

How to... Apply for a PhD

SECURING a PhD place is a highly complicated business. There is a bewildering array of options and, unlike undergraduate courses, little in the way of central organisation bodies to help cut through the complexity. Not only do you have to find both a topic that you will want to spend the next three years of your life investigating and a supervisor who you trust to guide you into the world of academia, but you also have to secure the money to allow you to do this. While this is hard enough for students with few ties to an area, it is particularly difficult for mature students with families who are unable to relocate and who may have been out of academia for a some time.

There is already a joint publication by the Psychology Postgraduate Affairs Group and the Society's (then) Scientific Affairs Board called *So You Want to Do a PhD?*

BY CHRIS BEARMAN

The purpose of the present article is to supplement this slightly out-of-date but excellent work, with a more up-to-date view from the perspective of mature students. An updated version of the booklet will, however, be published later this year.

The best way to start looking for a PhD place is to **contact psychology departments** in the local area (websites are often a useful starting point). They will be able to advise you on what topics you can study at the department, who is available to supervise projects and whether you should do a master's degree first (if you haven't already got one). Some departments have lists of topics that staff would like to supervise to help you decide. When choosing a topic and a supervisor, make sure that you pick a supervisor who you can get along with and an area that you are interested in. A PhD is a very immersive occupation and three years is a long time to do a boring project with someone that you cannot stand.

One of the important things is to **check whether the department is accredited to receive funding** (a studentship) from the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). Some universities are accredited for the '1+3' funding, where you get

funding to do a one-year master's course at the beginning of the PhD. Others are accredited just for the '+3' stage funding for the PhD, for those who have already got an accredited master's degree or other appropriate research training. It is possible to do either pathway in part-time or full-time mode.

The ESRC is the main research council for funding, although the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC), the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC) and the Medical Research Council (MRC) also fund some PhDs in psychology. To get funding from a research council you will either need to **put a research proposal together** with a supervisor and submit it by a deadline, or **be nominated to receive funding** by the department.

You should also **look out for CASE studentships**, a partnership between the department and industry. The department secures the funding and will appoint a student to do the research in the form of a PhD. Applying for a CASE studentship position is just like applying for a job and you will be in a good position if you already have some experience of the industry in question. These opportunities often pay above the standard research council studentship, but are not always well advertised.

WEBLINKS

www.esrc.ac.uk/esrccontent/postgradfunding/index.asp

www.bbsrc.ac.uk/funding/training/Welcome.html

www.mrc.ac.uk/index/funding/funding-personal_awards/funding-studentships.htm

www.epsrc.ac.uk/student/default.asp

www.welcome.ac.uk/en/1/biosfgcdpfunsumwps.html

www.psyag.co.uk

...work in progress...work in progress...work in progress...work in progress...

Awareness during paediatric surgery under general anaesthesia (Wellcome Trust, 2002–2005) £109,000

Jackie Andrade (Department of Psychology, University of Sheffield. E-mail: j.andrade@shef.ac.uk)

We are using a non-invasive procedure called the isolated forearm technique to measure the incidence of awareness

during paediatric surgery. We will test the influence of awareness on children's implicit memory for intra-operative stimuli and on their behaviour on recovery.

Sensitivity of visual imagery to irrelevant visual stimulation (ESRC, 2002–2003) £40,000

Jackie Andrade (see above) We will test the effects of

dynamic visual noise and other working memory interference tasks on a battery of imagery tasks designed to tap different aspects of mental image generation, storage and manipulation.

Suggestibility effects in children (ESRC, 2001–2003) £41,608

Robyn E. Holliday (Department of Psychology, University of Kent at Canterbury. E-mail: R.Holliday@ukc.ac.uk)

This research aims to quantify memory processes underlying suggestibility effects, and to evaluate and modify current

investigative interviewing protocols to minimise suggestibility effects in children.

Effects of bus driver stress on accident involvement (ESRC, DTI, Arriva Passenger Services Ltd, 2001–2005) £425,516

Lisa Dom (Human Factors, Cranfield University. E-mail: l.dom@cranfield.ac.uk)

As well as investigating the link between bus driver stress and accident involvement, we aim to reduce the risk of bus accidents via a bus driver simulator and a psychometric test to identify drivers at risk.

If you would like your recently funded research to feature in this column, contact Lisa Morrison on lismor@bps.org.uk with the funding body, amount awarded, period of funding, title, contact details and a clear summary of the project in under 50 words.

While research council funding is probably the best kind, there are other sources of funding available if there is not a department nearby that can get research council money, or if your funding proposal has been turned down. You could **apply for teaching studentships or graduate teaching assistant posts**, funded on the basis that you take on a certain amount of undergraduate teaching (usually seminars and workshops) while doing the PhDs. To apply for these you will normally need to submit a proposal (usually put together by the student and the potential supervisor) or attend an interview, or both. Also, research staff at universities get funding for their research and sometimes will employ a student research assistant to work on the project. Many research assistants work part-time on the funded project while doing a part-time PhD in a related area.

Other sources of funding may be available in the university. For example, you may be able to **apply for a bursary or a studentship**, usually awarded by

departments to their ex-undergraduate students. And if all else fails, you can always **self-fund**. Paying for a full-time PhD can be expensive. Doing it part-time can be hard because of the necessity of juggling PhD work and outside work; but this can be a good option, particularly if external responsibilities mean that you can't do a full-time PhD. A part-time PhD lasts between five and seven years, and your departmental status in terms of the resources you will receive can be anything from virtually a full-time student to a transient, so it is important to check what you get for your money.

The final piece of advice I can give is to **believe in yourself and persevere**. Every year hundreds of people are successful in securing a funded PhD place, so there is no reason why you shouldn't be one of them. Good luck!

■ *Chris Bearman is Chair of the Psychology Postgraduate Affairs Group (PsyPAG). E-mail: chair@psypag.co.uk.*

Like all sections of *The Psychologist*, 'Supporting research' depends on your contributions. We want your 'How to...' tips, questions, work in progress – anything related to the research process, from collaboration to dissemination, that would be of interest to our wide audience. E-mail Lisa Morrison on lismor@bps.org.uk.

RESEARCH NEWS

SHORT-TERM CONTRACTS INQUIRY

The Research Board (formerly the Scientific Affairs Board) has submitted evidence to the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee inquiry into short-term research contracts in science and engineering. Views were solicited from departments of psychology, in conjunction with the Association of Heads of Psychology Departments. This inquiry follows the Roberts Review of the supply of science skills, which identified a number of concerns about contract research (including the absence of a clear career structure, poor training and increasingly uncompetitive salaries). The inquiry is to investigate this further and to assess the implications this may have for researchers and their careers. It will also aim to identify the balance that needs to be achieved between contract and permanent research staff in university and research institutions, and adjust current and future policies accordingly.

RESEARCH COUNCILS UK LAUNCHED

In May 2002 Trade and Industry Secretary Patricia Hewitt launched Research Councils UK, a committee of heads of the seven research

councils. Its aim is to develop joint strategies for bids submitted for the spending review and to work towards greater consistency in practice and procedures for the submission of funding proposals from academics and researchers.

RAE OVERHAUL?

The Science and Technology Committee has published its report on the review of the RAE. It recommends a 'light touch' RAE to be held every six years, exemption of the top-rated departments and a fund to assist newer departments in developing a stronger research base. The report states that it is generally accepted that the RAE in its current form has 'had its day'. It also criticises HEFCE for not having anticipated the results of RAE 2001, and for its decision to target its limited budget on high-rated departments at the expense of the newer, developing ones. The committee calls for a significant increase in higher education research funding to be included in the 2002 spending review.

□ *The full report can be obtained online at: www.parliament.uk/commons/selcom/s&thome.htm.*

FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES listed by deadline

31 July 2002

British Occupational Health Foundation. Research grants. Contact: Brian Glazer. Tel: 020 7317 5898; fax: 020 7317 5899; e-mail: admin@bohfrf.org.uk

ESRC/EPSRC. People at the Centre of Communication and Information Technologies (Phase 2) outline applications. Contact: Tracy Davies (e-mail: tracy.davies@esrc.ac.uk) or Susan Blackwell (susan.Blackwell@esrc.ac.uk); website: www.esrc.ac.uk

1 August 2002

Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation. Grants for research on problems of violence, aggression and dominance. Contact: Program Officer. Tel: 00 1 212 644 4907; website: www.hfg.org

2 August 2002

Cancer Research UK. Education & Psychosocial Research Projects / Programme Grants. Contact: Dr Lynn Turner. Tel: 020 7317 5178; website: www.cancerresearchuk.org

1 September 2002

Leverhulme Trust. Research interchange grants; pilot project grants; large project grants; and standard project grants. Contact: J. Cater. Tel: 020 7822 6952, e-mail: jcater@leverhulme.org.uk, website: www.leverhulme.org.uk

MRC. Studentships and Fellowships. Contact: Margaret Bryant, Research Careers Manager. Tel: 020 7636 5422 ext 6249; e-mail: Margaret.Bryant@headoffice.mrc.ac.uk; website: www.mrc.ac.uk

National Institute of Mental Health. Affiliative Behaviours and HIV/STD Prevention and Alcohol and HIV/AIDS project grants. Contact: Extramural Outreach and Information Resources Office. Tel: 00 1 301 435 0714; fax: 00 1 301 480 8443; e-mail: asknih@odrockm1.od.nih.gov; website: www.nih.gov/grants/oer.htm

2 September 2002

Human Frontier Science Program. Long-term fellowship to support international co-operation in neuroscience. Contact: Grants Administrator. Tel: 00 33 388 215121, website: www.hfsp.org

PPP Foundation. Seminars and conferences grant programme. Tel: 020 7307 2622; e-mail: info@pppfoundation.org.uk

15 September 2002

NERC. Fellowships. Contact: Dr J.H. Baker. Tel: 01793 411564; website: www.nerc.ac.uk

open date schemes

See January and May issues.

A searchable database containing full details of the various national and international funding opportunities for psychologists can be found on the Society's website at www.bps.org.uk/careers/funding.cfm

If you are a grant-awarding body, please e-mail Lisa Morrison (lismor@bps.org.uk) with details of your scheme for inclusion in this column.