

HASS PhD studentship assessment criteria

Assessment Criteria for HASS PhD Studentships for Sept 2026 entry

These are highly competitive awards and successful candidates will be considered to have outstanding research potential and able to submit their thesis within the time frame of the funding/programme (full-time or part-time). These studentships are ranked on merit. The assessment criteria applies to the following awards, and can be adopted for departmental-specific awards also:

- HASS Studentships (Home and International)
- Global Majority Studentships
- Wolfson Postgraduate Scholarships in the Humanities
- Exeter administered AHRC studentships

Eligibility

1. Candidates must meet the fees status eligibility criteria for the studentship they apply to. Queries about eligibility for fee status can be directed to PGR Admissions.
2. Candidates must meet the relevant academic entry requirements for their selected degree programme.
3. Candidates must meet the English language proficiency requirements for entry into a MPhil/PhD programme – 2.1 BA and MA at Merit or international equivalent. Relevant professional experience can be taken into consideration. English language entry of IELTS 7.0 or equivalent overall, with 6.5 in writing and no less than 6.0 in any section.
4. The HASS Studentship awards are only available for new PhD students, starting in September 2026. Current PhD students and offer holders starting prior to September 2026 are not eligible for the funding and therefore applications from current PhD students will not be considered.

HASS Assessment Criteria:

Assessors are encouraged to bear in mind the Faculty's commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity in assessing applications. Assessors should have taken and be up to date with their mandatory training in Diversity and Inclusion in Higher Education, and are encouraged to have completed the Recruitment and Selection training.

- Excellence of the research proposal is our primary assessment criteria. In the interests of EDI, this is double-weighted (note that this does not affect the scoring range on the spreadsheet).
- The research proposal should demonstrate evidence of being feasible within the timeframe of the award/programme, and show evidence of ability to submit ideally within the funded three years (or part-time pro-rata equivalent).
- Successful candidates must have identified a strong and appropriate supervisor, and ideally, an excellent supervisory team – applicants are required to name at least one supervisor in their application (note that supervisor supporting statements are taken up after shortlisting, so reviewers are not asked to take account of these).
- Successful candidates should have a strong fit with departmental/Faculty research strengths and research cultures/environments.

HASS PhD studentship assessment criteria

- Successful candidates must show strong research potential and should show a strong or improving academic track record. This is evidenced through the research proposal, CV, transcripts, and references.

HASS Assessment Process

For each candidate, please complete one row of the relevant spreadsheet, scoring out of 10 against the four areas listed below. Note that you must use whole numbers between 0 and 10 for each column, data validation rules are in place on the spreadsheet. All calculations will be done once the data has been combined.

HASS Studentship Selection Criteria

A. RESEARCH PROPOSAL ASSESSMENT (Scored out of 10)

HASS is seeking to fund research projects that:

- clearly articulate research questions and aims of acknowledged significance to the appropriate discipline(s)]
- clearly articulate the originality, contribution to scholarship or innovative approaches of the proposed study
- identify research resources that merit further study and are accessible for research, including archival materials, special library collections, or appropriate online resources
- outline an appropriate methodology and, where relevant, critical framework for analysis
- demonstrate an awareness of the research context surrounding such a question or questions, resources, and methodology, and shows a
- can be completed within the funding period prescribed by the programme of study (full-time or part-time).

If the proposal is for a practice-led / creative PhD project, the research proposal must additionally:

- offer the prospect of original creative work or practice
- combine such work with intellectually rigorous analysis and contextualization

Grade Descriptor

10-9 A proposal of exceptional quality and promise

8-7 An excellent proposal, very high quality

6-5 A good proposal with potential but not articulated as clearly as it might be

4-3 An acceptable proposal, with some weaknesses, and not a priority for funding

2-1 A weak proposal, not fundable

0 No proposal

B. POTENTIAL AND APTITUDE FOR DOCTORAL STUDY (Scored out of 10)

HASS is seeking to fund students who show a clear aptitude for advanced academic research in the discipline(s) central to the proposed research project as well as promise and potential. Academic track record is a key source of evidence here but reviewer should also consider other contextual factors where relevant and not only academic attainment. This may be evidenced by some or all of the following criteria:

- outstanding undergraduate and/or taught postgraduate degree results, with strong first class/distinction results or projected results (or international equivalents)
- professional qualifications
- significant work or voluntary experience in a relevant area
- elements of the research proposal itself that show how the applicant has already begun their preparation or how previous experience will be used academically
- research dissemination: published work, conference papers, blogposts etc.
- For practice-led / creative applications, evidence of their previous practice.

Grade Descriptor

10-9 Exceptional, showing outstanding aptitude and promise, with strong first class/distinction results or projected results (or international equivalents).

8-7 Excellent, showing a high degree of aptitude and considerable promise, with first class/distinction results or projected results (or international equivalents)

6-5 Good, showing clear aptitude and promise, with high 2.1/high merit results or projected results (or international equivalents)

4-3 Acceptable, showing some aptitude and promise but leaving room for doubt, with lower 2.1/merit results or projected results (or international equivalents)

2-1 Weak, showing little or no aptitude or promise

0 Clearly does not meet academic entry criteria or no evidence submitted.

C. SUITABILITY OF SUPERVISION PLANS (Scored out of 10)

HASS is seeking to fund projects that have the support of strong supervision teams to help the student both successfully undertake their project and develop as a researcher. Supervision teams should adhere to the university's regulations on the [appointment of supervisors](#) on first and second supervisors. ECR supervisors can be named should be considered positively, but they must be supported by an experienced (first) supervisor. Candidates can name second/third supervisors outside HASS where necessary for the project.

HASS PhD studentship assessment criteria

Criteria for reaching a score here include:

- how far the research of all supervisors meshes with the requirements of the research proposal
- evidence that the combined supervision team has necessary experience to successfully supervise to completion
- evidence that the proposed supervisors are the most appropriate in the Faculty/university for this work
- how far the combination of the supervisors' expertise is appropriate to the project
- in cases where a third supervisor is requested; to what extent the third supervisor's expertise is necessary for the project and does not duplicate what might be provided by lead and co-supervisor.

Grade Descriptor

10-9 Exceptional, an ideal or virtually ideal supervisory proposal, with experienced and appropriate supervisors whose work very closely matches the student's needs.

8-7 Excellent, a supervisory proposal that is extremely well attuned to the research project, with appropriate supervisors whose work closely matches the student's needs.

6-5 Good, a supervisory proposal that is well attuned to the research project, with at least one suitable supervisor whose work matches the student's needs.

4-3 Acceptable, a supervisory proposal that will support the research project but where the supervisor(s)' experience is not central to it, or there is a lack of supervisory expertise for a significant aspect of the proposed research.

2-1 Weak or inappropriate supervisor(s) named.

0 No supervisors named

D. RESEARCH FIT (Scored out of 10)

HASS seeks to support students who will benefit from and contribute to our research environment and research culture. Criteria for reaching a score here include:

- how the applicant's research aligns with department/Faculty's thematic research environment
- the extent to which they show an awareness of, and willingness to engage with, the broader research environment(s) in departments and across the Faculty/university
- the applicant's indicated willingness to contribute to the department/Faculty's research environment and research culture
- how far the applicant engages with the personal and professional development opportunities of the department/HASS/Exeter training provision

HASS PhD studentship assessment criteria

Grade Descriptor

10-9 Exceptional, showing outstanding alignment with research environment

8-7 Excellent, showing a high degree of alignment with research environment

6-5 Good, showing clear alignment with research environment

4-3 Acceptable, but showing an under-developed degree of alignment with research environment

2-1 Weak, showing little or no specific alignment with research environment

0 No research fit statement

E. REPORT

Reviewers are asked also to write comments (usually between 100 and 200 words), highlighting both the chief merits of the applications and any areas of deficiency or doubt.