

Notes to help you with your postgraduate application

Please read these notes carefully. They are intended to help you make the best possible application.

References

Please choose your referees carefully. Each referee should be someone who:

- is familiar with you and your work
- can tell us about your suitability for postgraduate work
- can speak with authority about your abilities.

The best referees will be your former tutors, Department Heads or senior colleagues. An academic reference from an employer or other person is usually only useful if they can speak credibly about your suitability for postgraduate studies, for example, if they have studied for a higher degree themselves. It is usually helpful if your referee can mention some specific examples of relevant work which you have done, and comment on its quality. (You may also send one sample of work with your application - see under "Additional Evidence" below).

A reference which is written purely according to a formula, or which only mentions that you are of a good character and perform your duties well, **is not useful**.

A reference which is an "open testimonial", rather than a confidential statement is also **not useful**.

A reference which only confirms that you have been employed in a particular capacity is also **not useful**.

Academic Career and Qualifications

We look at any transcripts you send to see how well you have done in your academic and/or professional career. Most of our successful applicants have above average grades. However, we realise that students' learning changes over time and you will not be ruled out simply because of some low grades. We will look especially carefully at your performance in areas related to social science and sociology in particular. We will also take into account anything your referees say about your academic performance and readiness for postgraduate work.

Personal Statement

We would like to see a clear statement, in your own words, about why you want to take the course that you have chosen and what you hope to achieve. You should think very carefully about this statement and treat it as an opportunity to show what your interests are and how you will be able to benefit from postgraduate study in this Department. It is not necessary, if applying for a taught M.A., to outline a research project. Please do not exceed one side of A4 (about 500 words).

Additional Evidence

If you have written an essay or dissertation which received a high mark, or have published a paper on a topic relevant to the degree for which you are applying, you can send us one copy of one such item as part of your application. This may help us in deciding whether or not to admit you. This is likely to be helpful if, for example, you have difficulty finding suitable referees or if your English Language scores are borderline. If possible, please send a paper which

1. is recent, i.e. shows your highest level of work (e.g. third year not first year undergraduate work)
2. includes the original comments and grade given by the tutor (these could be on a separate sheet or written on the work itself).

A photocopy is acceptable - we do not undertake to return the original if you send it to us.

Special Notes for Applicants for the PhD Programme

Writing a Phd research proposal

The proposal should be between 1500 and 2000 words (no more than 3 pages for the ESRC) and include the following:

A working title of the topic area - This should do more than convey the key words associated with the proposed research.

General overview of area - This should take the form of a brief abstract of the general area of study and identify the discipline(s) within which it falls. You might also refer to the way in which your own background gives you competences in your chosen area.
Identification of the relevant literature.

In this section you should develop your proposal to demonstrate that you are aware of the debates and issues raised in relevant bodies of literature. References to key articles and texts should be made to show that you appreciate their relevance to your research area. A PhD is an original piece of research and so you should demonstrate that your proposed area has not been studied before. So you need to identify your niche in the field.

Key research questions - Since you need to demonstrate that the topic can be completed within the normal time period allowed, you need to demonstrate that it is manageable, and so focus on key questions within your niche area.

Methodology - You need to demonstrate an awareness of the methodological tools available to you and show some understanding of which would be suitable for your research. It may be that qualitative methods, including the analysis of interviews, are appropriate. Alternatively your approach may involve more quantitative techniques. In other cases you may be combining methodologies. You need to specify the approach you feel will be most appropriate, and say why.

Timescale/research planning - You need to show how you will spend your time and demonstrate that the research has been carefully planned.

Bibliography - You should include a short list of references to key articles and texts included in the application.

Avoid - Broad topic areas which would be unmanageable as PhD topics
Vague descriptions of research areas
Subject areas in which the Sociology department has no expertise

How do I Apply?

You may feel that you need more information about something or other before you make up your mind. If so, **email** us, **write** to us, **fax** us or **phone** us:

If you have already decided that you want to apply, you can send us your completed application and research proposal forms. You can do this by downloading the forms and posting or faxing them to the above address. If you have a problem doing this, contact us so that we can post forms to you.

Note that:

(i) You have to send the referee's report forms off to your referees direct. They must then send the completed reference straight to us (this speeds up the process we have to go through in order to give you a decision);

(ii) It is important that you complete the research proposal form in as much detail, and with as much care, as you can. We use what you say to help us judge your suitability for research and also to assign you an appropriate supervisor; and

(iii) The more information you give us about yourself (on the application form or on whatever attachments you include) the easier it will be for us to give you a quick decision.

Do I have to stay in Lancaster all the time in order to study for a research degree?

Lancaster's arrangements for research degrees are very flexible indeed. You can study full-time or part-time, and you can study at the university or away from it, depending on your needs and what is needed for you to be successful in completing a good thesis. The most important thing is to have an arrangement which is going to be practical and effective for you to achieve your aims. Many students begin their research full-time in Lancaster (giving them good access to (i) supervision, (ii) courses in their subject area and in research methods and (iii) our extensive research facilities. Then, later on, having come to a practical arrangement with their supervisor, they may study part-time, in Lancaster or away from it (often outside the UK). Part-time students can get advice by email, telephone and letter, and usually come back to the university for short periods of intense work with their supervisors.

What is the difference between MPhil and PhD?

A Lancaster PhD thesis normally takes around three years' of full-time study (or its part-time equivalent) to complete, although the actual time varies somewhat from one student to another, depending on the personal circumstances of the student and many other factors. Some take a bit less time, some take a bit more. It is our highest level of research degree, and to be successful you have to produce an original, contribution to knowledge. Standard PhD theses have a 100,000 word maximum.

A Lancaster MPhil normally takes around two years full-time (or its part time equivalent) to complete, and the maximum thesis length is 60,000 words. MPhil theses must demonstrate a strong and well-balanced critical faculty in discussing and/or applying the insights and methodologies of others to new areas or data. They are often original contributions to knowledge, but on a smaller scale when compared with the PhD thesis.

In almost all cases, research students are admitted initially to the MPhil degree, even if they intend to carry on to complete a PhD (this practice is standard in British universities). Then, if their work is proceeding satisfactorily, they are usually upgraded to PhD status after a year or so. We use this upgrading process to give you valuable general advice and feedback on your work so far by a member of staff other than your supervisor. After a successful upgrading, you continue to work on the same thesis, with the expectation that you will submit it for a PhD.