

MPhil/PhD Application Process – Guidance to WGU Applicants

Undertaking a doctoral level study should be the result of a considered decision-making process, as a PhD is: “a postgraduate doctoral degree, awarded to students who complete an original thesis offering a significant contribution to knowledge in their subject.” (www.findaphd.com) A PhD is normally the highest level of qualification an academic person is able to achieve.

Factors which should be taken into account when applying to study at doctoral level include an appreciation of both the extent of personal study time, usually encompassing a period of three or more years, and the level of academic writing required to complete a research degree should not be underestimated. The applicant should make sure they have decided on an area of study, rather than picking a topic without due consideration, see postgrad.com for a practical, introductory insights.

An integral part of the application process is the framing of a research question that is sufficiently novel and complex and has the potential to generate new knowledge. The question should enable the potential student to undertake initial research into the related subject area, drawing on a recognised body or bodies of knowledge, draft specific objectives which will contribute to a conceptual framework and write an initial proposal.

The proposal forms part of the compulsory interview process, where an academic panel will cover a range of practical issues but also conduct a discussion based on the initial proposal and overall is expected to last between 45 minutes and an hour. The interview panel is arranged when academic staff with knowledge of the subject area have read the application form, qualifications and the proposal. A thorough approach to these documents provides an indication that the applicant has thoroughly prepared at this early stage.

Retaining a focus that an MPhil/PhD is an academic undertaking it would be expected that the proposal includes a brief introductory/contextual section, which includes the research question. From this section a theoretical insight, in the form of an initial literature search and critical review should be conducted, drawing on academic sources, which are cited in accordance with the principles of a recognised academic referencing format (e.g. Harvard or APA). A literature review documents the state of the art with respect to the core subject or topic and synthesises the contents into a summary which is coherent, organized and identifies gaps by showing limitations of theories (rif.org.uk). These stages should be evident in the initial proposal.

The proposal should then provide evidence that a methodological approach has been considered, this indicates the components used to answer research questions, involving specific techniques to collect, assemble, analyse and evaluate the data. It is therefore essential to provide a clear outline of how the empirical data will be collected and what type of sampling approach will be used. Many applicants find this area particularly challenging and requires particular attention to limit potential barriers and limitations at a later stage.

Whilst this is difficult prior to commencing a doctoral study, the anticipated findings could be mentioned, with the potential value of the study to practitioners, academics and policy makers – which the rationale for undertaking the research which has impact. Finally, a consideration of where your research could go next should be stated.

Therefore, the expected format is similar to a research proposal that the majority of applicants will have written as part of a Masters level dissertation, however with greater complexity and indication of extending the current boundaries of knowledge. The document should be presented under a series of headings and the narrative is expected to consist of sentences and paragraphs. Lists, bullet points and content which is not authenticated by academic sources are unlikely to be viewed as satisfactory preparation. In terms of length, the proposal should be presented in 1.5 line spacing and have sufficient content to cover six pages of A4.

As a guide, these headings are suggested: Abstract, Introduction/Context (with research question). Literature review, methodology, anticipated findings, area for further research and finally references.

Doctoral supervisors may arrange a mutually convenient informal discussion with potential applicants to provide assistance in the development of the proposal, prior to submission.

Pre-Admission Research Project Plan Guidelines

This document is intended as a guide for you to use in providing an interview panel/proposed Supervisory Team with more information about your intended research topic. If you are formally accepted onto the programme, a more detailed proposal will be required after enrolment (3 months (FT) or 6 months (PT)).

Details of the Programme of Research

Thesis Title

Please provide a 'working thesis title'.

Background and Context

Please state the rationale behind the study and how it relates to the subject area and previous work. Explain the broad field of your research.

Aim

Clearly state the principal aim of the study. Please note, you are advised to state a single aim if possible.

Research Questions

Clearly define what questions you want to answer. State why you want to undertake the research: what gaps or weaknesses in existing knowledge will your research address?

Risk Assessment

State what risks to the researcher, university, collaborators or participants have been identified in the study and describe the steps that have/will be taken to eliminate or reduce them.

Research to be conducted outside of Glyndŵr University

List all areas of research that will occur away from Glyndŵr University premises. Include details and locations.