

## How to apply for a PhD in History

### Guidance notes for enquirers

These informal guidelines are intended to help you submit a proposal to study for a PhD in History at Kingston. We appreciate that drawing up a proposal is not easy at this stage, before you have undertaken detailed research in your topic. What we are looking for is evidence that you have reflected on this topic, have knowledge of the relevant literature, and considered the approach that you will be taking, for example, whether you will be researching new source material – and if so whether that will be primarily based on unpublished archives or printed documents, developing a new methodology to re-evaluate a historical problem, or a combination of these methods. This means that your proposal needs to be well-written, with a coherent plan based on knowledge of the area, and this requires careful preparation.

The proposal will obviously be a preliminary statement of the research and will almost certainly undergo subsequent modification. Its purpose is to enable us to decide whether we have the specialist expertise to supervise the topic, to evaluate its academic viability and importance and to assess your commitment and enthusiasm. If you are invited to an interview, the proposal will form the basis of our discussion. It is important, therefore to take the time to prepare it as thoroughly as possible. There are a number of useful guides to doctoral research and thesis writing which you may wish to consult before writing your proposal. These include:

- Estelle M. Phillips & D. S. Pugh, *How to get a PhD: A Handbook for Students and Their Supervisors* (Open University Press, 2000)
- Rowena Murray, *How to Write a Thesis* (Open University Press, 2000)
- Pat Cryer, *The Research Student's Guide to Success* (Open University Press, 2000)

### Structure and Content

Your proposal should be word-processed or typed, double-spaced and four-five sides of A4 paper in length. It should comprise the following elements:

- Introduction, describing the topic you intend to investigate
- Justification of your choice of topic in terms of its importance
- Relationship of your work to existing literature, and how it adds to current knowledge in this area
- Methodology, i.e your approach and any theoretical perspective you are considering adopting
- References to works cited and other relevant literature you have consulted.

The choice of topic is obviously very important. Before you apply you should look carefully at the areas of research expertise of the History Staff at Kingston. Does your proposal come into a field in which the History Department can offer research expertise?

The rationale for this research should demonstrate its originality with regard to existing work in the field. This means that the proposal should be able to engage in a critical analysis

of the relevant literature. What does this study aim to achieve? Does it investigate an area that has either not been examined before, or else only partially so? Is it challenging existing interpretations of the topic, or demonstrating that a different theoretical perspective can lead to new insights?

The methodology will vary according to the nature of the project. It is important to argue why the approach you have chosen is appropriate to your topic. The availability and accessibility of a sufficient body of primary source material is essential to the undertaking of a successful PhD in History. Is the material that you would use readily available in the UK? Increasingly a lot of primary material has been digitized, making it more readily accessible, so that is something that you should bear in mind. If the material necessary for your thesis is in a foreign archive how would you make arrangements and obtain funding to visit it? If it is in another language will you be able to read it? If it exists only in unpublished, handwritten form, do you have the necessary skills to decipher it? Also bear in mind that some source material might be difficult to access (for example in private hands and not made available to scholars) or unreliable.

The references should show a sound bibliographical knowledge of the topic, and presented in alphabetically by the authors' surname. It does not matter which referencing system you use (e.g. Harvard, Chicago, MHRA) so long as you are consistent.

A PhD thesis is an original piece of research intended to add to the existing body of knowledge in the field. At this early stage you will only be able to suggest ways in which your work will achieve this, but your proposal should convey your enthusiasm for the topic and confidence in your ability to complete it.

### **Further Information**

If we consider that your project is viable and we have the specialist knowledge to supervise it, then you will be asked to submit a formal application which enables us to check your qualifications, take up references, and possibly invite you to an interview. You can obtain further information from our website: <http://fass.kingston.ac.uk/socialscience>

We particularly recommend that you check the staff profile pages for a suitable supervisor with specialist knowledge in your area of interest. If you require additional information, or wish to submit a proposal, please contact:

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