

Scope: Research degree applicants and staff	Effective Date: February 2019	Responsible Dept: Registry	Equality Analysis Undertaken: No
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Research Student Admissions Policy and Interview Guidance Notes

POLICY

1. Minimum entry requirements

The minimum requirements for entry to research degree study are normally;

- an upper second class honours degree (2:1) in a relevant discipline;
- applicants who wish to proceed to the degree in a subject not studied as a substantial part of their first degree or equivalent level work may be required, before acceptance as candidates, to reach a satisfactory standard in a preliminary examination on that subject
- for candidates whose first language is not English, evidence of English language competence as detailed below.

Admissions can advise on acceptable levels of qualification e.g. overseas degrees.

Applicants who do not meet the above requirements may be considered in exceptional circumstances. If such an individual is recommended for acceptance at interview, a case for their acceptance, written by a School Research and Knowledge Transfer Lead, will be required. Such applications will be considered by the sub-group of Research Degrees Sub Committee, which will make the admission decision.

2. English language requirements

York St John University requires applicants whose first language is not English to at least meet the University's minimum English language entry requirements for research degree candidates. These are currently one of the following:

- Successful completion of a Bachelor's degree or Master's degree, at a UK University or in a University where the language of tuition has been English (degree awarded by a University taught in English medium as confirmed by UK NARIC);
- The British Council IELTS band score 6.5 overall (with not less than 6.0 in any component score);
- Or an equivalent deemed suitable by the University.

Tests must have been completed within two years of the issue of a Confirmation of Acceptance for Studies (CAS) and official certification must be seen. Where students have satisfied these English language requirements, but further English language

training needs are identified after admission, further training is available through the School of Languages & Linguistics.

3. Applications

Applications for Research Degrees must be made through the SITS Online Admission System and must include:

- A fully completed YSJU application form (Essential);
- Draft research proposal (Essential);
- Evidence of English language qualification to minimum standard (Essential for those whose first language is not English);
- Two academic references (Essential).

Admissions will acknowledge receipt of applications and forward these to the appropriate School Research and Knowledge Transfer Lead (or their nominee). Where applicants do not meet the minimum requirements (stated above) a rejection decision may be made by the School Research and Knowledge Transfer Lead acting alone, but all other admissions decisions must involve at least two members of academic staff.

School Research and Knowledge Transfer Leads are responsible for ensuring that any potential **ethical issues** arising from the application are considered as part of the admissions process.

Accreditation for Prior Learning (APL) will be considered in respect of the taught components of a research degree programme only and currently this is limited to practice-led degrees in the School of Performance & Media Production, School of Humanities, Religion & Philosophy and School of Art, Design & Computer Science. Applications will normally be made at the time of admission and considered by the relevant School in accordance with the APL procedures with a recommendation to Research Degrees Committee (RDC). APL is not permitted, in any circumstances, against the research thesis or thesis preparation components.

4. Research environment

School Research and Knowledge Transfer Leads are responsible for ensuring the availability of an appropriate research environment for all research student applicants in advance of an offer being made. This must include expertise for supervision (to include team member(s) meeting the research excellence criterion – see para 2(d) of the [*Eligibility Criteria for Research Degree Supervision Teams*](#)) and adequate resources for the proper conduct of the research (e.g. equipment, library collections, and computing facilities and software).

School Research and Knowledge Transfer Leads are responsible for identifying an appropriate supervisory team. Requirements for supervisory teams are set out in the [*Eligibility Criteria for Research Degree Supervision Teams*](#). If the potential main supervisor does not hold 'senior supervisor status', a second supervisor with this status, from a cognate subject area or discipline, must be included in a supervisory team. Once a supervisor or supervisory team is identified, and their time for supervision approved by their Head of School, the candidate must be offered an opportunity to discuss their

research proposal with their potential supervisor(s), in order to ensure that they have the information to ensure that the programme is right for them. Full details of requirements relating to supervisory teams are set out in the [Eligibility Criteria for Research Degree Supervision Teams](#).

5. Interview

If the application and research proposal are considered to be viable by the School Research and Knowledge Transfer Lead and potential supervisors, the candidate will be interviewed preferably in person (or if this is not possible either by video conferencing or telephone). As part of the interview, the candidate will be asked to give a ten minute presentation on their research proposal. Interviews must be carried out by at least two members of academic staff, chaired by the School Research and Knowledge Transfer Lead (or their nominee) and include the potential supervisor(s). Potential ethical issues and the need for ethics clearance should be considered at the interview.

Admission is subject to approval by RDC. Following interview and once the application is approved by the School Research and Knowledge Transfer Lead and RDC, Registry will inform Admissions and a formal offer will be made.

INTERVIEW GUIDANCE NOTES

These guidance notes provide additional information for the conduct of interviews for research degree candidates and should be read in accordance with the Research Student Admissions Policy.

Before the interview

Members of the interview panel should meet to discuss candidates.

All candidates should be interviewed in person if at all possible. Video conferencing or telephone is permissible if a face-to-face interview is not possible. As part of the interview process, the candidate should be asked to prepare a 10 minute presentation on their research proposal.

Consideration should be given to whether other staff, for example from the Learning Support Team, should be invited to attend, if there are questions about an applicant's support needs.

The interview

Below are some key points for consideration during the interview process and on which information is required following interview as part of the Interview Proforma and Admission Approval Form.

1. Originality of the research proposal:

- Is the proposal likely to make an original contribution to the body of knowledge, a vital criterion for the award of a PhD?
- Have the interviewers a detailed knowledge of current research being carried out in the area of the topic?
- Have the interviewers (or the candidate) checked the topic against the ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database (www.proquest.com)?

2. Feasibility of the research proposed:

- Can the proposal be carried out and written up within the constraints of the degree applied for? One year full-time (two years part-time) for a MA/MSc by Research/ two years full-time (four years part-time) for an MPhil/ three years full-time (six years part-time) for a PhD. Although additional overtime is available for MPhils and PhDs, projects should be achievable within the standard periods of study. Many research projects are overly ambitious – while there is usually time for the refinement of a PhD proposal prior to the transfer assessment process, this is not possible with a Masters by Research.

3. Ethical issues:

- Has the candidate considered ethics in the proposal?
- Does the candidate have an awareness of ethics, the need for informed consent, and observation of confidentiality?
- Will ethics clearance be required? Who from? (e.g. Cross-School Research Ethics Committee, or NHS)
- Are there potentially sensitive or problematic issues with the proposal?
- Will the proposal put the candidate at risk (e.g. travel to countries at war or with very high crime rates)?

4. Resource implications:

- What additional laboratory, software, hardware, library, studio, technical support or other resources will be required for this project?
- Can the School and existing services meet the needs of the proposed research within the constraints of existing resources?

5. Viability and practicality of practice-led elements (Practice led Degrees only):

- Are the proposed practice-led elements associated with a research proposal for a Practice-led degree (available in the School of Performance & Media Production, School of Humanities, Religion & Philosophy and School of Art, Design & Computer Science only) viable and practical?

6. Communication skills:

- Include consideration of written work, delivery of presentation and ability to comprehend, answer and frame complex research questions.
- Where an applicant's first language is not English and formal English language requirements have nevertheless been satisfied, consideration should be given to the applicant's grasp of the English language to embark on the research proposal, bearing in mind the demands of the discipline.

7. Relevant academic background, subject specific qualifications, experience and knowledge that is relevant to this proposal:

- This should form the bulk of feedback and reflect the candidate's ability to conduct research on the proposed topic.

8. Evidence of independent research skills:

- Research degrees lack the support of a cohort on a taught course. Has the candidate the independence to make the shift from a taught to a research degree?
- Has the candidate previously completed a solo research project such as a dissertation? And if so, did they enjoy working alone?
- Has the candidate the sound basic research skills to make a start on the research project within the parameters of the University's expectations regarding supervisory support?
- Is further background reading needed?

9. Envisaged training and development needs:

- Is the candidate aware of the need to engage in training and development?
- Has the candidate a realistic view of their current skills and the skills needed to complete a research degree?
- Where the applicant's first language is not English, are there any language support needs?

10. Personal/professional qualities:

- What is the candidate's motivation for research?
- Is the candidate open to new learning?
- Is the candidate a reflective learner?
- Can they develop the confidence to defend a thesis in a viva?
- How will they feel if the research leads to uncertainty and/or a realisation that there may not be a 'right' answer?
- For Masters by Research applicants is the candidate an excellent time manager? (as this is a very challenging time limited degree). For PhD applicants, do they have the determination and tenacity to complete a long course on the one topic?

11. Resource implications and time commitments:

- Can the candidate's needs be met by working with their supervisory team, development within the School and by existing YSJU courses or access arrangements? If not, is there an alternative source of training and what are the resource implications of this?
- Can the candidate attend seminars and training sessions in York and do they have the commitment to do this?
- If the candidate has declared a disability, reasonable adjustments and DSA may be discussed in the interview and may be entered under this heading.
- The expectation for a full time research student is that they work about 40 hours per week 45 weeks a year (20 hours per week for part timers). Can the candidate commit to this?

12. Availability of supervisory expertise:

- Are the proposed supervisors likely to be available for the full duration of the candidature (1-7 years)?
- Is adequate backfill cover available in case of the loss of a supervisor (e.g. through illness, accident or death)?

13. Competitively awarded studentships:

- An additional scoring grid should be completed at both shortlisting and interview stages, listing the candidates against the criteria for the award of the particular studentship, to justify the selection made for the recommendation.
- Following the interview, unsuccessful candidates may be recommended for an unfunded place if they have satisfied the interview panel that they meet the admission standard.

Further information on admissions processes is available on the University website:
<https://www.yorks.ac.uk/admissions/>

Following the interview

The applicant will be asked to leave the room while the interview panel consider their decision and will then be verbally informed of the outcome of the interview by the Chair of the Interview Panel (by phone or video conferencing in the case of an interview carried out by video conferencing). The outcome should be one of the following:

- a rejection (which needs to be justified in the Feedback Statement of the Interview Proforma and Admission Approval Form;
- a recommendation that the proposal be revised and resubmitted (guidance on revising the proposal and a time-limit for resubmission should be given to the candidate and recorded in the Feedback Statement); or
- a recommendation for admission, subject to approval by Research Degrees Committee (RDC).

No offer can be made at this point. The interview panel should be in a position at this stage to confirm the availability of an appropriate supervision team and required staffing to support the research degree (e.g., potential transfer panel members, internal examiner etc).

Interview Reporting

The Chair of the Interview Panel will complete Part 1 of the Research Degrees Interview Proforma and Admission Approval Form and send to the School Research and Knowledge Transfer Lead within **5 working days** of the interview for all candidates interviewed. Admissions will send out formal letters to unsuccessful candidates, and for those required to resubmit.

For successful candidates the interview chair/proposed main supervisor should also complete Part 2 of the Research Degrees Interview Proforma and Admission Approval Form in liaison with the School Research and Knowledge Transfer Lead. The completed form should be sent to Registry within **3 working days** of receipt for consideration by RDC.

Approval of Recommendation for Admission

Registry will circulate the Interview Proforma and Admission Approval Form to the sub group of RDC for approval. Once RDC has approved the recommendation put forward by the School, Registry will inform Admissions so that a formal offer can be made. Only Admissions can issue formal offers of admission to research degrees.

Once the applicant has returned the reply slip to accept the offer and has met any outstanding conditions, e.g. original certificates have been sighted, the application can be 'transferred' (ATR process) and Registry will send out enrolment instructions.

Enrolment and Induction

The enrolment instructions will enable the applicant to complete their online academic and financial enrolment prior to their start date.

The Research Office will co-ordinate induction arrangements for all new starters and details of the next available session will be communicated once the application has been approved. Induction will normally take place at the beginning of the month in which the applicant starts their research degree.