

## **The Research Degree application process**

In this note we explain the process by which a prospective research student applies for a place to study for a research degree in the Mathematics Department.

### ***Informal enquiries***

Many potential research students begin the process of applying for a research degree by making informal enquiries to a member of staff before making a formal application.

If a member of staff receives such an informal approach, it is strongly recommended that they respond in a polite and encouraging manner since, even if the potential student does not look a close match to the staff member involved, they may be of interest to other members of staff.

In all cases of such informal approaches it is recommended that:

1. The potential student is directed to the departmental web site for detailed information on how to apply.
2. The potential student is informed of the contact details of the DoGS, to whom they should be directed for any specific queries.
3. A formal application is encouraged (unless it is clear that this is inappropriate).

If it is felt useful to follow up an informal approach by arranging a phone call or meeting with a potential research student (either before or after a formal application has been made) then the DoGS should be informed that this is taking place.

### ***Making an application***

Every prospective research student needs to make a formal application before they can be considered for a place. Full details on how to make an application can be found in the *How to Apply* section of the departmental web site.

*Please draw the attention of any potential applicant to the questions that are asked on the departmental web site.* These are designed to assist the department in making decisions and applicants should answer them as part of the supporting statement on the application form.

### ***Handling applications***

The procedure for handling research degree applications is as follows.

1. Applications are submitted to the college. Shortly after an application has been received, a copy will be sent to the departmental office. It is then passed to the DoGS for an initial review. If the applicant is obviously unsuitable for a PhD, or if the subject area of interest to the applicant is outside of those topics in which

we have expertise, the DoGS will arrange for the application to be rejected immediately.

2. If the applicant appears to be a possible candidate as a research student, the DoGS will fill out a copy of the *Department of Mathematics, PhD Application* form (see the Appendix), adding in the names of potential supervisors for the student. This list of names will be based on knowledge of staff member research interests and the expressed interests of the student. As a general rule, the policy will be to try to ensure that no-one misses seeing the details of a student in whom he/she may be interested.
3. The departmental form and the application details will then be circulated to all listed members of staff. Members of staff should try to handle applications as promptly as possible; ideally it should not take more than 5-10 minutes to make a decision. All we are asking is for an indication of whether or not you would be willing to supervise the student. However, where relevant, comments would help – e.g. if you are very keen, or if you are only prepared to take the student if he/she gets a distinction in a masters degree that the student is currently taking.
4. When the form has completed circulation it should be returned to the DoGS. If there is interest from any members of staff then the DoGS will decide which staff member should take the application forward. If more than one staff member has expressed interest then the DoGS will make sure that there is agreement amongst all interested parties.
5. In rare cases, “taking the application forward” will just involve signing an offer form. More commonly, the applicant will need to be contacted for further discussion. This can take the form of a face to face meeting (if this is possible) but for the bulk of overseas applications it will require a telephone or internet call. If more than one staff member is interested in the applicant then it is appropriate to involve all of them in the discussions with the applicant.
6. The results of discussions with the applicant will be reported to the DoGS, who will then make a decision as to whether or not the student should be made an offer (possibly conditional on results for an ongoing course). If the student is to be made an offer, the DoGS will also decide who the supervisor and adviser will be; this will be a provisional decision, and can always be changed later. The DoGS will, of course, only allocate a student to a member of staff who has agreed to supervise! Joint supervision of students is also possible.
7. If a provisional decision to make an offer has been made, then, before making it official, the nominated supervisor will be asked to discuss the potential student with another member of staff. If both agree that it would be appropriate to take this individual as a research student, then they should sign the bottom of the *PhD Application* form (where indicated). Any Mathematics Department academic (including the DoGS) can perform this reviewing role.
8. Once a decision has been made, the DoGS will complete the paperwork and return it to the departmental office. The college will be informed, and an appropriate formal offer letter then will be sent to the applicant.
9. If the decision is positive then the DoGS will send an email directly to the applicant informing them that the department has agreed to recommend to the college that an offer be made (together with any conditions that we might request are made on the offer). The email sent to the applicant will contain the names of

the provisionally allocated supervisor and adviser. This email will also be copied to the provisional supervisor and adviser. This will enable members of staff to keep track of how many offers have been made to potential supervisees. Of course, not all students to whom offers are made will turn up; historically, the 'conversion ratio' is much less than 50%.

Note that, despite what it says on the college web pages, we are normally prepared to allow PhD students to start at any time during the year (although, for students that you are supervising, you can ask that extra conditions be imposed with regard to the start date – e.g. if you are going to be away at a certain time). Of course, starting at the beginning of the academic year is preferable for a number of reasons, including attending college and departmental induction events, attending training courses, and accessing taught BSc and MSc courses which may be of use to new students.

### ***Funding***

Funding opportunities for PhD students are generally very limited. Details of the funding options for research students can be found at:

<http://www.ma.rhul.ac.uk/phdfunding>

Details of how much internal (allocated the department) funding is available in a particular year should be obtained from the DoGS.

Details of fees for research degrees are available at:

<http://www.ma.rhul.ac.uk/phdfees>

### ***Record keeping***

The departmental office maintains a file on each PhD student application. The DoGS will also maintain a list of current offers, so that at any time it is possible to check the total number of offers made to prospective supervisees of a particular staff member, and also to review details of individual applications. If information is received regarding an applicant which you think should be kept with the application details, please send a copy to the DoGS.

Once a research students commences their study, this file will also be used to store copies of all relevant forms and documentation (quarterly reviews etc). Supervisors should feel free to consult such files.