Pre-Mock Interview Questionnaire

Doctoral Research Interview Preparation

Type in the shaded boxes. Save your completed PDF before returning it to your WSA counsellor.

Full name	
University	
Full course title	
Course start date	
Interview date, if known	
Interview time and time zone, if known	
Interview purpose	

Purpose of the interview

The university will assess your suitability for doctoral research and your ownership of the proposal. Prepare to explain its question, originality, literature, methods and feasibility, and defend your reasoning. Confirm the interview purpose from the invitation. If separate credibility or scholarship assessment is included, use PMIQ 08 or 06 alongside this research questionnaire.

How to prepare

For this WSA preparation stage, funding must have been evidenced and you must hold at least a conditional offer. This is WSA's stage requirement; follow your university's actual interview instructions. Send your counsellor the submitted proposal, offer, funding evidence and invitation. Review your references and prepare short notes in your own words. Use the podcasts at the end.

Before you begin

Check offer conditions and funding coverage. Practise unexpected questions without a script. Listen, answer directly, ask for clarification if needed and engage respectfully with challenge. Distinguish evidence, interpretation and uncertainty. Actual questions may differ.

Research proposal and design

01. Tell us about your academic background and research experience. Explain your own contribution to a previous project, what you learnt and why you are ready for a PhD now.

02. Explain your proposed research in plain language. State the main research question and aims, define the scope and explain why the project is manageable.

03. Why does the topic matter? Identify the gap using literature you have actually read. Explain your possible original contribution and what remains uncertain.

04. Which studies or authors most influence your proposal? Explain one argument you support and one you question, using specific evidence. Identify the works accurately and explain how you found and checked them.

05. What concepts or theoretical framework will guide the research? Define key terms in your own words and explain how the framework will shape your analysis. Consider an alternative.

06. Which methods will you use and why do they fit the question? Explain how you would carry out one method, what it can establish and why you chose it over an alternative.

07. What data, sources or participants do you need? Explain selection, access and analysis. What access have you confirmed? How would you assess reliability, bias and gaps in the evidence?

08. What ethical issues could arise? Explain how you would address consent where relevant, confidentiality, sensitive material, secure handling of data and any required approvals. Identify where you would seek guidance.

09. What are the main limitations and risks? If access, recruitment or your method failed, what realistic alternative would preserve a viable research question? Explain what the study cannot claim.

Research ownership and doctoral readiness

10. How will you organise the research period? Set out realistic stages and milestones for training, access, data collection or source work, analysis and writing. Allow for delays and explain how you would review progress.

11. How did you develop and write the proposal? Explain one significant decision or revision, the evidence behind it and how your thinking changed. Distinguish your work from help received.

12. What assistance or tools, including AI if any, did you use? Explain their role, how you verified claims and references and how you checked the university's requirements. Be ready to explain every part of the submitted proposal yourself.

13. If the panel challenged your central assumption, interpretation or method, how would you respond? Explain what evidence could change your view and how you would assess a suggested alternative.

14. Why this university and research programme? Give one strength of the department and one specific reason the proposed supervisor, research group or facilities suit your project. Explain how these support your research and name the university sources you used.

15. Which research skills do you have and which need development? Give a practical training plan. Explain how you would manage competing deadlines, work independently and use supervision and critical feedback.

16. What are your offer conditions and funding arrangements? Explain the source, evidence, duration and coverage of funds for tuition, research, living costs and accommodation. Identify gaps and distinguish confirmed support from pending applications.

17. What role or work do you intend to pursue after the PhD? Explain its responsibilities, realistic next steps and how the research and doctoral skills support it. Distinguish aspirations from confirmed opportunities.

18. What two questions would you like to ask about supervision, research training, access, facilities, progress reviews or support?

19. Where is your university ranked, if listed? Give the source and year. You may also mention a relevant subject or course ranking. Explain one limitation and how the ranking informed your choice alongside research fit.

20. Which credible research degree opportunities, departments or supervisors did you consider in your home country, if any? Explain your comparison honestly, without inventing alternatives.

21. How would you manage your physical health, mental wellbeing and study workload while studying? Describe practical habits, sources of support and what you would do if you needed help. You do not need to disclose private medical information.

22. Do you expect international travel for research to increase or decrease? Explain how this could affect fieldwork, archives, international collaboration and your own research design.

23. If the panel asks an unexpected question outside your proposal, how would you reason from what you know, acknowledge uncertainty and respond to challenge?

Ranking references (check the latest edition and whether your institution is listed):
QS World University Rankings: https://www.topuniversities.com/world-university-rankings
Times Higher Education World University Rankings:
https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings

Podcasts to use before your mock interview

Open each link in the WSA Student Support Library. Listen to the podcast and read or download its summary before completing this questionnaire. Make a note of anything you would like to discuss with your counsellor.

WSA 026 UK University Credibility Interview

https://www.worldstudentadvisors.com/student-support-library/uk-university-credibility-interview

Use the general advice on clear answers alongside your PhD invitation. Prepare separately to defend your proposal, literature and methods; this podcast does not replace research interview preparation.

WSA 003 PhD Support

https://www.worldstudentadvisors.com/student-support-library/phd-support

Use this to prepare for a discussion of your research plans, motivation for doctoral study and readiness for independent research.

WSA 002 Cost of Studying Abroad

https://www.worldstudentadvisors.com/student-support-library/cost-of-studying-abroad

Check tuition fees, research expenses and living costs across the full PhD period. Explain the source, duration and coverage of your confirmed funding.

Bring the exact proposal submitted to the university. Check that every reference is real and that you can explain the ideas, choices and limitations in your own words.