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SUPPORT FOR PHD APPLICANTS



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FINDING A PHD

Discover PhDs, 2020a suggests locating the research area you find most intriguing. This is essential to know before searching for a PhD as it helps limit where you search. You can also use this as a starting point for who to speak to for guidance and on which sites to look at postings.

Top Tip

Contact the potential PhD supervisors via email with your CV before applying. This way you can find out about the project and if you'd like to work with the supervisor. This also allows the supervisor to understand your academic strengths and background before you apply.

There are a number of places to look for PhD advertising, a few key internet resources are listed below to help you start your research.

- Conversations with experts you know in the field, like your lecturers – they may be aware of upcoming opportunities and can recommend colleagues to work with
- University websites
- Doctoral training websites eg. SENSE <https://eo-cdt.org/projects/> and Panorama <https://panorama-dtp.ac.uk/research/>
- General PhD advertising sites e.g. www.findaphd.com/
- General job websites e.g. www.jobs.ac.uk, academicpositions.co.uk
- Research area specific websites e.g. <https://www.earthworks-jobs.com/>
- Twitter
- Company websites e.g. <https://www.zsl.org/>, <https://www.bas.ac.uk/>

There are also a wide range of other non-internet resources available to you. Speaking to people in the research field you are applying for is invaluable as they can point you towards perspective supervisors and may know of current openings at other institutions. Career hubs are also a great place to visit in the search for more general guidance as they can provide numerous resources to help you with your applications and review and give pointers on any important documentation such as CVs.

PHD APPLICATIONS

Most applications require documentation to be provided, this may include any of the following; CV, personal statement, transcripts and certificates, academic references and English language certification. It is a good idea to get your CV and personal statement checked by a friend, colleague or professional before submission, this will allow you to identify any common mistakes and for the expert to highlight any areas they believe your CV may be lacking in. People who may be able to help with this are career advisors and any professors within your selected research field you may have contact with.

Top Tip

Make sure you check the PhD programme website for details of what you should include in your CV and personal statement.

Writing a CV – top tips

- Include the technical skills you have in relation to the project e.g. coding.
- Include any papers you have published or conferences you have presented at.
- If you have not previously worked in the field you are applying for emphasise your soft skills such as the ability to forward plan.
- Include your academic qualifications, subjects and skills learnt. It might be worth highlighting any exceptional grades you have in some key modules (i.e. first class %'s), or if you came top of your class (out of how many students).

Writing a personal statement – top tips

- Include any novel ideas you have for the project e.g. using new methods, this will be appreciated by the reviewers as you have thought about the project in depth and done background research on the subject area.
- Include any collaborations you wish to make during your PhD as this will bring new partnerships to the department.
- Contacting the potential supervisor will help you write your understanding of the PhD project, and why you'd like to do it.

References

- Two references are usually required for a PhD application. Ideally at least one of these would be an academic reference e.g. your undergraduate/ postgraduate project supervisor.

Discover PhDs, 2020a suggests before applying for any PhD double check the course start date as this can vary depending on the University or funding body, and make sure you get your application in by the closing date.

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

Within the interview you must show the panel you are the ideal candidate for the project. In order to do this the interviewer will be keen to know that your skills and ideas fit the project description. To do this ensure you have examples of how you will fit the project and incorporate these into any interview questions you are asked.

Top Tip

Prepare a list of answers for common PhD interview questions and prepare answers for them.

Discover PhDs, 2020b suggests that before the interview you should find out the format of the interview, for example how many people will be on the panel? Who will be on the panel?

Social media advice

Make sure all professional social media accounts are up to date with recent experience and qualifications. Ensure that all personal accounts are private.

Discover PhDs, 2020b also states that if the interview is held online make sure you have a suitable back drop in place and ensure your WiFi speed is strong enough to provide a high-quality connection for the video conference.

Discover PhDs, 2020b expresses that if you are asked to give a presentation make sure the length of your presentation fills at least 80% of the time given. Also ensure that any materials you need for the presentation are prepared well in advance and bring plenty of spares. Also be aware, it's also important to note that you should definitely not over run on your presentation time slot. The interview panel are likely to have a tight schedule for the day, so they may cut you off if you don't stick to the time slot. It is also advised that you send your presentation before the event and save in multiple accessible places in case something goes wrong, and bring copies with you in case the panel requires copies on the day.

One of the most important things you can do before an interview is prepare for any topics which are likely to arise. Make sure you are able to explain the project that you are applying to and why you are interested.

Find a PhD, 2020a states that it may also be advisable to read around the research topic you have chosen and research the papers your potential supervisors have previously written. Academic positions, 2020 suggests to look through papers of significant contributors to your research field.

Important

PRACTICE! (Discover PhDs, 2020b) This is essential to performing well in an interview. Practice **outloud** as much as you can before the interview day, this will allow you to become more confident in your presentation.

THE DAY OF THE INTERVIEW

During the day

Take the opportunity to look around the university, meet your potential supervisor and PhD students in their group. Use this day to find out as much as you can about what it would be like to do this PhD – four years is a long time, so it's best to work out if that research group, supervisor and city are suited to you. If you are applying to a PhD programme like the SENSE CDT or Panorama DTP make sure you ask about benefits of these programmes – what is the training included in this programme? How much money will you get in your Research Training Support Grant? Do they have good links with industry and what will they do to help you get a job at the end of your PhD?

In the interview

Interview etiquette

A good interviewer will try to set you at ease, so the interview is a conversation rather than an interrogation. During the interview try to be confident – remember that you were invited to interview for a reason!

Top Tip

Remember the examiners are people too! Try not to be too nervous – they just want to hear your experience and enthusiasm.

Top Tip

If you're asked a question you've not prepared for, don't be afraid to take a few seconds to think about your answer. This will help you give a structured answer. It may also be good to talk the interviewers through your thinking.

How to answer interview questions

Postgrad.com, 2020 suggests not to answer questions you are asked with single word answers such as yes or no instead try to elaborate your answers, and always give examples to back up the skills you have. This will show the interviewer your skill set range without having to ask you directly about it. It will also give the interviewer a glimpse into how the skillset and experience you have will be adapted to the project.

When being asked questions Postgrad.com, 2020 advises not to be afraid to show you are independent by giving original ideas as an answer. For example you may be asked how you may tackle a certain part of the project, this is where you can show your originality by providing a unique methodology of your own.

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SENSE CDT and Panorama DTP

Interview answer content

Find a PhD, 2020b encourages showing the interviewer you know what is involved in undertaking a PhD and how hard it can be, but also how your skills and attributes can help overcome this. Try to use examples to reinforce how you have combated issues such as motivation in the past.

Find a PhD, 2020b recommends that if possible include references to your previous work and show how this has prepared you for the project you are being interviewed for and how the skills you have gained can be transferred to this project.

Top Tip

Above all, be enthusiastic! Many PhD programmes won't require you to have specific knowledge or expertise in the area you wish to do a PhD in, but they will want to hear why that project is exciting for you and why you wish to pursue research.

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

At the end of the interview you will be asked if you have any questions. Business insider, 2020 suggests that one of your final questions should be to ask what will happen after the interview and if there is anything you need to do. Often the interviewer will follow up with an offer or rejection email however, there may be times where extra information is needed from the candidate. Business insider, 2020 states it is also a good idea to obtain your supervisors contact details at the end of the interview to be able to send follow up emails if you do not receive an email from the interview panel.

Business insider, 2020 makes the point that the interview allowed you to ask questions about the project and University, and that now is the time to reflect upon the answers you were given.

Business insider, 2020 recommends that after the interview you should continue looking for other PhD's in the event of a rejection email, this will allow you to keep your motivation levels high.

Top Tip

Business insider, 2020 states that even if you receive a rejection email from the University you should still form a thank you email for being considered for the position and being invited for an interview. Remember it is likely you will be working with these people in the future if you continue to pursue a career in the same research field, and they may even be able to find extra funding for you to work with them later.

FAQ'S

1. Do you need to have publications in order to apply for a PhD?

You are not required to have published any papers prior to the commencement of your PhD however, if you have published papers this can only aid your application.

2. When do you apply for PhD's?

There are multiple doctoral training programmes (e.g. SENSE Earth Observation CDT and Panorama DTP) which have deadlines close to the start of the year. Having said this however, there are plenty of other PhD opportunities throughout the year.

3. Should you contact the supervisor prior to applying for a PhD project?

It is incredibly important to contact the supervisor prior to applying for a PhD project. They will be able to tell you more about the project and if they think you are a suitable candidate. It is also essential that you can work closely with your supervisor for the duration of the project therefore, being able to have a good relationship with them is essential.

4. What should you look for when choosing a University?

There are many things which should be considered when choosing a University to attend some of which include the location, facilities which you will be able to use e.g. laboratory equipment, academic groups within your institute and any published material from that institute that is tailored to your research field.

5. Do you need a master's to do a PhD?

You are not required to have a master's qualification when applying to do a PhD.

Please check the [SENSE CDT](#) and [Panorama DTP](#) website for specific questions about these programmes.

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