Department of Biological Sciences

Guidance for prospective PhD students

These guidelines provide an overview of the PhD application process. If you have any queries please contact the Research Office Team Leader (Tim Hoe) in the first instance.

How long does it take to study for a PhD?

Full time
Full time PhD students must submit their thesis within 4 years of enrolment. The usual period of study for a full time PhD is between 3 and 4 years.

Part time
Part time PhD students must submit their thesis within a maximum of 7 years of enrolment. PhD students who are studying part time usually aim to complete their thesis within 4 or 5 years. Before applying to study for a PhD part time please consider which times you would be available during the week, e.g. whole days for 3 days each week or half days throughout the week as this may determine whether a lab-based project will be possible.

Please note
It is not usually possible for us to consider part time applications from overseas applicants.

PhD studentships
Our research attracts a wide range of funding and each year we invite candidates to apply for PhD studentships which are awarded on a competitive basis. Information about PhD studentships is provided on the Department of Biological Sciences website. Note that funded PhD studentships have deadlines for application, are advertised early in the calendar year and generally are for full time students.

Applicants for PhD studentships must be able to satisfy specific eligibility requirements in relation to qualifications and residency, and these will be specified on the relevant webpages and adverts. If you apply for a PhD studentship it is important that you follow the instructions for applicants carefully.

Successful candidates for PhD studentships are usually able to demonstrate that they have excellent skills and qualifications in relation to the proposed PhD research and are usually able to demonstrate an existing commitment to research.

If you are applying for an external studentship or scholarship, or if you have already secured funding from a studentship or scholarship please contact the Research Office Team Leader to discuss your application.

Funding your own PhD studies
The usual study periods for full time and part time PhD students are outlined above and the cost of tuition fees are available on the Birkbeck Prospectus. As part of the application process we ask all applicants to consider how they intend to fund their living expenses and tuition fees. Full time applicants should be aware that in addition to tuition fees, funding of at least £12,000 per year will be required to cover living costs including accommodation, food, and local travel within London.

http://www.bbk.ac.uk/biology
Identifying a potential PhD research area and supervisor

Information about the research areas of academic staff is available on the departmental website. If you have already identified a potential PhD supervisor and have discussed potential research projects with them, please include an agreed research proposal when you submit your application.

However, if you require assistance in identifying a potential supervisor within the department you must identify up to 3 academic staff that you are interested in working with, and highlight which of their research areas particularly interest you. You must include this information in your personal statement on the application form so that your details can be forwarded to the relevant academic staff. Please note: the PhD Graduate Committee are unable to consider applications for PhD study until a research project and supervisor have been identified.

The application process for research students

Before applying you should explore your opportunities including:

- Whether you meet the entry requirements for PhD study within the department of Biological Sciences. Entry requirements are available on the Birkbeck prospectus. (Note that our PhD students are initially enrolled as MPhil students).
- Whether you would like to pursue your PhD studies full time or part time
- The research area you are particularly interested in
- How you plan to fund your PhD studies
- Eligibility requirements for any PhD studentships you intend to apply for

How to apply: you will need to submit an online postgraduate application form, available on the Birkbeck prospectus. When you complete the application form please refer to the guidance below.

Completing the online application form

In the 'Supporting Statement' section
Provide details of your proposed supervisor and research project. If you have not yet identified a potential supervisor you can include the names of up to 3 academic staff within the department who are carrying out research in areas that you are interested in, and identify which of their research areas particularly interest you.

In the 'Finance' section
If you are applying for one of the PhD studentships that we have available please state this here. If you are applying for an external source of funding (e.g. Science without Borders, Commonwealth Scholarships) please state this here.

Proposed start date
Please include the date you are seeking to begin your PhD studies. PhD students may begin their PhD studies at the start of the Autumn Term or at the beginning of the Spring Term each year.

References
You must include details of your referees and ask them to provide their confidential references

The PhD Graduate Committee will consider your completed application. If you are invited for an interview you should be prepared to discuss your suitability for PhD studies in general as well as your interest in your chosen subject. Interviews last up to 30 minutes and are usually carried out by 3 members of the committee. Confidential references will be required before a decision is made about whether to invite you to attend a PhD interview.

http://www.bbk.ac.uk/biology
### Frequently asked questions

**Within which research areas can I study for a PhD?**

The particular research strengths of the department are summarised by the following key areas of research. A list of academic staff working in these areas is available [here](http://www.bbk.ac.uk/biology).

- Structural biology, Microbiology, Computational biology, Chemical biology, Cell biology, Biophysics, Biology (organismal)

**How much does it cost to live in London?**

Funding of at least £12,000 per year will be required to cover living costs including accommodation, food, and local travel within London. You may find the following websites useful when assessing your expected costs:

- [http://www.bbk.ac.uk/prospective/international/fees-money-and-scholarships/living-costs](http://www.bbk.ac.uk/prospective/international/fees-money-and-scholarships/living-costs)
- [http://housing.london.ac.uk/cms/home/](http://housing.london.ac.uk/cms/home/)
- [http://housing.london.ac.uk/cms/about/london-student-housing-guide-pdfs/](http://housing.london.ac.uk/cms/about/london-student-housing-guide-pdfs/)
- [http://www.studenthousing.lon.ac.uk/](http://www.studenthousing.lon.ac.uk/)

**Is it possible to study specifically for an MPhil?**

No, but at present all students are initially registered as MPhil and transfer to a PhD degree is dependent on a formal assessment of their progress, usually in the second year of studies for full time students.

**When will I know if my application has been successful?**

Unfortunately we are not able to provide feedback to individual students who are unsuccessful in applying for a PhD due to the volume of applications that we receive. In the case of applications for PhD studentships invitations to attend interview are usually sent to those who are successful in being shortlisted within about 2 weeks of the closing date for applications.

**How will I be assessed as a PhD student?**

Details of the assessment process will be provided at the beginning of your studies and will include a schedule of targets in order for you to submit your thesis within a maximum of 4 years full time study or 7 years for part time study. Details about current PhD assessment are available [here](http://www.bbk.ac.uk/biology). PhD students are assigned a Thesis Committee which includes a principal supervisor, a second supervisor and a thesis chair. Your progress as a research student will be assessed through a combination of written assignments, oral and poster presentations, vivas and reports from your thesis committee.

**Queries relating to studentships**

**How can I tell whether I am eligible?**

Eligibility requirements vary depending on the source of funding. Please check the specific eligibility requirements for the [PhD studentship](http://www.bbk.ac.uk/biology) you are interested in.

**Can EU students apply for Research Council funded studentships (e.g. MRC or BBSRC) if they have not lived in the UK for 3 years prior to beginning their PhD studies?**

Yes but EU students in this situation will be eligible for a fees-only studentship only. Fees only studentships provide course fees but do not include a stipend or travel and conference funds. Potential applicants in this situation are encouraged to apply as there are sometimes alternative sources of funding for competitive students.