

How to Apply for a Research Postgraduate Programme at Mary Immaculate College

First Steps

Before beginning the application process, you should have an idea of a research topic (or research area) that you would like to research. Essentially, your proposal should identify a question or problem that you will seek to address in your thesis. It could be that your thesis will address the fact that something has been overlooked or misunderstood. You may want to apply a new reading or interpretation in order to challenge or extend received readings or understandings. The process of identifying a topic will require you to read around your areas of interest and to talk to others to refine your ideas.

Identifying a Research Supervisor or Supervisors

When you have an idea of what you would like to research, you should contact a member of the academic staff in the relevant department. You can explore the research interests of faculty on the department's webpages. If you are unsure as to which member of faculty's research interests best match your chosen research topic, you should contact the Head of Department. The application process cannot proceed until a member of faculty has agreed to act as supervisor for your thesis and signed your Postgraduate Studies Application Higher Degrees by Research Form (RGS PGR20) to signal their support.

The Thesis Proposal

When a supervisor has been agreed, you should consult with them while drafting your thesis proposal.

The word limit of the PhD research proposal is between 3,000 and 4,000 words and the word limit of an MA by research proposal is up to 3,000 words. In both cases, this limit includes the bibliography.

The proposal will be evaluated on the basis of overall quality, clarity, originality, evidence of familiarity with the field and literature, relevance of the topic, focus, feasibility, referencing (in accordance with either the Harvard or Chicago Style of Referencing), and style (including syntax, grammar, and spelling).

Writing a Research Proposal

A working title – this is something that often changes as the research project progresses – the essential thing is that it is clear and informative.

Aims and objectives – be specific about precisely what you intend to look at and avoid vagaries and generalisations. Give examples, names and dates to stake out your research area.

Motivation – Why do you want to embark on research into this topic area? What do you hope to gain from the PhD experience, both personally and professionally? What skills and qualities do you possess that equip you to embark on this project?

Methodology – Essentially, what is your approach? What data-collection and analytical techniques will you use? Will you be looking at the topic through a particular theoretical lens? Will you be looking at manuscripts or listening to audio material, consulting archives or travelling abroad, using electronic resources or conducting interviews? If so, you need to outline this.

Substantive outline of the project (with scholarly references) – How will your thesis impose structure on your study? Will chapters be organised chronologically or thematically? If there is an element of comparison, will this take place within chapters or across them, or both? Will chapters constitute discrete discussions, or will they build progressively towards the argument?

Originality, relevance and outcomes of the project – How do you justify your project? What is your rationale for doing this research on this topic? Why does the research need to be done? Where does this project fit in relation to current literature and gaps in existing knowledge? Outline the possible benefits, impacts, or outcomes of your research for understanding, practice and policy. Provide key supporting references as evidence.

Ethical implications of your research (if applicable) – For those undertaking research involving live participants (for example, research involving surveying or interviewing) there will be ethical considerations to take into account and it is important to acknowledge them in your proposal. If possible, outline the ways in which you will adhere to ethical research practices.

Relevant bibliography – At this stage in your planning, what have you read and what do you think you will need to read in the course of your research? Of course, this bibliography is a starting point and will grow as your research progresses.

Academic Letters of Reference

While writing the thesis proposal, the applicant (in consultation with their supervisor/s) should decide on who their two academic referees will be and contact them, as copies of letters of reference must be included with the application. It is entirely appropriate for your proposed supervisor to act as referee.

Please note that both letters of reference must refer to the thesis topic / proposal, as well as the applicant's academic ability.

Departmental Review of Thesis Proposal

When both applicant and supervisor have agreed that the thesis proposal is ready for submission, it should be forwarded to the Head of Department for review. Head of Department must also sign the PGR Research Degree Application form to signal their approval. In cases where the Head of Department is also a proposed Research Supervisor, the Dean of Faculty must also sign the application form.

The Application Form

The applicant should complete a research postgraduate application form, available on-line [here](#). The application form must cite the thesis title, although the thesis proposal will accompany the form as a separate document.

Please ensure that all necessary signatures, including those of your supervisor and the head of department on the back page of the form, are sought *before* the form is returned to the RGS.

The Application Package

The application package should be sent by email to the Research and Graduate School (RGS), Mary Immaculate College. Email: rgso@mic.ul.ie

The application package should contain the following:

- Application Form (signed by Student, Supervisor/s and Head of Department)
- Thesis Proposal
- Two Academic Letters of Reference
- Academic Transcripts
- Proof of payment of application fee, (Realex email confirmation or TransferMate email confirmation for Non-EU applicants)
Click [here](#) to pay the EU application fee (€50)
Click [here](#) to pay the Non-EU application fee (€50)

Applications will only be accepted in either the Irish or English language. In order to facilitate evaluation by the Postgraduate Research Sub-Committee, those submitting Irish language applications may accompany them with an English language translation. Should an English translation not be provided by the applicant, Mary Immaculate College will provide a translation to the Postgraduate Research Sub-Committee. Please note that this additional processing step may take up to four weeks.

Next steps

Applications received by the Research & Graduate School (RGS) will be sent to the members of the Postgraduate Research Sub-Committee (PRSC). The PRSC meets regularly to consider applications and decide on the awarding of places. Following the PRSC meeting, the board's decision is forwarded to the applicant, supervisor/s and Head of Department. Formal letters of offer will subsequently be issued.