



PhD/MPhil Research Degree Application Guidance

If you wish to apply for a PhD or MPhil programme at Edinburgh College of Art please follow the below guidance.

1. Applying for PhD or MPhil

On the University of Edinburgh [Degree Finder](#) page you can navigate to the programme that you wish to apply to. You will find information on the programme, entry requirements, tuition fees etc on this page. Check the 'Application Deadline' and the 'How to Apply' information for the programme. Check that you meet the 'Entry Requirements' for the programme. Follow the 'Apply' links to understand the layout of the online application form at an early stage. You can follow this link without committing to an application.

General information on how to apply and what documents are required with your application can be found in the ['Applying – Your Information'](#) webpage.

You will be required to complete the online application form and upload relevant documents. The 'Programme' section of the online application form asks for a [personal statement](#). This should describe your suitability for and your expectations of a degree here with us. You are also asked to detail your qualifications and relevant prior experience, to give a summary of your proposed research project, and to name your proposed supervisors.

Documents required include:

- a copy of the [degree certificates](#) for the qualifications you hold
- a copy of the [academic transcripts](#) for the qualifications you hold, or interim transcript for any degree not yet completed,
- two [references](#) – at least one of which must be an academic reference, preferably relating to your most recent qualification,
- [certified translations](#) of any degree certificate, academic transcript or other relevant document not in English must be provided
- proof of meeting [English language entry requirements](#) must be provided by applicants, regardless of nationality of country of residence
- a [research proposal](#) which outlines your intended research topic (see guidance 2. below)
- some practice-based programmes may also require a portfolio (see guidance 3. below)
- some theory-based programmes may also require a writing sample (see guidance 4. below)

Once your application has been received by the University it will be processed by the Admissions team and will then be sent to the Selection Panel for review. If any essential documents are missing from your application the Admissions team will contact you about this. Applications without a research proposal will be classed as incomplete and cannot be reviewed by the Selection Panel until this is received.

Finding a Supervisor:

You should search for a potential supervisor for your research topic prior to submitting an application. Please refer to the University guidance on [how to find a research supervisor](#). Staff lists of Edinburgh College of Art staff can be found [here](#), and can be filtered by Academic Staff by individual School. Each member of staff has a profile page which gives a summary biography and research information along with their contact details.

It is recommended that you contact potential supervisors to discuss your research proposal and seek willingness to supervise. If you begin a dialogue with a potential supervisor before applying, they may ask to see your draft research proposal and they may offer you feedback. If they are willing to look at a further draft they may want to see how well you have understood and applied their advice. After this discussion if they have confirmed that your proposed research is within their expertise/supervisory remit and they are interested in working with you can list their name on your application as your proposed supervisor.

Your Principal Supervisor will normally be based in the Subject Area you are applying to. Assistant Supervisors can be based in the same subject area, or in the wider Edinburgh College of Art and University of Edinburgh.

The Selection Panel will consider the proposed supervisor you have named on your application and discuss your application with them and/or with other supervisors that may be relevant for your application.

Interview:

If the Selection Panel feel that your application is of the required quality and there is supervisory expertise available you will be invited to attend a short interview, normally with the Programme Director and/or the proposed supervisors, to discuss your application and research proposal. The interview will normally be online (eg via MS Teams) but can be in person where relevant.

2. Research Proposal Guidance (for all programmes)

A research proposal identifying the objectives and scope of the research and stages necessary for successful completion is a necessary and important part of your application. The proposal should indicate the nature of the outcome, for example whether it will be a full thesis, or a smaller thesis and body of creative work. In the case of practice-based research, applicants are advised to give an indication of the kind of creative work they intend to undertake, and how it will engage with and further the research aims and process.

Your research proposal is the key that allows staff to understand your intentions and readiness for a research degree. The best research proposals are developed through several drafts

The proposal may well later evolve and even change radically through the research process, but the initial proposal is required to help identify the particular research question(s) or areas of concern prompting this research and for staff to help identify suitable supervisory expertise if invited to interview.

The research proposal must be uploaded with your online application. Applications cannot be fully considered until an adequate research proposal has been received.

Word count – minimum 1,000 words, maximum 3,000 words.

We will assess your proposal against the following criteria:

- (a) **AIMS:** Identify a clear gap in existing knowledge. Succinctly and clearly explain your aims and objectives. Provide a title, identify a particular research question or area of concern prompting this research and convey its significance. For Art and Design programmes, please state if you are applying for a Theory Based or Practice Based PhD.
- (b) **CONTEXT:** Demonstrate excellent knowledge of the field and preparedness to undertake the proposed research project. Convey the intellectual, academic, artistic context of the research question(s) or concerns. Provide a bibliography of relevant scholarly literature and other key research resources.

- (c) **METHODS:** Your proposal must be original and innovative, substantively and/or methodologically. Explain the research processes and methods that you will apply. Indicate why they are the most appropriate and, if relevant, most innovative methods.
- (d) **IMPACT:** The potential impact of the research must be explicit, with realistic and appropriate plans for maximising the impact identified (e.g. engaging possible non-academic partnerships.) Explain how your research will have academic and artistic impact and/or social and economic impact.
- (e) **CLARITY:** Writing and presentation must be of the highest standard. Ensure that your proposal is succinct, clearly written and free of jargon (it should be readily understood by a non-expert).

Ensure that you do not write more the specified word limit. Context, methods and sources must be well thought out and clearly expressed in your Research Proposal.

Further information on how to write a research proposal can be found in the [How to Write a Good Research Proposal guide](#).

You may also provide a bibliography of relevant scholarly literature and other key research resources (not mandatory, no word count limit).

3. Programmes requiring a Portfolio

Applicants for the following programmes cannot be fully considered until an adequate portfolio has been received:

- PhD/MPhil Art (practice based research only)
- PhD/MPhil Design (practice based research only)
- PhD Creative Music Practice
- PhD Musical Composition
- PhD Architecture by Design

See programme specific guidance below:

- **PhD/MPhil Art** (practice based research only) *(not required for theory based research)*

Once you have submitted your application and have been sent your MyEd EASE login you will be able to upload your portfolio.

If you wish to undertake research by practice, please provide a portfolio of your work. This should include evidence of your recent creative work, whether personal, academic, or professional. Collaborative projects should be identified accordingly, and your role must be clearly defined.

Portfolio specifications: Submit one PDF document, maximum 10 pages, including documentation and / or images of your works. Include captions, such as title, artist, year, material and descriptions for each image.

For time-based material, submit up to eight minutes of material.

Video: High quality QuickTime .mov files only. Audio: high quality .mp3 or .aiff files only.

- **PhD/MPhil Design** (practice based research only) (*not required for theory based research*)

Once you have submitted your application and have been sent your MyEd EASE login you will be able to upload your portfolio.

If you wish to undertake research by practice, please also provide examples of your work. Applicants cannot be fully considered until an adequate portfolio has been received.

Your portfolio should be digital and either uploaded to your application, or available online in the form of your own website/blog (please provide the URL) or as a downloadable PDF file stored in the cloud.

The portfolio will indicate the research values and methods of your work to date, and should engage with and further the ideas outlined in your Research Proposal. It will support your application by providing strong corroborating evidence of independent research thinking and of high quality research output. Since it is a professional resource, the portfolio may also provide corroborating evidence of your professional experience.

- **PhD Creative Music Practice** (all applicants)

The portfolio should include three pieces of composition or examples of work related to your proposed field of study, and a short piece of written output to indicate the quality of your written language. This portfolio should convey the research values and methods of your work to date, and should be relatable to the ideas outlined in your proposal.

The portfolio should include representative examples of work undertaken as part of a formal programme of study, any work carried out while in practice, and self-initiated projects undertaken outside formal studies. As such, the portfolio can also provide corroborating evidence of your professional experience, as well as independent research thinking.

- **PhD Musical Composition** (all applicants)

The portfolio should include three to five substantial pieces of composition. It should indicate the values and methods of your work to date. The focus of the portfolio should be on your best and most recent work. It should include representative examples of work undertaken as part of a formal programme of study, any work carried out while in practice, and self-initiated projects undertaken outside formal studies.

The portfolio may also provide corroborating evidence of your professional experience, as well as independent creative thinking. It can contain music in any format, as scores, recordings or other creative content.

- **PhD Architecture by Design** (all applicants)

For this programme, the portfolio is one of the most important parts of the application, therefore, it is important to consider carefully how you assemble your portfolio.

Portfolios should be presented digitally as PDF documents. We will consider the presentation of a portfolio as an extension of design skills. We do recommend pages should be set up at A4 or A3 size, and organised in 'landscape' format. However, we will accept portfolios that vary from this if they conform to the memory limits. Make sure the portfolio is saved as a single PDF file (not as lots of separately saved pages). On the first page of the portfolio incorporate your name and UUN, and on the pages immediately following include a brief CV and your personal statement. Present your design work in an intelligent and understandable way. Give the titles of projects, and annotate drawings etc as required. Organise your work so that the selection panel can see and appreciate your development.

The focus of the portfolio should be on your best and most recent work. It should include representative examples of work undertaken as part of a formal programme of study, any work carried out while in practice, and self-initiated projects undertaken outside formal studies. As much as possible include a variety of work:

- KIND: architectural design, speculative projects, art, built, research;
- SCALE: furniture, buildings, urban design, regional studies;
- MEDIA: freehand drawings, technical drawings, computer drawings, models, sculptures, live performances, paintings, installations, video.

Do not limit your portfolio to presentation images alone. Include sketches, studies and working drawings. If possible, include examples from your design sketchbooks and notebooks. Notes and sketches play an important part in design thinking and are important for demonstrating your capacity to investigate and explore in the medium of design.

If you have had a longer period in practice or have a diverse educational, professional background, you should include work that would best show the wider scope and development of your career.

Make sure that drawings, photographs, etc appear at a high enough resolution to be clearly legible.

4. Programmes requiring a Writing Sample

Applicants for the following programmes should also provide a writing sample:

- PhD/MPhil Art (theory based and practiced based research)
- PhD/MPhil Architecture
- PhD/MPhil History of Art

We ask you to submit a writing sample with your application so that we can gain a clear sense of your research and communication skills. You should select a piece of written work – whether published or unpublished – that best represents your values and approach. This might include:

- An essay or conversation piece written for a critical audience.
- A selected chapter from your dissertation for a Masters degree (do not submit an entire dissertation.)
- A conference paper, or professional report, whether published or not.
- A published essay or journal article.

Please do not submit more than 10,000 words. A shorter, more focussed essay, or case study is usually a better indication of your abilities.

If you have any questions about submitting your application and the admissions process please do not hesitate to get in touch with the ECA Postgraduate Research Team
ecaresearchdegrees@ed.ac.uk