
- Who would you (ideally!) wish to supervise you?
- Are you open to a predefined or collaborative research topic if it comes with funding?
- Do you want to study full or part-time?
- Tailor your application and personal statement accordingly

Preparing your application



- Tailor your personal statement/statement of purpose
- Work on your research proposal (if applying for a PGR course)
- Update your CV
- Check with your referees (early) – keep them informed
- Choose samples of written work that link to your research interests
- Include any applications for scholarships (more on this later)
- And then prepare for your interview (if applicable)..

What do I put in a research proposal?



- Title
- Abstract (depends on overall length)
- Overview
- Lit review, with key topics/research questions
- Research Design and Methods
- Relevance/Importance/Potential Contribution
- Can be between 500 and 3000 words...(structure and word length will vary by department and course)

Do I need a research question?



- Some departments will just want a general sense of your interests
- Others will want the proposal to articulate potential research questions
- These need to be:
 - Specific, clear, precise and focussed
 - Engaging existing knowledge/debates
 - Answerable by empirical data
 - Practical & manageable
 - Useful, topical and relevant to wider interests

Think about the basic questions..



- What do I need to know?
- Why do I need to know this?
- What kind of 'data' will answer my questions?
- Where can I find these data?
- How will I analyse this data?
- What kinds of evidence will this produce?

Good research questions are...



- **Topical:** Arising from issues raised in literature, policy or practice
- **Achievable:** Research Sites (archives/fieldsites) and sources of data are accessible and help you develop a full and nuanced answer to your question.
- **Substantial:** Offers space for further development
- **Clear and simple:** They become more complex as your research progresses.
- **Interesting:** Will sustain you for at least 3 years
- **Topical:** They ideally address a current issue or policy concern

Some ideas for structuring a research proposal.. (but these will vary by field/discipline)



- Include a Title/Abstract/Overview
- Background/contextual information (brief)
- Research question(s): the central issue or problem with which you intend to grapple
- Literature review (is there a gap in the literature?), emerging research questions/topics, other fields
- Theoretical framework (what body of work will YOU draw on)
- Research design and methods
- Relevance/contribution to the literature
- Suggested word length and format varies by subject and stage.

And write about methods too..

- Quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods, theoretical or library-based?
- Focus (local, regional, national, international)?
- What sources of data will you draw on, and what skills do you need ?
- What practical /fieldwork challenges will there be?
- What are the ethical issues to consider?
- Will you do a pilot?

What else to consider putting into a proposal?



- It should address questions raised by existing literature, if not yet fully answered
- It should be feasible: can you do this in 3/4 years with the support of your supervisor/department/pathway?
- It should be substantial with scope for further development over the 3 years (and possible into a post-doc)
- It should be exciting and matter (to you!). It must sustain you for 3 years...

Get advice and feedback



- Find the experts in your area, reach out to them, and see if they are interested in your work and ideas
- You may want to contact a potential supervisor to see if they are interested, and get their feedback too
- You will benefit a lot from your peers, so find out about the research student culture
- Your ideas will keep developing, the proposal does not need to be perfect at this stage!

The Grand Union DTP...



- One of 14 ESRC Doctoral Training Partnerships (DTPs)
- The Grand Union DTP brings together three universities with complementary research strengths
- 18 Oxford-led training pathways; 4 OU-led and 1 Brunel-led pathway
- Annually awards 45-50 ESRC studentships and 6 postdoc fellowships
- A wide range of training innovations and funding opportunities
- Committed to widening access to PGR study
- Strong student representation
- One equal partnership

Pathway Clusters

The pathways within the Grand Union DTP fall into five loose clusters:



Society & Wellbeing



Rights & Freedoms



Learning & Cognition



Globalisation,
Development and Local
Knowledges



Economics and
Management

Who is eligible for an ESRC studentship?



- To be eligible for a full award (stipend and fees), you must have been ordinarily resident in the UK for at least three years prior to the start of the studentship grant (but not just for education.)
- To be eligible for a fees only award, you must be ordinarily resident in an EU member state
- A very few (1 or 2) studentships awarded to applicants pursuing 'Advanced Quantitative Methods' have no residency restrictions.
- More information at <https://esrc.ukri.org/skills-and-careers/doctoral-training/esrc-students/>
- Information about UK Government support for international students at ukcisa.org.uk/Information--Advice/Fees-and-Money/Government-Student-Support

What does a studentship cover?



- A stipend (around £15,000) and tuition fees are covered (fees only for EU nationals)
- Research-related costs, including overseas fieldwork, institutional visits and internships, provided pre-approval is obtained for all expenses
- The opportunity to apply for support for new interdisciplinary activities and initiatives through our Incubator Fund

The Grand Union is committed to widening participation to postgraduate research



- A Masters qualification is not a prerequisite for a studentship from the Grand Union DTP. All pathways have routes for students without a Masters, with training designed for individuals, based on an assessment of prior learning and training needs
- We take your professional career profile into account, not just your academic achievements
- We are interested in doctoral research that will have an impact and promote knowledge exchange: existing or planned non-academic collaborations are well regarded.
- Our application form provides an opportunity to outline information about challenges you may have overcome and which have prepared you for PG study.

What happens after you apply..



- Your application will be assessed by your institution, department and pathway leads.
- If sufficiently strong, it will be selected for submission to our central studentship competition.
- Your chosen pathway will prepare a nomination form, giving assessors an accessible overview of your application materials and its strengths.
- DEADLINE for Autumn 2019 entry – January 2019 (check with your institution on exact date for your course)

All Questions welcome

