

POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH DEGREE (MPhil/PhD) APPLICATION GUIDELINES

HOW TO APPLY FOR A POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH DEGREE (MPhil / PhD)

This guidance document is intended to support applicants in preparing a strong PhD application. For additional guidance, please refer to our recorded webinar series (covering proposals, portfolios, supervision, and funding), available to view on [Vimeo](#). If you have any questions, please email: pgr-admissions@gsa.ac.uk

STEP 1: CHECK THE ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

Entry Requirements: To apply for a PhD or MPhil at GSA, applicants should normally have obtained a minimum of an undergraduate degree with First or Upper Second Class Honours. Applicants who do not meet the formal academic requirements may still be considered through Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) and/or Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL), where they can evidence relevant prior study and/or professional experience at an appropriate level. Applicants wishing to be considered via APL/APEL should contact pgr-admissions@gsa.ac.uk for advice.

Where required, applicants must also meet the English language requirement of IELTS 6.5 overall with no less than 6.5 in each component (or equivalent). English language requirements are non-negotiable.

STEP 2: IDENTIFY POTENTIAL SUPERVISORS

Identifying potential supervisors is an important early step in shaping a viable PhD project. To assist with this, we advise applicants to contact pgr-admissions@gsa.ac.uk in the first instance, indicating which School they wish to apply to. The PGR Admissions team can advise on next steps and, where helpful, put you in touch with the relevant PhD Coordinator to discuss supervisory fit. A list of potential supervisors can be accessed here: <https://radar.gsa.ac.uk/>.

STEP 3: SEARCH FOR FUNDING AND SCHOLARSHIPS

An overview of current GSA funding opportunities is listed on the [Funding & Opportunities page of our website](#) (the range of which changes each year). Please note that arts and humanities postgraduate funding is highly competitive, and funders often have different eligibility criteria. We encourage applicants to be resourceful and organised when identifying and applying for PhD funding. International students may be eligible to apply for research council funding in their home countries via government schemes.

Postgraduate Doctoral Loans are available to those starting a full-time or part-time postgraduate Doctoral course on or after 1 August 2018. This loan is to help with course and living costs while studying and has to be paid back. Please visit our Fees and Finance page on the GSA website [here](#).

STEP 4: GATHER YOUR DOCUMENTS

To apply to Doctoral Study at the GSA, you will need to submit the following. Failure to include the listed documents may result in a delay or application rejection:

- Online Application
- 1 x Completed Research Proposal using GSA template
- 2 x Academic references (on institutional headed paper, signed and dated within 6 months of your application)
- Transcripts of Previous Degrees
- English Language Qualification (please note score minimums)
- 1,000 word writing sample from all applicants (this should be a recent or new example of academic or critical writing, e.g. essay, article, review). Please contact pqr-admissions@gsa.ac.uk if you are uncertain what to provide.
- Portfolio of recent work (if your application is for practice-led PhD) with accompanying narrative.
- Studentship Application Form (Optional) for Golden Thread and Celtic Crescent

Please note that the above list includes additional documents that are not required when applying for taught postgraduate courses, as detailed on the GSA website, so please ensure that you provide all of the requested information when you submit your application for PhD or MPhil study (see below).

STEP 5: APPLY ONLINE

Your application form should be completed online, with other documents uploaded at the time of application.

Select the School you are applying to study in and the mode of study (full-time or part-time) from the list below the **Doctoral Study** heading on the [How to Apply \(postgraduate\) page](#) of our website.

Please note incomplete applications cannot be accepted.

APPLICATION REVIEW

A panel of academic staff from across The Glasgow School of Art meet every four to six weeks to review applications. We aim to inform applicants of the success of their application within six weeks of applying. If you have not received a response within eight weeks, please contact us at pqr-admissions@gsa.ac.uk

We accept applications for MPhil and PhD programmes at any time, but applications received after 28th June will not be considered for entry in that academic year. We must receive the application in full by 28th June for entry in September of the same year.

Please note, though, that if you are applying for funding, allow as much time as possible to apply to us. Many funders require you to have an unconditional offer of a place from your host institution before you are eligible to apply.

RESEARCH PROPOSAL CRITERIA

A research proposal identifying the objectives and scope of the research is an important part of your research degree application. The research degree (MPhil or PhD) is an independently directed and intensive body of original research. The PhD is intended to make an original contribution to knowledge in the field or discipline. The proposal sets out the aims, questions and methodologies of the intended research. This enables us to judge the scope and quality of your proposed research, as well as identify appropriate supervision.

The proposal should indicate the nature of the outcome of the project, including the intended mode of submission. There are two main modes of submission at GSA:

- PhD by Thesis is a full, written thesis of between 70,000–100,000 words
- PhD by Research Project (otherwise known as a practice-led or practice-based PhD), is comprised of a thesis of between 25,000–40,000 words and is submitted with a body of creative work.

In the case of applicants for PhD by Research Project, applicants are advised to give an indication of the kind of creative practice they intend to undertake, and how it will engage with and further the research aims and process. You must also submit a portfolio of recent work as part of your application. Guidelines are outlined later in this document.

The proposal may later evolve and change through the research process, but the initial proposal is required to help identify the particular research question(s) or areas of concern prompting this research, and for GSA staff to help identify suitable supervisory expertise.

Your research application has ten components (explained in this document) that help you identify the objectives and scope of your proposed research project:

1. Research Proposal
2. Research Context, Methods and Sources
3. Qualifications and/or Relevant Professional Experience
4. Preparedness for Proposed Doctoral Project
5. Institutional Fit
6. Supervisory Fit
7. Training Needs
8. Knowledge Exchange, Public Engagement and Impact
9. Ethics
10. Funding

Please ensure your proposal/application clearly addresses the criteria for completion.

RESEARCH PROPOSAL GUIDELINES

These guidance notes will help you to understand each section and its requirements. Ensure your proposal is well written, clear, succinct and free of jargon— it should be readily understood by a non-expert. Proofread/spell-check, and do not exceed the specified max word count.

RESEARCH PROPOSAL TITLE

Provide the proposed title of your research project.

SCHOOL/SUBJECT AREA WITHIN GSA

Identify which of the GSA's specialist schools or subject areas you will be working within: School of Fine Art, School of Design, School of Innovation and Technology, Mackintosh School of Architecture.

Please note: your choice of school will be the school to which the proposed Primary Supervisor belongs. Please check with your proposed supervisor or School PhD Coordinator if you are unsure.

MODE OF SUBMISSION

Identify whether you intend to submit by thesis or by research project.

RESEARCH PROPOSAL (500 words)

Succinctly and clearly explain your central aims and objectives. What do you intend to do? Identify a particular research question, argument or area of concern prompting this research and convey its significance. Include 1-3 key research questions in this section— what do you want to find out or learn? What do you hope your research will achieve? Demonstrate excellent knowledge of the field and identify clear gaps in existing knowledge/practice. How is your research original? What does it add to existing research in the field?

RESEARCH CONTEXT, METHODS AND SOURCES (500 words)

Building on the above proposal, ensure you are familiar with the specific contexts, histories and key methods employed within the discipline or field related to your research. What is the context for your research project? Who are the central proponents, theorists or practitioners in the proposed field or research area? Include a short indicative bibliography of around 10 key sources (relevant scholarly literature and other research sources). Why have you selected these sources? How do they relate to your research? Explain how you will conduct your research. Which specific research methods will you employ to answer your key questions? Why are these the most appropriate, relevant or innovative methods in relation to your research?

QUALIFICATIONS AND/OR RELEVANT PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE (300 words)

Academic qualifications: Identify all accredited higher education qualifications, including classification of results. Where possible, place your results in context (e.g. summa cum laude; #3 in a cohort of 100, etc). You can include information on courses, dissertations etc. that may be of particular relevance to this proposed project.

Relevant prizes and awards: Include information on all relevant prizes, awards or nominations. Again, please place these in context where possible, e.g. local, national, international, number of applicants etc.

Relevant professional experience: Please contextualise this in relation to your proposed research.

Provide evidence of independent research thinking and outcomes. Relevant professional experience might include employment in a relevant field, internships or residencies, specific research or methodological training, or notable, research-led publications, exhibitions, performances, editorial work etc. Do not include work experience that is irrelevant to your proposed project.

PREPAREDNESS FOR PROPOSED DOCTORAL PROJECT (300 words)

Following the previous section, evidence how you are/ have prepared to undertake your proposed research project in at least one of the following areas: previous study; relevant professional experience; professional development. Why do you want to undertake a PhD at this stage of your career? What are your future career aspirations? How has your previous study, experience and professional practice informed your decision to pursue a PhD and prepared you to undertake doctoral level study?

INSTITUTIONAL FIT

This section asks you to consider how we can provide you with the best support available in terms of research expertise and training. Why, specifically, is GSA the best 'fit' for your project? What facilities and resources does GSA offer, relevant to your research? This must be directly related to your research proposal, and not a general statement about the reputation of GSA. You must demonstrate awareness of the benefits, expectations and potential for engagement with the research and training resources of:

- The specific GSA school in which you will be based;
- The GSA as a whole;
- Other relevant non-academic partners and organisations;

- Other appropriate research or training resources in or beyond Scotland.

SUPERVISORY FIT

At the point of a formal application to the programme, you are encouraged to identify who you would wish to be your Primary Supervisor at GSA and have an idea of two additional, appropriate supervisors who are academic members of staff at GSA. You must make a case for why you consider these academics to be the best choice as supervisors for your specific research project.

How do their research specialisms align with your project?

TRAINING NEEDS

All PhD students require training as an ongoing process. What specialist facilities, training or equipment might you require to successfully complete your project? What other resources will you need?

Please note: Dedicated studio space is not provided by default for PhD students at GSA. Applicants can make a case in their application for a studio or project space at specific points in their research, which will be considered in negotiation with the relevant departments. If your project is contingent upon studio space, please ensure you are clear about what can/cannot be provided for you before you accept an offer (if your application is successful).

KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE, PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND IMPACT (300 words)

A key aspect of doctoral level research (and beyond) is to think about its broader purpose and function as a contribution to knowledge both within and beyond academic contexts. Why is this research worthwhile?

Who is the audience for your research? Who might benefit from your work? How can you reach non-academic audiences? How do you intend to exhibit, disseminate or make your research available? Do you have realistic and achievable plans for maximising the impact of your research, and what are they? UK Research and Innovation have a definition of impact here.

ETHICS

All research has ethical implications. As such, please briefly outline any ethical considerations raised by your proposed research and how you would address them.

Ethics review applies to a wide range of research activities. If your project involves working with participants or collecting information from or about people (for example interviews, workshops, observation, surveys, co-creation, or making audio, photo or video recordings), you will normally

need ethics clearance before any recruitment or data collection begins. Ethics considerations may also arise in relation to data storage, sensitive topics, work with children or vulnerable participants, fieldwork and safety, and the use of third-party materials (for example archives, existing recordings/images, permissions and copyright).

For further information and guidance, please consult GSA's [Research Ethics policy](#) and [Code of Practice](#) on the GSA document site.

FUNDING

What sources of funding do you have (or hope to have) to fund your PhD? Please specify key funding sources, dates and deadlines. See the [Fees and Finance page](#) of the GSA website for current fee information for PhD programmes. If applying for a DFA Golden Thread or Celtic Crescent studentship, please indicate this here.

PORTFOLIO GUIDELINES (for PhD by Practice)

For applications to the PhD by Practice (practice-led PhD), you must submit a curated portfolio of recent work (ideally from the last 2 to 3 years), with an accompanying written narrative. The portfolio is read alongside your proposal and helps the admissions panel understand your practice, trajectory, and readiness for doctoral research.

What to submit

Submit one Portfolio document (Word or PDF), titled: Your Name – PhD Application Portfolio. We cannot accept ZIP files or unsupported file types.

This Portfolio document should contain:

1. Portfolio Narrative (300 to 500 words). Placed at the start of the document. It should briefly:
 - outline your current practice and trajectory (key media/forms, themes, recent direction)
 - explain why you selected these examples
 - clarify your role and contribution (especially where work is collaborative)
 - make clear where the research sits in your practice (what you investigate through making, and how process and iteration inform what you do)
 - connect the portfolio to the proposed PhD direction (without repeating the proposal)

NB. If your prior work does not directly align with the proposed project, select examples that demonstrate relevant capabilities (technical, methodological, conceptual, or collaborative) and briefly explain how these will support the PhD.

2. Portfolio of Work(s)

You can present work in either of the following ways:

- Links to work hosted online (for example your website, Dropbox/Google Drive, Vimeo, YouTube, SoundCloud, or similar). Ensure links work, point to the correct material, and include passwords if required.
- A single PDF containing exactly 10 images (no more, no less).

For each work included, provide:

- Title, date, medium/format, your role, and context (location/site if relevant)
- 2 to 3 sentences outlining intent, process, and what it evidences in relation to your research direction

FURTHER ADVICE

PhD Coordinators may be willing to offer brief feedback on draft proposals/applications prior to formal submission, subject to sufficient notice and availability. To be put in touch with the relevant PhD Coordinator, please contact pgr-admissions@gsa.ac.uk, indicating the GSA school you wish to apply to.

If you begin a dialogue with prospective supervisors before applying, they may ask to see your proposal or portfolio and may offer you informal feedback or guidance. If they request a further draft, they may want to see how well you have understood and applied their advice. The decision about when (or whether) to submit a formal application is yours.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE REQUIREMENTS

International students required to evidence their English language proficiency by sitting a Secure English Language Test (SELT) will be asked to complete an IELTS for UKVI (Academic) test taken at a UKVI approved test. Our current requirement for doctoral study is IELTS for UKVI (Academic) with 6.5 overall and no less than 6.5 in each component. A full list of UKVI approved test centres can be found [here](#).

UKVI REQUIREMENTS

Guidance for applying for a Student Visa can be found in the guidance document on the Student Visa Requirements page [here](#).

ALTERNATIVE ACCESSIBLE FORMATS

If you require assistance to complete your application, or need versions of the application forms in alternative formats, please contact Registry by email at registry@gsa.ac.uk or telephone the GSA switchboard on 0141 353 4500 and ask to be connected to Registry. State that your enquiry relates to an application for a Doctoral Study PhD or MPhil.