Postgraduate Study Interviews

There is no fixed procedure for interviewing for postgraduate courses and interviews are not necessarily held for all courses. Interviews can vary considerably in length, structure, number of interviewers etc. depending not only on the institution, but also on the department within the institution. Interviews for Masters courses may be held by telephone (particularly for international students).

PhD courses

All candidates for PhD courses will normally be interviewed and there are several different formats the interview could take, including:

- An informal chat with supervisors, lunch and then a formal interview with 2 or 3 interviewers (including the supervisor).
- Interviews with potential supervisor(s) and with the postgraduate tutor.
- An interview day, consisting of a series of short talks to explain to the applicants the selection process and the training provided by the department and the faculty, along with the processes by which students’ progress will be monitored. The applicants may also have a buffet lunch with PhD students from the department to get a peer perspective.
- A panel interview comprising a minimum of three interviewers. There is a postgraduate tutor who chairs the panel plus the prospective supervisor(s) and one other person.
- A meeting with the director of the PhD programme, secretary to the PhD programme, potential supervisor(s), and existing PhD students.

If you are already studying with the department (e.g. Masters, MPhil) you may find that you are interviewed first and then asked to fill in the necessary paperwork afterwards.

Preparation before the interview

Read through your application form/CV again to familiarise yourself with what you wrote. The interviewer(s) will pick out points from your application form/CV for further discussion and clarification. Read through information about the course/department so you are well informed at the interview and can also prepare any questions you have yourself about the course. Find out about staff members’ research interests (often on the department website) because you will be working closely with other staff. Learn about your research topic (especially PhD students); you will be expected to have some level of knowledge at the interview.

Tip: Postgraduate study, particularly at PhD level, can make you feel isolated as you will often be working either alone or in a small group. Think about this beforehand and how you will cope with these feelings if they occur as you may be asked about this at the interview. Prepare a strategy to ensure you have a healthy work and social balance.
Interviewers will be looking at several issues when they ask you for interview

Your reasons for study:

This will help give them an idea of your motivation and also your commitment to the course. Think through your reasons for wanting to do further study before you go to an interview. For example, do you want to:

- develop specialist expertise in some aspect of your first degree subject;
- have a complete change of career direction into a new, possibly vocational, subject area;
- develop some new skills and enhance your employment prospects;
- enter a profession, e.g. teaching or social work, for which a postgraduate course is essential?

Research you have done into the course:

They will want to know that you are serious about undertaking further study and that you have researched the course or area of study/research that you are interested in, as well as the department and institution. In particular, prospective PhD students should look into the background of staff they will be working with, including their current and past research on the University website and also their published work e.g. research papers, books, articles in journals etc.

It is also vital for applicants who have had a break away from academia prior to applying for a PhD to refresh their memories and research their subject. Research may have moved on since their study days and so they should look particularly at current and future developments.

Your potential for academic/practical work:

They will also want to identify your potential for academic and, where applicable, practical work in order to assess how well you will cope with the requirements of the course/research. Before the interview think about the kind of skills that will be relevant to go on to undertake further study and how you have achieved them.

You may want to include examples of the following:

- research skills;
- written and verbal communication skills;
- IT skills;
- commitment and perseverance;
- ability to use your initiative and work on your own without supervision;
- problem solving skills;
- analytical skills;
- practical skills (where applicable);
- work experience (where applicable).

Help:

Talk to an adviser: Our Careers Advisers can discuss further study options and discuss the interview process with you.
For more information contact the Careers Development Service:

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University of Leicester
Percy Gee (Students’ Union) Building
Ground Floor

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