

General Application Feedback - AHSS
GOIPG/2020 – Government of Ireland Postgraduate Scholarship

I. Project
a) Clarity and coherence of the proposed research
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clearly articulate the research in terms of aims, objectives and research questions.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus on strengthening the relationship between literature review, research questions and research design.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fully explain and interrogate the intellectual foundations of the proposal and be aware of the importance of articulating a clear conceptual framework.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider the reasons behind an extensive literature review - reflect on what is already known and focus on specific questions when outlining the scope of the review.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Write the research methods and theory as if addressing a non-specialist.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In social sciences, applicants are advised to focus on rigorous methods rather than be ideologically driven.
b) Quality of the proposed research design and methodologies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be realistic when designing the project about how many questions can really be answered.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pay due attention to methodology and make sure the research design is detailed.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Give a detailed justification for the research design, methodology and proposed methods.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outline ability to carry out the methodology or whether training will be required.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider both the strengths and weaknesses/limitations of the design and offer critical reflection on the potential limits of the chosen methodology.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use the GANTT chart most effectively by presenting clear milestones and deliverables: consider articulating the progress of the project in terms of chapter completion, linking milestones and deliverables to the structure of the project.
c) Feasibility of the proposed milestones, deliverables and contingency plans
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be realistic when outlining the contingency plan - a degree of 'pessimism' may help to develop a more useful plan.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When the research involves interviews, contingency plans should focus on multiple strategies for recruitment.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be realistic when defining milestones: don't be overly ambitious about what can be done within the timeline of the project.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be realistic about mastering specialist skills in a short period of time.
d) Consideration as to how the proposed research will advance state of the art and make a contribution to existing knowledge
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus on explaining why this project is necessary now/timely, but use caution when asserting a topic is undeservedly neglected or the approach completely new and original.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider how the research will impact on the field in which it is embedded, but also the implications of the work outside academia (e. g. informing debates, policy formulation...)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide a preliminary/tentative indication of insights or outcomes expected or hoped from the research.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indicate explicitly the envisaged contribution to theory building, if applicable.

e) Plans for dissemination and knowledge exchange of the proposed research
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognise the importance of dissemination and communication as part of the project: dissemination plans need to go beyond listing academic outputs.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include non-traditional academic media in your dissemination plan, and don't neglect non-academic audiences/consider dissemination beyond academia.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When including social media, include a clear plan of how it will be used, don't mention it just for the sake of it.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be realistic when drafting the knowledge exchange plan and highlight any existing experience in engaging with potential stakeholders.
f) Consideration of the relevant ethical issues and sex/gender dimension
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spend time reflecting on the possible gender implications of the project, seek advice and guidance from your potential supervisor before asserting that none exists.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If the research involves interviews/recruitment of participants, numbers of males and females should depend of the issue under investigation.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide the fullest ethical consideration for the project possible and reference any appropriate ethical guidance.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Even in non-social science project, do not disregard potential ethical implications - seek expert institutional advice if unsure any such issues will arise.

II. Applicants
a) Track record and research potential of the applicant
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid vague claims that cannot be substantiated.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give clear/specific evidence of your potential for research, focusing on both the breadth of academic experience as well as other work/life experience.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearly outline why you are well-matched to the proposed research/how your wider experience makes you the ideal candidate for undertaking the research.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low undergraduate grades should be addressed and explained by the scholar, supervisor and referees.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe and give details of any previous research dissertations, including the methods used and any learning acquired.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highlight any work submitted for publication, and if none has been submitted, identify work that could lead to a publication.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be careful about tunnel vision and narrowing focus on a topic already explored in detail at BA/MA level.
b) Personal statement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The personal statement is not a CV - focus on qualities directly linked to the ability to conduct research, to the suitability to undertake the proposed research, and how your career to date has prepared you to the project.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that the personal statement provides insight into your motivations to carry out this proposed research.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be careful about appearing overly confident/hubristic.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In social sciences: avoid overly personal links with the topic, which may suggest the risk for a lack of objectivity.
c) Match between applicant's profile and the proposed research project

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If the work is related to previous research with the proposed supervisor or ongoing academic employment, highlight how you have identified innovative questions independently, rather than as part of a team.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate how the proposed research relates to previous work and/or professional experience.
d) References
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider the crucial role of the supervisor statement as indication of the future work relationship between supervisor and scholar.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • References should be relevant to the research project; be aware that non-academic referees are less useful in the context of the application.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choose a referee that can contextualise the importance of the project and indicate how much progress has been made to date.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Referees should pay particular care not to use any gendered pronouns, so as to maintain gender-blinding.

III. Training and career development
a) Clarity and quality of training and career development plan
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicants should ensure that they have engaged in genuine reflection and audited their existing skills - don't be afraid to acknowledge gaps for which training is needed.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not focus only on the academic job market.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give clear details about any courses already taken, especially those taken independently of previous degree courses.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be specific about which training courses you plan to undertake and be realistic about the number of courses you can complete - this should not be to the detriment of the research.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show evidence of how the plan will emerge from/map onto the project (e.g. timing of training needed to perform specific parts of the research)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If possible, plan for at least one visit to another research group abroad.
b) Capacity to acquire new knowledge and skills
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be realistic about the capacity for skill-acquisition (e.g. language skills) in a relatively short time; it should not be done to the detriment of the actual research.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicants need to demonstrate their capacity to acquire new skills by providing evidence of a track record of acquiring skills.
c) Potential for the development of skills relevant to employment outside the traditional academic sector
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be realistic about the prospect of finding long-term academic employment and give serious and realistic consideration to non-academic careers.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate how the research proposal will facilitate a non-academic career.
d) Evidence of thought as to how the scholarship would impact on the applicant's career path
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider the contribution of the scholarship as prestigious and beneficial with regards to networking and access to resources and people.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider not only the transferable skills that come with PhD study, but also training courses that would procure additional transferable skills – as well as how and why these skills would serve you in particular areas, both cognate to the subject and beyond it.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where the career path is envisioned within academia, consider how this can be achieved in addition to networking, conferences and publication, e.g. where your research project

might take you in terms of demand for expertise, growth areas, global demand (or lack thereof).

IV. Environment

a) Suitability and ability of the proposed academic supervisor(s) to provide adequate supervision

- Applicants are advised to contact their supervisor(s) and develop a relationship at an early stage prior to the application, in order to comprehensively discuss the proposed research.
- In general, and where applicable, consider a supervisory team, and at the very least one co-supervisor.
- If the primary supervisor lacks experience, consider co-supervision with a more senior colleague.
- Articulate not only the suitability of the primary supervisor, but also the broader networks of support that will be on offer in the host institution.

b) Quality of infrastructure, facilities and support to be provided by the higher education institution

- Consider moving to an institution other than where the BA and/or MA were undertaken.
- Ensure the HEI has a broad series of support structures for administrative, pastoral and academic support as well as evidence of a strong research culture in the fields of the proposal.
- Avoid using only an institutional template and include a personal justification explaining why the facilities are appropriate for this applicant and this project.
- Describe how the HEI has the best resources for the specified work (equipment, access to datasets...), stressing any specific resources and/or opportunities (e.g. internal grants and awards) that distinguish it from others.
- Where applicable, mention the HEI's Athena Swan awards, as additional markers of the HEI's quality and investment in gender issues.

c) Match between the applicant, academic supervisor(s) and higher education institution

- Try to tailor the information about the institution's research infrastructure to the research project (e.g. courses the applicant will attend).
- Highlight the connections of the proposed research to the work of the supervisor and to the research specialisms of the Department and any other staff members in the Department/University.
- Be honest about the reasons for choosing the institution, if it is based on the availability of funding - if that is the case explain why the chosen institution/supervisor is better than alternatives (in Ireland or elsewhere).
- If already registered in the HEI, reflect on the experience of working there, even for a short period.