

Applying to a research degree programme at  
Oxford, OU or Brunel in the social sciences...  
and finding funding too..



Grand Union DTP Admissions Webinar: 31<sup>st</sup> October 2019

# Webinar Overview



This session is intended to help you decide if:

- 1) applying for a PhD/DPhil is the right thing for you,
- 2) to help you develop a strong application
- 3) to tell you about ESRC studentship funding.

We are unable to answer very specific questions about eligibility in this session, but a quick recap before we start:

- ❖ ESRC funding is reserved almost entirely for UK and EU students.
- ❖ EU students will usually be eligible for a fees-only award
- ❖ The ESRC does not fund standalone Masters programmes
- ❖ We can only fund candidates for ESRC approved courses – these are listed on the pathway pages on the DTP website



# Is a PhD /DPhil for you?



- Why do a PhD? It's a long and sometimes tough 3-4 year journey. You need to be clear about where you want to go next and how the PhD prepares you for that future.
- Many PhD programmes courses can be studied on a part-time basis.
- Our universities are committed to widening access to postgraduate research and encourage applications from talented candidates with the required skills and experience.

# So you want to do a PhD..but which one?



- The Grand Union DTP funds doctoral studentships across the social sciences. Start at the [Grand Union](#) and course admissions pages to learn about the different programmes of study
- Think about your own profile – including previous relevant academic training and work experience – and how it strengthens your profile, and supports your current interests
- Do you need to start with a taught postgraduate degree to get research training experience, or directly begin a DPhil/PhD programme?

# Do your homework..



- Find out about the academic research expertise in your chosen department
- Does your application and research area 'fit' the departmental profile?
- Who would you (ideally!) wish to supervise you?
- Are you open to a predefined or collaborative research topic if it comes with funding?
- Do you want to study full or part-time?
- Tailor your application and personal statement accordingly

# Preparing your application

- Tailor your personal statement/statement of purpose to the course
- Work on your research proposal (if applying for a PGR course)
- Update your CV
- Check with your referees – keep them informed
- Choose samples of written work that link to your research interests
- Complete the scholarship applications
- And then prepare for your interview (as applicable)



# What goes in a research proposal?

- Title
- Abstract (depends on overall length)
- Overview
- Lit review, with key topics/research questions
- Research Design and Methods
- Relevance/Importance/Potential Contribution
- Can be between 500 and 3000 words...(structure and word length will vary by department and course)

# Do I need a research question?

- Some disciplines just want you to set out your research interests.
- Others will want a clear research question
- These need to be:
  - Specific, clear, precise and focussed
  - Engaging existing knowledge/debates
  - Answerable by empirical data
  - Practical & manageable
  - Useful, topical and relevant to wider interests



# Think about the basics..

- What do I need to know?
- Why do I need to know this?
- What kind of 'data' will answer my questions?
- Where can I find these data?
- How will I analyse this data?
- What kinds of evidence will this produce?

# Good research questions are...

- **Topical:** Arising from issues raised in literature, policy or practice
- **Achievable:** Research Sites (archives/fieldsites) and sources of data are accessible and help you develop a full and nuanced answer to your question.
- **Substantial:** Offers space for further development
- **Clear and simple:** they become more complex as your research progresses.
- **Interesting:** will sustain you for at least 3 years
- **Topical :** they ideally address a current issue or policy concern

# Write about methods too..

- Quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods, theoretical or library-based?
- Focus (local, regional, national, international)?
- What sources of data will you draw on..and what skills do you need ?
- What practical /fieldwork challenges will there be?
- What are the ethical issues to consider?
- Will you do a pilot?

# What else to put into the proposal?



- It should address questions raised by existing literature, if not yet fully answered
- It should be feasible: can you do this in 3/4 years with the support of your supervisor/department/pathway?
- It should be substantial with scope for further development over the 3 years (and possible into a post-doc)
- It should be exciting and matter (to you!). It must sustain you for 3 years...

# Get advice and feedback



- Find the experts in your area, reach out to them, and see if they are interested in your work and ideas
- You may want to contact a potential supervisor to see if they are interested, and get their feedback too.
- You will benefit a lot from your peers, so find out about the research student culture
- Your ideas will keep developing..the proposal does not need to be perfect at this stage!

# The Grand Union DTP...



- ✓ One of 14 Doctoral Training Partnerships (DTPs) funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) in the UK
- ✓ Brings together three universities with complementary research strengths across the social sciences
- ✓ 18 Oxford-led training pathways; 4 OU-led and 1 Brunel-led pathway
- ✓ Annually awards approx. 40-50 ESRC studentships and 6 postdoc fellowships
- ✓ A wide range of training innovations and funding opportunities
- ✓ Committed to widening access to PGR study and to promoting collaborative opportunities
- ✓ Strong student representation



# Who is eligible for an ESRC studentship?



- To be eligible for a full award (stipend and fees), you must have no restrictions on how long you can stay in the UK, and have been ordinarily resident in the UK for at least three years prior to the start of the studentship grant.
- To be eligible for a fees only award, you must be ordinarily resident in an EU member state, in the same way UK students must be ordinarily resident in the UK
- A very few (1 or 2) studentships awarded to applicants pursuing 'Advanced Quantitative Methods' have no residency restrictions.
- More information about eligibility available on the ESRC and UKCISA websites



# What does a studentship cover?



- A stipend (around £15,000 in 2019-20) and university fees are covered (fees only for EU nationals) for between 3 to 4 years (sometimes Masters funding too)
- Contribution to research-related costs, including overseas fieldwork, institutional visits and internships, provided pre-approval is obtained for all expenses
- The opportunity to apply for support for new interdisciplinary initiatives through our Incubator fund

# Advanced Quantitative Methods (AQM) Awards



- The Grand Union DTP will offer at least 4 awards to students using advanced quantitative methods or data skills in their research.
- To be considered 'advanced', the research design and analysis will deploy methods or data skills that extend beyond the standard expectations in your field.
- Aspects of proposed AQM may include the following, depending upon the subject area and proposed research:
  - ❖ Advanced methods of data collection and data analysis techniques
  - ❖ Use of large and complex data sets (admin data, digital data, census data)
  - ❖ Specific experimental, quasi-experimental or evaluation methods
  - ❖ Advanced use of data and programming skills (including AI and e-Research tools)
- Your pathway will decide if you should be nominated for an AQM award.

# DTP Application Form



- The form provides you with an opportunity to provide further information about your skills, experience and potential for graduate study (sections 5 and 7), along with your research plans (sections 3 and 6).
- We take your professional career profile into account, not just your academic achievements. This can be outlined in section 5.
- As part of reviewing the quality of the research proposal, the assessors will consider the potential for it to have meaningful impact. We encourage you to consider what this might be and how you can engage with non-academic organisations.
- Candidates wishing to be considered by their pathway for AQM awards should also complete section 8.
- Ensure you adhere to word limits.

# What happens after you apply..



- DEADLINE for Autumn (Sept/Oct) 2020 entry is January 2020 - check with your institution on exact date for your course
- Your application will be assessed by your proposed institution, department and pathway.
- If sufficiently strong, it will be selected for submission to our central studentship competition. This is a two-stage process
- The pathway will prepare a nomination form, giving DTP assessors an accessible overview of your application materials and its strengths.
- Successful candidates will be contacted by the DTP from early April.

# How the DTP reviews pathway nominations..



- Nominations consist of the pathway nomination form, DTP application form and University application materials.
- Each nomination is independently read and reviewed by members of the assessment panel, with representation from all three partners and a range of disciplinary expertise. Assessors do not review candidates from their own pathway.
- The panel will look for evidence that you have the appropriate skills and experience to complete a doctorate in your chosen field, and consider the quality and feasibility of your proposed research.
- The final distribution of awards seeks to ensure a balance of 3 year and 4 year awards.

# Are there other sources of funding for PhD study?



- ESRC Grand Union funding is very competitive, and we can only support a small proportion of eligible and strong applicants.
- There are other scholarship programmes at our institutions.
- You may be considered for these automatically.
- Do use funding websites and resources to find other sources
- You can also apply for loans for PhD study

# Common Questions



- **I am an EU student who has been living in the UK – am I eligible for a full award?**
  - EU nationals resident in the UK for three years prior to the start of award and normally resident in EU prior to that may be eligible for a full award; EU nationals not previously residing in the UK are eligible for a fees-only award (Note: If you are an EU national, please apply whether you are eligible for the full or fees-only award, as many of our fees-only scholars have also been awarded additional funding from other University sources)
- **Can you confirm whether I am eligible for an award before I apply?**
  - The GUDTP cannot confirm whether you are absolutely eligible for an award prior to an offer being made, and subsequent review of all of relevant information and documentation
- **I applied for a place in the last admissions round and was unsuccessful, can I be considered for funding in the upcoming competition?**
  - If you applied for a place at one of our partner universities but did not get a place in the institution or withdrew your application, you are eligible to submit a new application for a place and ESRC funding (only the new application will be reviewed)
  - If you were awarded a place and started the course but were not awarded any ESRC funding, you are not eligible to submit a new application



# Common Questions



- **Can I have feedback on my application?**
  - Unfortunately, the GUDTP is not able to provide individual feedback on application due to the numbers that are received each round
- **Will I be considered if I apply for a course not listed on the DTP pathway webpages, but my research can be considered to be 'social science'?**
  - No; only courses that are listed under one of our 23 pathways can be considered for an award as these are the arrangements accredited by the ESRC
- **How do I know if I am using 'advanced' quantitative methods?**
  - This is judged and determined by the nominating pathway based on the evidence you provide on your specific quantitative methods/skills in your University and DTP applications; if in doubt as to whether you might qualify, don't hesitate to still fill in the appropriate sections of the DTP application form ('if in doubt, complete'!)
- **Does the ESRC fund standalone Masters programmes?**
  - No; you must be intending to continue on to the doctoral track and the application will require you to speak to the doctoral research plan even if you are at the Master's stage at the time of application

# Questions from Q&A time:



- **Can I apply to more than one DTP?**
  - Yes; there is no reason why you cannot apply to multiple DTPs, and applying to more than one might give you more options in the decision-making process
- **Do I need to live near a campus (main University location) as a DTP student?**
  - Typically yes; the ESRC expects that students live nearby their institution of study (fieldwork excluded). Applicants can apply for an exemption to this rule with a good case to their home institution, and there may be different expectations for part-time students.
- **If you haven't yet decided if you will be studying full-time or part-time, how should you proceed?**
  - Usually applicants will apply for one of the two, however, you should check with your department as to their recommendation (submitting two university applications could be slightly costly). Please keep in mind that the DTP can be flexible should you have good reason to switch (once) from one to the other while on the award.
- **How is part-time funding allocated?**
  - Part-time awards are allocated on a pro rata basis. The length of PT study is typically for twice the amount of time as the equivalent FT course (depending on University practice) and students receive 50% of the standard full stipend over the course of the academic year.

# Questions from Q&A time:



- **Does the DTP fund visiting studentships?**
  - No; the DTP is not able to fund any visiting studentships, although individual university's may have separate schemes for this type of set-up
- **Where is the Open University's campus?**
  - The OU is based in Milton Keynes; residency requirements specific to the OU are based on distance from Milton Keynes
- **What are the residency requirements for part-time students?**
  - This will depend on the University and programme, pathways may have different guidance for PT students (i.e., you may have to be present at the department for a certain number of days throughout the year). Check with your chosen pathway or Department if unsure.
- ***Important note: many queries regarding general admissions and entry requirements, residency requirements, part-time study expectations, and specific course concerns are more aptly directed to the university, department and/or pathway in question, as the DTP does not make university admittance decisions.***

# Questions from Q&A time:



- **How would you set up a collaborative studentship?**
  - If you already have connections with an organisation and they have agreed to a collaborative project, you can include this in your application for funding OR
  - The DTP often has collaborative studentships already established and then advertises these opportunities to prospective applicants
  - Note: we also encourage applicants to think of how they might engage with a non-academic organisation in the future, such as through an internship and knowledge exchange opportunity.

# Questions from Q&A time:



- **Do you have to have a post-graduate degree prior to undertaking doctoral study? Will it give your application an advantage if you have a Masters degree already?**
  - Your funding application will not be disadvantaged if you do not already have a Masters, however certain courses do require applicants to have completed a Masters prior to starting a PhD.
  - If you would be applying to one of those courses and do not already have a Masters in that area, you would apply to the Masters course to then later apply to the doctorate after the first or second year of study, depending on the exact structure.
- **How does finding a supervisor work? Are there supervisors directly related to the DTP?**
  - Any supervisor that works within a DTP pathway is eligible to be a potential supervisor, although students themselves are not required to set up a supervisory arrangement; the department will oversee this process. If you have a specific supervisor(s) in mind, you can definitely reach out to them yourself to discuss your research plans

# Questions from Q&A time:



- **What if you already have an MBA?**
  - Although possibly beneficial to your academic development process, generally an MBA would not have the required research methods training expected by the ESRC for students to enter straight onto the doctorate on one of the DTP's pathways, so you may be best to apply to a 1+3 or 4 year programme structure where the necessary training would be covered within the award.
  - The Leadership & Organisational Governance pathway at the Open University may be a good fit in this case.
- **Can you completely change your research topic/project between the Masters and doctoral phase?**
  - This would depend on the individual scenario and need further approval from within the home institution and the DTP
  - It is expected that Masters students admitted within a certain pathway would continue on that pathway into the PhD phase

# Questions from Q&A time:



- **Is there a book on how to successfully apply for a PhD grant?**
  - There are many books, blogs, articles and other resources on the PhD application process, some of which are listed on our website at <https://www.granduniondtp.ac.uk/why-doctoral-study>.
- **Is it worth doing a PhD in the current academic climate?**
  - We would say yes! But consider the following when it comes to your own personal decision:
    - Why do you want to do a PhD? Is it to obtain a future academic post? Is it focused on something you are passionate about? Is the research something you know you enjoy?
    - A PhD can develop lots of skills in so many different ways, as well as open doors to a whole variety of opportunities, whether in academia, business, government or elsewhere



# Further resources:



- To reference more detailed information about DTP studentships, ESRC funding eligibility criteria, and the DTP application process, please visit the following pages:

<https://www.granduniondtp.ac.uk/studentships>

<https://www.granduniondtp.ac.uk/eligibility> & <https://esrc.ukri.org/skills-and-careers/doctoral-training/prospective-students/>

<https://www.granduniondtp.ac.uk/how-apply>

- **All DTP training Pathways can be found at** <https://www.granduniondtp.ac.uk/pathways>
  - Individual courses and their requirements are located under the “Structure” tab on each pathway’s page
- **Still exploring doctoral study? Visit** <https://www.granduniondtp.ac.uk/why-doctoral-study> **for more information**