

## HOW TO APPLY FOR A POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH DEGREE (MPHIL / PHD)

### STEP 1: CHECK THE ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

These can be found on our website [here](#).

### STEP 2: IDENTIFY POTENTIAL SUPERVISORS

Choose potential supervisors in relevant GSA schools whose research interests are close to your own. You can find staff profiles on our website [here](#), and/or you can seek advice from our PhD Coordinators – contact details [here](#).

### STEP 3: SEARCH FOR FUNDING AND SCHOLARSHIPS

Visit the [GSA website](#) and the [Scottish Graduate School for Arts & Humanities](#) website for some initial sources. Please note: all arts and humanities postgraduate funding is challenging and competitive, and many funders have different eligibility criteria. We encourage applicants to be resourceful and organised in identifying and applying for PhD funding. International students may be eligible to apply for research council funding in their home countries via government schemes.

### STEP 4: GATHER YOUR DOCUMENTS

To apply to Doctoral Study at the GSA, you will need to submit the following:

- Online Application
- 1 x Completed Proposal Form
- 2 x Academic references (word count 500 max per reference, as PDFs, on headed paper)
- Transcripts of Previous Degrees
- English Language Qualification (if applicable)
- 1,000 word writing sample for all applicants (this should be a recent or new example of academic or critical writing e.g. essay, article, review)
- Portfolio of recent work if your proposal is for a PhD by Research Project, also known as a 'practice-led' PhD.

Details and relevant forms are available on the GSA website [here](#)

### STEP 5: APPLY ONLINE

Your application form should be completed online, with other documents uploaded at the time of application. If you are unable to apply online, please follow alternative instructions on our website [here](#).

## 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 available 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 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

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

Innovation School

Mackintosh School of Architecture

School of Simulation and Visualisation

*Please note: your choice of school will be the school to which 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.

1. 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?

2. 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?

### 3. 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.

### 4. 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?

### 5. 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, expectation 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
- The Scottish Graduate School for the Arts and Humanities (of which GSA is a founder member). More information on the cross-institutional graduate school can be found [here](#).
- Other relevant non-academic partners and organisations
- Other appropriate research or training resources in or beyond Scotland

The above might include academic staff research expertise, strategic research themes linked to GSA, research groups and centres within and beyond GSA, outreach and knowledge exchange programmes etc.

## 6. SUPERVISORY FIT

At the point of a formal application to the programme we expect you to *at least* 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 or one of our academic partners within the Scottish Graduate School for Arts and Humanities. 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?

Please note: due to availability, eligibility, workload and research expertise, the supervisors you suggest may not be able to supervise your project. There is no guarantee that the supervisor you propose will be able to take you on as a student, subject to a successful application. Wherever possible, we will match applicants with academic staff most experienced in the proposed research area.

## 7. 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).

## 8. 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](#).

## 9. ETHICS

All research has ethical implications. Please outline the ethical implications of your research and how you intend to address these. Consult GSA's Research Ethics policy/guidance [here](#).

## 10. 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 [GSA website](#) for current fee information for PhD programmes.

## PORTFOLIO GUIDELINES

For applications to PhD by Research Project (practice-led PhD), you must submit a portfolio of work produced in the last 2-3 years or so. To submit images of your work please upload a Word or PDF document with a website or Dropbox (or similar) link pasted into the document. Please check the link(s) you provide are correct and ensure the images you select are the ones you wish the GSA Admissions panel to consider. Alternatively, you can add up to 10 images (no more or less) to a PDF as your portfolio submission. Please title the Portfolio document as follows: **Your Name - PhD Application Portfolio**. Please note that we cannot accept ZIP files or other file types.

A contents page should be included within your main proposal including information on the images provided. Information should include details such as title of work, date, location/site, medium, scale and any other relevant/contextual details as appropriate to the form. You should also consider how you define research in relation to your practice/portfolio. Where is the research in your practice?

## FURTHER ADVICE

PhD Coordinators may be willing to offer brief feedback on draft proposals/applications prior to a formal submission, subject to sufficient notice and availability. Please contact the PhD Coordinator in the relevant GSA school to which you want to apply [here](#).

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.

APPLICATION REVIEW

Applications are reviewed by senior academic staff at GSA. If your application successfully address the criteria outlined above, you will be invited to an interview. We aim to respond to applications within 6-8 weeks of application. If you have not heard from us within this time, please contact: PGR Administrative Officer, Research & Development at: [PGR@gsa.ac.uk](mailto:PGR@gsa.ac.uk)

We accept applications for MPhil and PhD programmes at any time, but applications received after 30th June will not be considered for entry in that academic year. We must receive the application in full by 30th June for entry in Sept 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 a unconditional offer of a place from your host institution before you are eligible to apply for scholarships or awards.