Notes for International Students on Writing an “Expression of Interest”

Introduction: How we can help you at the University of Wolverhampton

 Expectations at British universities are for MPhil and PhD applications, proposals and expressions of interest to begin to address: the area for research, why that area, and the suggested approach or approaches to that area.

In short: we need to know what you want to research, but also a little bit about the specifics of your proposed research.

 The below notes offer guidance for you as you prepare your Expression of Interest for us to consider, at the University of Wolverhampton.

First steps

We engage in a process of support and feedback to help you in the preparation of your Expression of Interest. We are always happy to receive informal inquiries (to Dr Benjamin Halligan: b.halligan@wlv.ac.uk), and happy to meet and talk about your proposed research too. We can also support you via Skype or telephone conference call – please email for details.

Please do spend some time on our website, and identify academics and research groups that would be able to support you during your proposed research. We offer a wide range of subjects, internationally noted academics, excellent facilities, and world-leading research, and we would like you to be part of that environment.

Pre-Research Degree Course

The University offers a Pre-Research Degree Course which will support you to develop your English languages skills if you have an IELTS score of either 6.0 to 6.5 but not the required IELTS 7 for entry to a research degree. This 6 month course also provides you with a research supervisor who will support you as you work to develop your research proposal.

What can be in an Expression of Interest?

We typically offer formative feedback on your Expression of Interest if we are able to accommodate your research. It is only after we have accepted your Expression of Interest that we ask for a full Research Proposal. Therefore, please do not feel that the Expression of Interest needs to be perfect: we would just like to hear from you about your research, along some of the lines discussed below.

So if, for example, you wished to look at the effectiveness of representations of healthy lifestyles in children’s television programmes in South America, a number of questions can be raised. Has anyone else engaged in this research? If so, what more now needs to be done? Does your research then hold the potential to break new ground and so generate new knowledge? Any proposed research will need to engage with published writing already in the field. You will need to note this writing in your Expression of Interest: who are the key authors / thinkers? What groups of experiments / investigations have already occurred in the area that you are looking to? It may be easier to divide this writing into “Primary Sources” and “Secondary Sources”. Tip: Use “Google Scholar” (<https://scholar.google.co.uk/>) to quickly hunt down references to academic writing already published in your area!

At the same time, you would need to begin to discuss possible ways in which you intend to analyse the material. Will you use questionnaires? If so, which approaches to questionnaires, and why these approaches? Will you use textual analysis of the programmes themselves? If so, which approaches to textual analysis could prove to be the most useful? Are you intending to conduct interviews? If so, what kind of information will you try to gain from interviews? Are you using a chemical technique – if so, what is it, and how might it produce the results you want? Have these methods been used for other published studies – and does their use by others confirm the effectiveness of your chosen method for your proposed research? Or is it a matter of talking about the need to change or enhance a certain method that is already familiar to others working in the field? In short: the expectation is that you will begin to suggest a possible method for your research – that is, your methodology.

These questions will determine the structure of the proposed research. How do you propose to divide up the three years (for full-time PhD research)? This can be done in blocks of six months, and typically fieldwork would occur during the second year. This will offer us a suggested timeline for the research, so that we can see how, after the three years are up, you’ll be able to submit your work during the final “write-up” year. (Normally, submission is expected at the end of the third year. You should note that you may not normally submit after the end of the fourth year.) Please note that this would only be a draft timeline, and subject to change further to discussions with your supervisor team once research has begun.

We would typically expect a draft title for the research. But this does not need to be definitive: we will not hold you to using this title, if you later decide on the need to change it. And the title can, at this early stage, just be descriptive: “A study of…”, “An investigation into…”, “An examination of…”, “A new approach to…”

We are keen to hear something about you as well, in terms of your academic and professional experiences. How do these experiences inform the research you are proposing? If you completed or are completing a Masters, what experiences have you gained that will enable you to research further? Does the proposed research arise from your work on your Masters? If you come with professional experience, is the proposed research building on the abilities you have gained in non-academic environments?

What happens next?

When we have received your Expression of Interest we will be back in touch once we have looked at it. This typically takes about 3 weeks. We will offer you formative feedback and, if are able to accept your Expression of Interest, we will ask you to complete a full Research Proposal. We will offer you support and guidance for this. Once the Research Proposal has been accepted, we will be happy to issue you a formal offer letter for a place to study with us. You will be able to begin your studies with us during any month of the year.

We look forward to hearing from you!

Examples of titles PhDs recently awarded by the University of Wolverhampton:

Faculty of Social Sciences

* The effect of the performance related pay system on the performance of the employees in Saudi national firms: Three case studies
* The American Civil War and the British Imperial Dilemma
* Death on the Warwickshire Coalfield: An examination of the contribution of miners, coal owners and the State to the decline in mining fatalities in the British coal industry in the period of expansion 1840 to 1913
* An examination of the motivations and consequences of foreign direct investment in the Premier League 1992-2012
* The impact of entrepreneurship education on the relationships between institutional and individual factors and entrepreneurial intention of university graduates: Evidence from Zambia

Faculty of Education, Health and Wellbeing

* Developing and integrating cultural competence into nursing education curricular: A qualitative grounded theory approach
* Perceptions of the influence of adults other than teachers on PE and school sport in West Midlands Primary Schools
* An examination of bullying in different institutional contexts: Undergraduate student notions of bullying in school, the workplace and university
* Trait emotional intelligence: Evaluating the theoretical construct, its relationship to other psychological variables, and potential interventions to enhance it

Faculty of Arts

* The emergence of the documentary real within relational and post-relational political aesthetics
* Injury incidence and severity in professional ballet dancers over three years
* Multi-sensory appreciation and practice: A somaesthetic approach to the exploration of taste smell and touch in food-based art
* The Cyborg Subject Parallax Realities, Functions of Consciousness and the Voice of Subjectivity
* The divided seal: Reading a history of signatures in visual art through Derrida’s Signature Event Context

Faculty of Science and Engineering

* Characterisation of potential replacements for nickel compounds used in decorative chromium plating
* A multi-criteria decision analysis framework for sustainable rainwater harvesting systems in Ibadan, Nigeria
* Bioremediation of modelled petroleum-contaminated soils of the Niger Delta and the impact of xeolite augmentation
* A framework for land information management in Ghana
* A knowledge management framework for reducing the cost of poor quality on construction projects

Further reading:

“Writing a PhD Research Proposal”

<https://www.studential.com/postgraduate/study/PhD/writing-a-research-proposal>

“Writing a Good PhD Research Proposal”

<https://www.findaphd.com/advice/finding/writing-phd-research-proposal.aspx>

“How to Write a PhD Proposal with 5 Tips”

<https://www.pandadoc.com/how-to-write-a-phd-proposal>

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