

Guidance Notes: Applying for PhD Study

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1 introduction

‘A doctor’s degree historically was a licence to teach—meaning to teach in a university as a member of faculty. Nowadays this does not mean that becoming a lecturer is the only reason for taking a doctorate. . . The concept stems, though, from the need for a faculty member to be an authority, in full command of the subject right up to the boundaries of current knowledge, and able to extend them.’ (Phillips and Pugh 2006).

Doctoral research leading to the award of a PhD degree is a major undertaking. For a full-time student the PhD lasts for three years; it is not unusual to require up to a year after this for ‘writing up’. For part-time students the PhD is likely to take between five and six years. It is important you genuinely wish to dedicate yourself to this level and duration of self-directed research, and that you are sufficiently motivated to explore the research topic which you have committed to.

For the award of a PhD, a research student must demonstrate:

- the creation and interpretation of new knowledge through original research or other advanced scholarship, or of a quality to satisfy peer review, extend the forefront of the discipline and merit publication;
- a systematic acquisition and understanding of a substantial body of knowledge which is at the forefront of an academic discipline or an area of professional practice;
- the general ability to conceptualize, design and implement a project for the generation of new knowledge, applications or understanding at the forefront of the discipline, and to adjust the project design in the light of unforeseen problems;
- a detailed understanding of applicable techniques for research and advanced academic enquiry.

Given the importance attached to ‘original research’, the School wish to support PhD candidates who have the potential to achieve high quality research, and who can evidence informed and innovative thinking, as well as possess strong motivation and an ability to manage research independently.

2 Winchester School of Art

Research at PGR level at WSA reflects the interests of the supervising staff, contributing to academic understanding at the very forefront of fine art and design as well as critical, historical and cultural studies. Our community is made up of a diverse range of researchers who have in common a commitment to engaging with critical debates within their fields and at the intersections of

the disciplines which make up an art school's remit—creative practices within fine art, graphic arts and design, media, arts management, fashion and textile design and curatorship.

There are two PGR intakes per academic year. The main intake is at the start of the academic year, which falls at the end of September; there is a second intake at the start of our second semester, which is the beginning of February.

The deadline for applications is three months before the chosen start date. Apply [here](#).

For the University's Code of Practice and regulations for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy see: <https://www.southampton.ac.uk/calendar/sectionv/index.page>

For up-to-date details of how to apply, entry requirements, and fees, please consult all information available online: https://www.southampton.ac.uk/wsa/postgraduate/research_degrees.page

2.1 contacts

For all administrative queries, including admissions information, please contact:

Graduate School Office
Faculty of Arts and Humanities
University of Southampton
Avenue Campus
Southampton, so17 1BJ
+44 23 8059 7433
Email: fah-pgr-apply@southampton.ac.uk

3 supervision, progress & training

As a research student you will be supervised by leading academic who are specialists in your field. The PGR student community at wsa is also supported by a wide range of social activities, guest lectures, seminars and research events; these provide opportunities to deepen the understanding of one's own research area, learn something new about colleagues' work and practice the professional skills (details of some of these can be found on the [PGR blog](#) that hosts this document). There are a number of facilities at the School for work in a variety of media. Set in the original capital of the Kingdom of Wessex, wsa also has good transport to England's capital, London, providing easy access to a wide range of professional and cultural events.

Over the course of completing a PhD, there are a number of important [milestones](#) to help make sure that the student's work is on track for completion. These include three progression reviews, taking place at approximately 8, 18 and 30 months after starting the PhD.

The second of these reviews (at 17—20 months) is called the 'confirmation'; it is the point at which the student presents their work in written form

followed by a viva conducted by wsa colleagues outside the supervision team, who will ask questions about the content of the work and provide feedback for successful completion. The work will be assessed both to ensure it is at a PhD standard and that it can be completed in the time remaining. Once the research is completed and submitted, the student will proceed to the final viva. The panel for the viva will consist of two academics with relevant expertise; one will be from within wsa, whilst the other will be external. The viva is a chance to reflect on the research, as well as to discuss its value and receive feedback on it. The examiners in the viva will judge whether the work submitted has made a sufficient contribution to knowledge to merit the award of a PhD.

Full details of the [progression schedule](#) can be found on the website of the Doctoral College.

3.1 supervision

Research students have a minimum of two supervisors, of whom one will be designated the lead supervisor. Meetings with your supervisors take place on a regular basis throughout your candidacy, often with greater frequency at the beginning and end of the research process. Supervisors ensure that research projects are original and significant; they will also advise their students on keeping the project on track to be completed in a realistic time frame. They guide students towards the most appropriate research methods for the topic under consideration, and help to communicate findings with clarity and impact. Supervision can also be maintained by e-mail, phone and video conference during periods when your research may require you to be away from the School, such as for fieldwork or conference and workshop events (as well as during the current pandemic). Current supervisors are listed on the blog [here](#).

An important element which sets the PhD apart from taught programmes is that the research is entirely self-driven; it is the student's responsibility to pursue their research independently, with a view to becoming an 'authority' on their chosen topic in the future.

3.2 training

Your training will cover research project management, preparation for examination and publication, as well as technical and practical skills appropriate to your project. You will also take part in regular research seminars, and you will be encouraged to play an active role in developing exhibitions, events and research outputs. You can present your research at annual conferences and can participate in inter-university symposia and other national and international academic events and exhibitions. You will also have access to regular lectures, seminars and guest speaker events held at the School and across the University more widely.

Your supervisory team will work with you to identify the research skills training you need; this will be available through a range of programmes offered

within the School and through the University's Doctoral College: <http://www.southampton.ac.uk/doctoral-college/index.page>

3.3 professional development

We seek to provide candidates with opportunities to develop a portfolio of skills relevant to the academic context and the creative industries. Many students will be offered the chance to teach, either assisting an experienced course convenor, or leading elements and modules themselves. All students who teach will be supported in developing the relevant skills through mentorship by an experienced academic and relevant training, with a view to getting accreditation in the form of an [Associate Fellowship of the HEA](#).

Supervision and PhD seminars also provide forums to advise students on career development, especially in publishing or exhibiting their work in appropriate places, attending conferences, making contacts, and developing their professional skills. Students are encouraged to participate in the intellectual life of the School and of the University of Southampton as a whole.

Postgraduate research provides an important step in one's professional career, whether by continued academic research or by enhancing one's vision and leadership for work within a wide range of professional roles in the creative and cultural industries.

To find out more about the programme and the research of PhD candidates and staff at the School, see <http://blog.soton.ac.uk/wsapgr/>.

4 the research proposal

A detailed and clear research proposal is a vital element of a PhD application; this section will guide you through what is needed to make a research proposal of a high standard. Practice-based research proposals must also be accompanied by a folio of images and/or documentation of previous work, with contextual commentary (submitted in PDF format).

A research proposal will typically be 5-10 pages long and should demonstrate the following three key features of your research (which echo the requirements of PhD study noted above):

- **originality:** how does your project contribute to human knowledge? How does it provide new knowledge, new tools, or new ideas?
- **significance:** what implications does your research for other researchers, professionals or the general public? Can the findings be used by others, and in what fields?
- **practicality:** can your project be completed in three years of full-time study (or equivalent part-time)?

Your research proposal enables us to assess the quality and originality of your ideas, whether you are able to think critically, and whether you have a

grasp of the relevant literature. It also tells us about the perspectives you intend to take in your research area and helps us to assess whether we can offer suitable supervisors for your project.

At the application stage, we are looking for clear evidence of your *potential* for successful PhD study. This must be reflected in your research proposal document. After students have started their research degree study, it is quite usual for them to refine their original proposal in light of detailed literature reviews, further consideration of research approaches as the research progresses, and comments received from supervisors and other academic staff.

4.1 structure

Your proposal should include the following elements:

working title: your title should give a clear indication of the intent of your project, directing attention explicitly to the central issue(s) that you will address.

overview of research: should provide a short overview of your research: the key issue(s) that you wish to investigate, and why these are important. It should be made clear why you wish to conduct the research at Winchester School of Art. It can be useful to refer to the research areas and priorities of a particular [research group](#) or [supervisor](#).

literature review: show how your research fits into existing knowledge and how it adds to it. In this part of the proposal, you should reference the most important texts, practices and ideas related to your proposed research (or practice), demonstrate your understanding of key research issues, and identify existing gaps (both theoretical and practical) that your research is intended to address or respond to. At this stage, the literature review need only reflect some major debates and issues and show your familiarity with some of the main works addressing the research issue that you are proposing. The literature review is key to demonstrating your potential set against the two key criteria noted at the start of this document, that you can show 'a systematic acquisition and understanding of a substantial body of knowledge', and also that you seek to create or interpret 'new knowledge through original research'. For practice-based research, a literature review will not be restricted to books and articles; it will also reference artists, exhibitions and specific art practices, philosophies and processes. In all cases, a good literature review will make it obvious which research your project will be in dialogue with, and how it helps to advance knowledge related to that dialogue.

methodologies and theoretical understanding: describe how do you plan to undertake your research, offering reasons for the decisions you make in relation to research methods and approaches. Examples might include archival, market or textual research; studio or experimental practice; interviews or ethnography. As appropriate to your research interests, you should explain what methods and theoretical approaches you intend to employ. It is important to outline not just the practical methods, but to demonstrate a wider awareness of methodology, to consider the broader philosophical understanding of how

knowledge is made, organised and framed. For practice-based research, position your work within the wider field, whether that is fine art or design. It is important that a practice-based PhD is not simply the pursuit of a single art 'project', but that it seeks to understand and make a body of work through a coherent and sustained practice which adds to the store of human knowledge.

resources: List any specialist equipment or training needed, including training in other languages or in using particular software. If travel is needed to exhibit, or to collect data, then provide details.

timeline: Provide a realistic time plan for completing your research degree study in three years full-time or six years part-time for a PhD.

indicative list of references and sources: You should list the main published academic literature that you envisage will guide your research. This must show how the theoretical framework will be supported, as well as the academic context within which you will place the work. If there are particular data sets or other resources which you will draw on, include those as well. For a practice-based PhD, sources relevant to your creative practice are vital and it is likely that you will also include references to key artworks, exhibitions or artist documentation. Please make sure that the formatting for references is consistent; wSA uses the Harvard Referencing System, the style guide for which can be found [here](#). The keys to writing a strong research proposal are to:

- clearly state and explain your research idea. This may take the form of a hypothesis or you may identify a more open-ended question or issue
- establish the relevance and value of the proposed research question in the context of current academic thinking
- suggest what you sort of impact your research might have, and what new areas your work might open up
- demonstrate that your research will not take longer than three years full-time or six years part-time.
- explain why you are qualified and capable of conducting the proposed research, and finally
- present you proposal in a concise, unambiguous and grammatical manner.

5 joining the PhD programme

If your application is successful you will receive either a conditional or unconditional offer. You will be asked to respond to your offer through the Offer Holders' web site. It is important that you do this as soon as possible if you decide to accept our offer. This is because:

- We can expect your arrival and keep you informed of the activities organised for new students, such as international induction programme update, international welcome party, etc.
- You will be authorised to access services such as accommodation booking, meet and greet booking, etc.

In joining the PhD programme at Winchester School of Art we expect all doctoral candidates to play an active role in the research community. You will gain expert support from your supervisors and have access to dedicated study resources, both on-site at the School and at the University's main campus in Southampton, along with a comprehensive range of electronic resources via the [University's Library](#).

6 appendix: applying online

Before making a formal application, it is often useful to prepare an initial proposal and to look carefully at all of the available information as outlined in this document and available online. It is advisable to begin the online application process as early as possible as you can save your progress as you go and the system will prompt you for all of the required documentation. We also strongly advise you to view the [profiles](#) of current research staff to consider who might provide suitable supervision. Please feel free to [contact us](#) to discuss your research interests. At any given time, we cannot guarantee that a particular supervisor will be available; usually this will be because of existing supervision commitments. Ultimately, the make-up of a supervisory team will be at the School's sole discretion.

All applications for PhD research need to be submitted via the University's Online Application Form: https://studentrecords.soton.ac.uk/BNNRPROD/bzsksrch.P_Search

The form is part of the University's Student Record System. Upon successful application, you are able to continue to use the system to apply for all central University services as part of formally enrolling as a student at the University of Southampton. Please note: the Winchester School of Art is a School within the University's Faculty of Arts and Humanities.

Search for a Postgraduate Programme of Study

Please use the search parameters to help you to find the programme of your choice, then click on the "Search for Programme" button at the bottom of this page. The programmes returned by your criteria will then be displayed. If your search returns a large number of programmes, you may need to scroll down the page to see all of them. Next to each programme, you will see a link which you can click on in order to apply for that programme.

Please select the academic year in which you will start your course.

Please click on the "Help" link if you need more information about the programme search.

The University's data privacy policy can be viewed [here](#).

Application Assessment Fee

There is no Application Assessment Fee when applying for a postgraduate research degree (eg. PhD, iPhD, EngD, EdD, MRes).

There is an Application Assessment Fee for each postgraduate taught programme application you make (eg. MA, MSc). This fee is payable when you submit your application and can only be paid by credit/debit card or PayPal. The rates for the available academic sessions are:

2020-2021 Academic Session - GBP 0
2021-2022 Academic Session - GBP 50

- This fee will be waived if you satisfy criteria based on the information you provide in your application.
- The Application Assessment Fee Terms and Conditions and waiver conditions may be viewed [here](#).

Please note: Some application pages take longer to render than others; please be patient. Double clicking on a loading page will cause the error message 'Break in attempt detected' to appear. If you are presented with this message, simply log in to your application again and you will be able to return to the same page. If you continue to experience this problem, please contact admissions@soton.ac.uk

* - indicates a required field.

Programme type:* Taught Research

Full-time / Part-time:* Full-time Part-time

Academic Year:*

(Optional) Search for programme name and/or Faculty:

Search text:

Faculty:

To proceed with your online application:

- select 'Research' for programme type
- select either full- or part-time as required
- use the drop down menu to select the academic year for when you wish to start
- select 'Faculty of Arts and Humanities' for faculty

You should select the year of study that best reflects when you wish to start, but exact start dates can be negotiated later on. Although there is no specific deadline for PhD research applications, when scholarships are on offer a deadline for applications will be clearly stated on the School website. Please note that the application fee referred to on the website is relevant to postgraduate *taught* programmes only and should be disregarded when applying for a PhD programme.

Having made the above selections, click on 'Search for Programme'. You will be provided with a list of course titles within the Faculty. You can currently study for the award of Doctor of Philosophy at Winchester School of Art via either the PhD Design or PhD Fine Art programmes. These are generic

course titles. We accept PhD proposals related to a wide range of research areas, subject to appropriate supervision within the School, and which includes both practice- or non-practice-based research across the areas of art, design, media, fashion, textiles, and art-based management subject (such as luxury branding). For full details of appropriate subject areas consult the Winchester School of Art homepage or contact research staff at the School. To proceed with your application click on 'Apply online' and follow the on-screen instructions.

As a part of completing the online application form, applicants need to upload various supporting documentation. All documents should preferably be in PDF format. You will need to provide: a research proposal; academic transcripts and degree certificates; cv and personal statement; two reference letters; and a portfolio of work (if applying for practice-based research) or sample of written work (if non practice-based research). International students may need to provide an English language certificate (IELTS or equivalent). If you need clarification on any of these matters please contact the [Graduate School Office](#) in the first instance.

For further details on how to apply consult the information available online: <http://blog.soton.ac.uk/wsapgr/apply-for-phd/>

7 useful sources for applicants

The following materials may help in preparing your research proposal (as well as in completing your research degree):

Barrett, E. and Bolt, B. (eds.) (2010), *Practice as Research: Approaches to Creative Arts Enquiry*. London: IB Tauris.

Baxter, L., Hughes, C. and Tight, M. (2007) *How to Research*. 3rd edn. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Bell, J. (2010) *Doing Your Research Project: A Guide for First-time Researchers in Education & Social Science*. 5th edn. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bennett, A. (2006) *Design Studies: Theory and Research in Graphic Design*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press.

Biggs, M. and Karlsson, H. (eds) (2012), *The Routledge Companion to Research in the Arts*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Elkins, J. (2014) *Artists with PhDs: On the New Doctoral Degree in Studio Art*. Washington, DC: New Academic Publishing

Gray, C. and Malins, J. (2004) *Visualizing Research: A Guide to the Research Process in Art and Design*. Abingdon: Routledge

Manghani, S. (2013) *Image Studies: Theory and Practice*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Macleod, K. and Holdridge, L. (ed.) (2009) *Thinking Through Art: Reflections on Art as Research*. Abingdon: Routledge

Nelson, R. (2013) *Practice as Research in the Arts: Principles, Protocols, Pedagogies, Resistances*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Philips, E. and Pugh, D. (2005) *How to get a PhD: A Handbook for Students and their Supervisors*. 4th edn. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Sullivan, G. (2010) *Art Practice as Research: Inquiry in the Visual Arts*, 2nd edn. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Smith, H. (2009) *Practice-Led Research, Research-Led Practice in the Creative Arts*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.