

Guidance on the selection of PGR applicants

Considering PGR applications

In assessing applications for PGR places, selectors should consider the following:

- Whether the applicant meets the entry requirements for their chosen research degree, including academic qualification(s), references and English language requirements; these are stipulated on the admissions webpage for the relevant research degree.
- Where a research proposal is required, whether the proposed area of research is:
 - able to be researched to sufficient depth for the level of research degree (e.g. PhD) applied for;
 - feasible within the time available on the chosen research degree;
 - within an area of research in which the University has the necessary expertise, and for which proper supervision can be provided and maintained;
 - within an area of research in which the University has the appropriate resources (e.g. library, computing, laboratory facilities, technical assistance), and an appropriate research environment.
- The applicant's performance at interview (see below).

Interviewing PGR applicants

Before an offer of a place, all applicants should be interviewed, even when they are known to the prospective supervisor(s). The purpose of the interview is to allow the Faculty/School to take a view on the broad viability of the project as well as the credibility of the potential PGR. The interview will normally involve the prospective supervisor and at least one additional academic colleague (e.g. the Associate Dean (Research and Innovation), or nominee(s)). The below offers guidance on the conduct of these admissions interviews:

- Where possible, aim to have the whole proposed supervisory team present at the interview, or at least the main supervisor and one additional faculty member (see above).
- Interviews may either be in person or, where this is not practicable, by video-conferencing.
- Interviewers should introduce themselves to the applicant and explain their role in both the Faculty/School, and in the admissions process.
- During the interview, topics of discussion should include:
 - the proposed topic and suitable supervision arrangements;
 - the applicant's background knowledge of the proposed subject area and why they want to research this particular topic;
 - the possibility of/requirements for fieldwork/placements;
 - the research degree process in the UK (this can be new to applicants, so explain the broad expectations and milestones, such as Formal Progression Reviews, and highlight any activities they would be expected to participate in, e.g. Faculty/School symposia);
 - if an applicant is not applying for a studentship, it is reasonable to ask them how they intend to fund themselves through their registration (including the tuition fees and

subsistence). Absence of available funding is not in itself sufficient reason to reject an application. Depending on the applicant's circumstances (e.g. an international applicant) evidence of their financial position may form part of the conditions of an offer and/or be required as part of a visa application, where relevant;

- the range of researcher development courses offered by the University, and any specific training needs they might have.
- If English is not the applicant's first language, use the interview to assess their language skills and make clear that their thesis must be submitted in publication-standard English. It may be appropriate to direct them to the University's pre-sessional and in-sessional English language courses: www.sussex.ac.uk/languages/english.
- Bear in mind that the interview is also an opportunity for the applicant to assess Sussex. It is therefore worth taking some time to describe the Faculty/School/department/research group/research culture amongst current PGRs, and explain why the applicant should choose Sussex.
- Do not offer the applicant a place during the course of the interview: formal offer letters are issued by Admissions and constitute a legal contact between the University and the applicant, and are issued only following a number of compliance checks, and in some cases it is not possible to make the offer recommended by the selectors. Selectors may tell the applicant that they intend to recommend an offer, but where they choose to do this, selectors must make clear that their recommendation is subject to review and confirmation by Admissions.

Last reviewed: July 2025