

MPhil/PhD Admissions

Frequently Asked Questions

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How to apply

What documents am I required to submit with my application?

A list of supporting documents required with your application can be found on our [programme prospectus pages](#). Please follow the guidance listed on the School's [supporting documents](#) page.

There are three application deadlines – one in December, one in January, and one in May. When should I apply?

To be considered for a direct-entry MPhil/PhD scholarship, you must submit your application by the December deadline. If you apply for direct entry after this date, you will be considered for admission only.

If you are an MSc applicant seeking ESRC 1+3 funding, you must submit your application by the January deadline.

Applications for admission to the Department's MPhil/PhD programmes close in May. For exact deadlines, please visit the [PhD admissions/funding page](#).

Do I need to submit a GRE (Graduate Record Examination) or GMAT (Graduate Management Admissions Test) with my application?

GRE/GMAT scores are not required, however if these reflect positively on your quality as an applicant, you may wish to consider submitting these.

I'm applying to more than one PhD programme. Should I submit different application documents for each programme?

For guidance on what to do in this situation, please see [here](#).

Does the order in which I rank my programme choices matter?

Yes, this has two important consequences:

- i. Your programme choices are considered in order, so if you are successful for your first choice, you will not be considered for your second choice. Consequently, we can only guarantee to consider your application for School-administered funding opportunities if you submit it by the funding deadline and list a Department of Geography and Environment programme as your first-choice.
- ii. In the September 2019 and September 2020 admissions cycles, first-choice applications were over seven times more likely to receive an admissions offer from the Department than second-choice applications. During the same period, all our funding offers went to applicants who listed one of our programmes as their first choice. This does not mean that we discourage applicants from listing our programmes as their second choice. We do make offers to students who list our programmes as their second choice. However, this does reflect the fact that we only

have a finite capacity to admit new students each year, and first-choice applications tend to be much more adeptly tailored to our faculty's research interests than second-choice applications. Accordingly, we recommend that you only list one of our programmes as your second-choice if you genuinely believe that your proposed research would represent a good fit with that programme. We recommend that you do not list any of our programmes as your second-choice solely as an 'insurance policy'.

Applying – entry standards

Where can I find information about entry requirements? What should I do if I don't quite meet the required entry standards?

The entry requirements for each programme are listed on the [prospectus pages](#) for each programme. In general, the minimum entry requirement is a merit overall in a relevant master's degree programme with a 65%+ average, as well as a 70%+ distinction in the same degree programme.

You are not required to meet the 65%+ average with a 70%+ dissertation results requirement with your most recent master's-level degree. It is possible to satisfy this requirement with a previous degree's results.

As the LSE is a world leading social sciences institution, in general, only candidates with a strong social sciences background are encouraged to apply.

As admission to the department's PhD programmes is extremely competitive, meeting the minimum entry requirement for our programmes does not guarantee acceptance.

Can I apply if I'm not from a 'traditional' background?

Yes. The admissions process considers all applications holistically. This means that you're welcome to apply if your academic qualifications don't quite meet the stated entry requirements, or if you're from a professional background and feel you can meet the entry requirements via relevant professional experience.

We also encourage research projects which will expand and diversify the research profile of the Department. As a result, we are especially seeking to support applications from UK and BAME students.

Where the admissions standards for qualifications state 'taught master's degree (or equivalent)', what does this mean?

This means that your previous qualifications and/or professional experience are of a comparable standard and syllabus to a taught master's degree featuring an independent research component.

What level of English language proficiency do I need to demonstrate to be eligible to study with the Department?

Information on the LSE's English language requirements can be found [here](#).

Please note: The Department has no role in administering the language requirements system. If you have questions about the language requirements, please [contact Graduate Admissions](#).

Applying – research proposals and other supporting documents

Will you consider my application without a research proposal?

No, applications without a research proposal will not be considered.

Will you recommend a research topic to me?

We think it's best that our applicants' decisions about what they want to study are based on their own commitment to and interest in a particular research topic.

Does the Department provide example research proposals?

No. When producing your research proposal, you should follow [the School's guidance for production of application documents](#).

What guidance does the Department provide on research proposals?

The School provides detailed guidance about research proposals [here](#). This guidance covers all applicants, including MSc applicants seeking ESRC 1+3 funding. Applicants are required to follow the word limits set out on the School-level guidance page, and the department does not require applicants to address specific topics.

In general, your research proposal should be an indication of your research interests, how you developed them, and how you intend to pursue them. We recognise that your research interests will continue to develop while you complete our taught courses. Accordingly, if you are admitted to one of our programmes, your research proposal will be considered a 'living document' throughout your time with the Department, and not a fully binding commitment. Expectations for ESRC 1+3 applicants are the same, except that your application will be considered in light of the fact that you are earlier in your developmental trajectory than a direct entry applicant.

How can I find out whether my research interests are similar to the Department's?

Information on the Department's research interests can be found on the [department's research page](#).

How do your MPhil/PhD programmes fit within the Department's research themes?

As a research unit, the Department is split into three clusters. Each of our MPhil/PhD programmes is associated with one of our research clusters.

1. Economic Geography research cluster
 - a. MPhil/PhD Economic Geography
2. Environmental Economics and Policy research cluster (EEP)
 - a. MPhil/PhD Environmental Economics
 - b. MPhil/PhD Environmental Policy and Development
3. Urbanisation, Policy and Development (UPD)
 - a. MPhil/PhD Human Geography and Urban Studies
 - b. MPhil/PhD Regional and Urban Planning Studies.

For each programme, the Department appoints a Doctoral Programme Director (DPD). Doctoral Programme Directors are responsible for their individual programme, and they meet to discuss matters which affect all the Department's PhD students. As the Department of Geography and Environment is slightly unusual in having five MPhil/PhD programmes, to ensure coherency, consistency and cohesion, the department also appoints a Director of Doctoral Studies, who operates in an oversight capacity in relation to the Department's doctoral research programmes.

Applying – contacting faculty

Can I contact members of the Department to discuss my research before submitting my application?

Yes. However, when contacting our faculty, please remember that as they are world-leading academics they tend to be very busy and receive many requests for support. Consequently, we can't promise that our faculty will respond to your emails.

Can I ask a faculty member to recommend a research topic for me?

As doctoral degrees are a demanding and long-term commitment, we think it's best that our applicants' decisions about what they want to study are based on their own commitment to and interest in a particular research topic. Accordingly, we ask that you don't do this.

Do I need to get a faculty member to agree to supervise my PhD before I submit my application?

We welcome applications from prospective students without a prior connection to the department, so we do not require candidates to secure supervision prior to applying. Additionally, we do not require applicants to work on their research proposal with a faculty member before applying. We ask that you refrain from requesting that the Department circulate your research proposal and/or CV, as this is not procedurally necessary.

Is it okay to send a generic email to lots of the Department's faculty members?

You should always tailor the content of your email to the intended recipient. You're much more likely to receive a response if your email specifically says why you think the person you're contacting should be interested in supervising your project, and why your proposed research would fit within the Department's research environment. Accordingly, before emailing anyone, we recommend that you look through our faculty's [departmental profile pages](#), and look through the [Department's research information pages](#).

How long should I wait before chasing a faculty member for a response? Is it okay to chase a faculty member for a response more than once?

We recommend waiting at least a full working week, and preferably two. We also recommend that you do not chase a faculty member for a response more than once.

What does it mean if I email a faculty member and receive a response from geog.phd@lse.ac.uk?

This means that the faculty member you emailed has asked the PhD Programmes Coordinator to respond on their behalf. There are many reasons why a member of faculty might do this, so this shouldn't dishearten you or stop you from applying to study with us. However, it does mean that our faculty member has chosen not to respond to you. As such, we ask that you don't chase faculty members for a response if this happens.

How should I address faculty when I write to them (i.e. should I call them Professor, or Doctor, or by their first name?)

When you first write to a member of our faculty, you should always address them by their title, i.e 'Dear Professor [Surname]'. You can find our faculty's titles by looking at their [personal webpages](#). If the faculty member you want to reach out to is described as 'Professor of [subject area]', you should address them as 'Professor [Surname]'. If their webpage describes them as an 'Associate Professor' or an 'Assistant Professor', you should refer to them as 'Doctor [Surname]'.

If one of our faculty write back to you, please pay attention to how they sign their name. If they sign their email as 'Professor [Surname]' or 'Doctor [Surname]', you should continue to address them in that way. If they sign off their email with their first name, then it's probably okay to address them in your next email as 'Dear [first name]'.

Please remember that the above are not hard and fast rules, and you should always pay attention to the tone of our faculty's emails.

Applying – what happens after you press ‘submit’

What happens before the Department receives my application?

Before your application is received by the Department of your first-choice programme, the School's Graduate Admissions Office conducts basic checks to ensure that you have included all the required documents with your application.

Please note: the Department will not receive your application until you have supplied all of the required documents and the School has received your references. Accordingly, once you have submitted your application, it is important that you ensure your referees respond to our reference requests promptly. Applications released to the Department *after* the release deadline will not be considered for funding.

It is also important for applicants to understand that applications are considered in series at the LSE, not in parallel. This means that second-choice programme applications are only released to the relevant selectors if their 1st choice programme rejects their application, after that decision has been made. To understand the implication of this, please see above, in the section entitled '[Does the order in which I rank my programme choices matter?](#)'.

How will the Department assess my application?

Once the Department receives your application, relevant academic staff who may be interested in supervising your research will consider your application. Your application will be considered in relation to the following broad criteria:

- a) Do your qualifications and experience meet the expected standard?
- b) Does your research proposal have the potential to produce research of a sufficiently high calibre?
- c) Do your research interests align with those of the department/prospective supervisors?*
- d) Will the department be able to accommodate you?

* It is particularly important that applicants understand how important it is for their research interests to fit with [those of the department](#). The reasons for this are as follows:

- Our programmes tend to have distinctive methodological focuses, described on their respective [prospectus pages](#). If, for example, you submit a physical geographic research proposal, we will not be able to supervise you as we specialise in human geographic research. Similarly, if your research proposal is inconsistent with the methodological focus of your chosen programme, you are unlikely to be successful.
- Our faculty's research and teaching commitments, and the School's rules, mean that they can only commit to supervising a limited number of research students at any given time. This means that they are likely to favour applications whose proposed research is most interesting to them, and which they feel most competent to supervise.

If our faculty consider that your application meets all the above criteria, they will recommend to the selector that you be interviewed. If your application does not meet all the above criteria, your application will be rejected.

What happens in the interview stage?

Interview invitations are sent directly by the faculty members who will be conducting your interview. If you are invited to interview, this means that the Department is strongly considering you as a potential candidate for doctoral study. All potential candidates for our MPhil/PhD programmes are interviewed regardless of any previous association with potential supervisors, the Department, or the LSE. Interviews will generally be conducted remotely, by telephone or VOIP. Interviews normally last 20-30 minutes, but may last longer than this. Interviews are not recorded, but your interviewers are required to record their assessment of your interview using an interview record form. All interviews will conform to the expectations described [here](#).

Please note: The interview process is not meant to be intimidating, however it is supposed to be rigorous and challenging. Your interviewers will not be trying to catch you out or trip you up! Rather, this is an opportunity for you to discuss your motivation for doctoral study, your academic and professional background, and your research proposal with your interviewers. This is also a chance for you to ask questions about the next stages of the application process, the MPhil/PhD programme to which you have applied, and the demands of doctoral study more generally.

What happens after the interview stage?

After your interview has been completed, your interviewers will make a recommendation to the selector about whether you should be offered you a place to study with the Department. This recommendation is taken very seriously, but the final offer/reject decision rests with the selector, not your interviewers. If the Department decides to offer you a place, the Graduate Admissions Office will produce and send formal offer documentation to you. If your application is unsuccessful, you will be informed of the outcome by the Graduate Admissions Office.

All candidates who are offered a place to study with the Department are also considered for all funding opportunities offered by the School for which they are eligible, as described in the section entitled '[How does the funding process work in the Department of Geography & Environment?](#)'.

Applying – other common questions

Will my financial status play any role in the selection process?

Admissions decisions are based on academic merit alone, without any reference to an applicant's financial situation. Applicants who can fund themselves or succeed in securing a scholarship or sponsorship from any source will be considered for entry to the programme in the same way as applicants who have no funding in place. The same procedures and standards apply to all applicants competing for entry.

Can I apply to one of your MPhil/PhD programmes while I'm still studying for my master's/before my master's results are released?

Yes, as long as you will be able to provide official proof of your final degree results by the time you are required to register for the programme.

I can't afford to pay the administrative fee to apply. Can this be waived?

Applicants can apply for an administrative fee waiver. Further information on this can be found [here](#).

Please note: The waiver decision process is managed by the Graduate Admissions Office, not the Department. For questions about this process, please [contact the Graduate Admissions Office](#).

How can I get help with the application system?

Questions about the mechanics of the [application process](#) should be submitted to LSE's Graduate Admissions Office via the [online enquiries system](#), which includes an option to submit a written enquiry. Enquiries for this should not be sent to the Department.

Before contacting the Admissions Office, please check to see if the information you are looking for can be found on the LSE's [graduate study webpage](#) and the School's [general admission enquiries page](#). You can also [track your application](#) and find out how to carry out the most common tasks online using the admissions service's '[How do I...](#)' page.

If I am unsuccessful, will the Department provide feedback on my application?

Applications rejected **without** interview: In general, if an application is rejected after initial consideration, our academic staff will indicate briefly via the admissions system why it has been rejected. This information can be requested from the Graduate Admissions Office. The Department cannot provide this to you.

Applications rejected **after** interview: You are free to enquire with your interviewers about their reasons for deciding not to offer you a place to study with the Department, and you are welcome to ask the Graduate Admissions Office for a copy of your interview record form. However, please note our academic staff are under no obligation to provide feedback.

The Funding Process

How do I apply for funding?

There is no separate application for funding. Funding is allocated by nomination and you will automatically be considered for any awards you are eligible for, provided the Department receives your application by the deadline.

How does the funding process work in the Department of Geography and Environment?

Decisions about School-administered funding opportunities are made by the Department of Geography and Environment (G&E) Research Degrees Funding Panel ('the Department panel'). The Department panel is composed of the Department's five Programme Directors, the G&E Director of Doctoral Studies and the Deputy Director of Doctoral Studies.

Scholarships not awarded by the department panel are as follows:

- The School's [Analysing and Challenging Inequalities](#) scholarships, which are awarded based on nominations by departments to a bespoke panel associated with the LSE's International Inequalities Institute.
- [Scholarships awarded by the Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment](#) are awarded by the Grantham Research Institute's scholarships committee, based on recommendations from departments.

As competition for admission is intense, and competition for scholarships is even more intense, the Department cannot provide School-administered funding to all offer-holders. Accordingly, all applicants should actively explore all potential sources of funding at all stages in their application, including before and during the LSE's funding consideration process.

How competitive is the scholarships/funding process?

The LSE doesn't publish School-wide information on funding-application success rates. However, for September 2019 and September 2020 entry, the Department of Geography and Environment received nearly 500 applications for doctoral study. Of those, only 26 (just over 5%) were subsequently admitted to our PhD programmes with a scholarship.

We don't say this to discourage anyone from applying. Rather, this is intended to encourage applicants to be realistic about their chances of securing School-administered funding, and to actively pursue all potential sources of funding at all stages of the admissions process.

If I'm offered a place on a PhD programme but I'm not awarded funding by the School, will I be allowed to register and apply for funding as a continuing student?

Certain subject-specific, externally funded, School-administered scholarships require the Department to consider applications from continuing students. However, the Department will only consider continuing students if no suitable candidates are discovered via the admissions process. Very few of these scholarships exist. Where they exist, they are generally only awarded once every four years. To date, the Department has also never awarded a scholarship to a continuing student. Accordingly, we strongly discourage applicants from registering in the hopes of securing funding from the School as a continuing student.

If I'm not awarded funding by the School, will the Department help me to find funding elsewhere?

In general, it is offer-holders' own responsibility to seek out funding to support their studies. Consequently, the Department is not able to seek out funding from external sources on offer holders' behalf. However, if you do find a funding opportunity that you would like to apply for, if you have already been offered a place to study on one of our programmes, your prospective supervisors will generally be willing to consider supporting your application. If you would like to ask for support in making an application, please contact your prospective supervisors directly.

Beyond the School administered scholarships mentioned at the top of this page, the following organisations have previously supported our students:

- [The Anandamahidol Foundation](#)
- [The Arts Promotion Centre Finland](#)
- [Becas Chile](#)
- [The Brazilian Government](#)
- [The Centre for European Policy Studies](#)
- [The China Scholarship Council](#)
- [The Commonwealth Scholarships Scheme](#)
- [CONACYT \(Government of Mexico scholarships\)](#)
- [The Indonesia Endowment Fund for Education](#)
- [The Palestinian Agricultural Relief Committee](#)
- [The Peruvian Ministry of Education](#)
- [The Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology](#)

You may also wish to check the following webpages for funding opportunities:

- The LSE Financial Support Office's list of [external funding providers](#)
- [The Alternative Guide to Postgraduate Funding](#)
- [FindaPhD – funding page](#)

Please note: In general, the Department will only support applications to third-party funding bodies if applicants have already been offered a place to study on one of the Department's MPhil/PhD programmes. Accordingly, if you are planning to apply to a third party-funding body, please first apply to the Department. As the Department's admissions processes will usually take at least one month from the point at which you submit your application to the School and can take six weeks or longer during periods of peak business, please make sure that you apply for a place to study with us in plenty of time to accommodate any external funding body deadlines.

On Course

How long will I have to complete the PhD programme?

The maximum period of full-time registration is four years. This means you are required to submit your thesis within four years.

Can I apply to be a part-time student?

The Department expects all students to undertake the taught phase their MPhil/PhD studies full time without exceptions. Therefore, the Department will not consider applicants for part-time study at the point of admission.

Do you offer distance learning or online PhDs?

All students are required to be in regular attendance at the School so that they can attend courses, supervision meetings and other seminars as required by their programme. Periods of study away from the School can be undertaken, but require departmental and central approval. Applicants should make plans, on this basis, to study in London.

Can I skip the taught phase of the programme if I already have a relevant taught master's degree?

The Department does not allow students to skip the taught phase of their doctoral studies.

Our programmes aim to produce world class researchers in the field. In order for students to be able to undertake research at this level, the department believes that students must have a sufficient range of 'tools' to do so. It therefore requires that its students complete, and pass to the required standard, a range of courses to provide them with these tools and techniques that can be applied in their research.

Please note: Students who have graduated with a relevant taught master's degree from the Department of Geography & Environment cannot repeat courses they have already taken as part of their master's programme. These students are expected to fulfil the taught phase of their PhD programme by taking other courses.

When will I start my programme?

Registration for all Geography & Environment MPhil/PhD programmes will start in late September.

The only exception is for students taking EC400, 'Introductory Course in Mathematics and Statistics'. EC400 is a pre-sessional course run by the Department of Economics, which is a pre-requisite for many graduate level courses run by the Department of Economics. If you take EC400, you will be required to register earlier. Early registration for EC400 usually takes place in mid-late August.

EC400 is mandatory for students on the MPhil/PhD Environmental Economics, and optional for students on the MPhil/PhD in Economic Geography.

Will the Department allow me to have supervisors from another department or university?

The Department's rules for supervision are as follows:

- (i) Students must have two supervisors.
- (ii) At least one supervisor must be either an Associate Professor or a full Professor employed by the Department of Geography & Environment. Staff employed by the Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment do not count for the purposes of this rule.
- (iii) Other supervisors can be from elsewhere within the School.
- (iv) External supervision (i.e. supervision by faculty from outside the LSE) will normally only be permitted where suitable supervision cannot be found within the LSE. This is normally only permitted where a supervisor leaves the School mid-way through a student's time with the Department, and not at the point of admission. If your research proposal cannot be supervised within the School at the point at which you apply, you are highly unlikely to be offered a place to study with the Department.

Please note: it is the Department's responsibility to ensure that each student receives appropriate supervision. Consequently, it is ultimately for the Department to determine which supervisors should be allocated to each student.

ESRC 1+3 – studentships for prospective MSc applicants

How do I apply to be considered for the 1+3 route?

You should apply for the relevant MSc programme and include a research proposal for the PhD element of the programme. You must also indicate your wish to be considered for 1+3 funding in your personal statement.

For guidance on the research proposal, please visit the School's [supporting documents page](#).

Please note: Applications for the ESRC 1+3 funding stream will only be considered if they are received by the Department by the funding deadline.

Can I apply for a 1+3 programme if I'm self-funded?

1+3 scholarships are only offered by the ESRC. It is therefore not possible to apply for 1+3 admission on a self-funded or externally funded basis.

I received an offer for the MSc programme, but my offer doesn't say anything about 1+3. Does this mean I was unsuccessful for the PhD?

Admissions and funding decisions are made separately and at different times. If you meet the funding deadline and receive an offer for the MSc programme, your application will be considered for the 1+3 funding route.

Please note: Due to the volume of applications, we are only able to contact successful nominees directly. Updates on the funding process will therefore be communicated [here](#).

Visiting Research Student (VRS) Scheme

How do I apply to become a visiting research student?

To apply as a visiting research student, you apply in the same way as for our MPhil/PhD programmes, with the same entry criteria. Further information on our entry requirements can be found on our [prospectus pages](#).

Can I apply for LSE funding to support my studies as a visiting research student?

The School expects all visiting research students to fund their own studies while at the LSE. As such, the LSE does not offer financial support to visiting research students.

How long can I visit for?

The scheme allows research students from other universities to spend up to 3 terms in the Department of Geography & Environment. Standard offers will be from September for three terms. If you intend to visit on 'non-standard' dates, please include the intended start and end dates of your visit in your statement of academic purpose.

Can I take any courses as a visiting research student?

Visiting research students do not have access to any LSE taught courses, however they are welcome to attend and participate in doctoral workshops and research seminars.