

SUPER Doctoral Training Partnership

Preparing for a Doctoral Interview

Useful links:

Available projects – [SUPER DTP Fourth Call \(2021/2022\) | The Scottish Universities Partnership for Environmental Research \(st-andrews.ac.uk\)](https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/super-dtp/)

FindAPhD article – [The PhD Interview – What to Expect and How to Prepare | FindAPhD.com](https://www.findaphd.com/blog/the-phd-interview-what-to-expect-and-how-to-prepare/)



About the SUPER DTP

SUPER is a partnership between eight universities funded through the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC; part of the UKRI) to deliver world-leading research in natural environmental science. SUPER brings together the strengths of the Universities of Aberdeen, Edinburgh Napier, Heriot-Watt, Highlands and Islands, St Andrews, Stirling, Strathclyde, and the West of Scotland, whose research and training collaborations address cutting-edge scientific challenges across a holistic “catchment to coast” remit. Underpinning these research partners are stakeholder organisations spanning industry and government, including Marine Scotland, NatureScot, Forestry & Land Scotland, and more ([full list on our website](#)). SUPER Postgraduate Researchers (PGRs) are involved in multi-institutional, cross-disciplinary, and interdisciplinary projects, providing distinctive research opportunities and collaborations that can curiosity-driven science or linked directly to the needs of environmental regulators and industry.

SUPER DTP students become part of a cohort within our Graduate School that provides a supportive network, facilitated by bespoke events. The SUPER cohort pursue research, engage in training, and learn from each other as part of a large multi-disciplinary group across Scotland. Students are offered unparalleled opportunities to understand societal and environmental challenges and to deliver science for the benefit of wider society. Together with their PhD qualification, the registration of PGRs on our bespoke Post Graduate Certificate in Researcher Professional Development (PG Cert RPD) means SUPER PGRs are equipped to take on diverse careers and to manage our natural environments more sustainably.

The doctoral interview

The projects that SUPER funds are chosen during a competitive process and awarded to Principal Investigators (PIs) based at one of our partner institutions. The SUPER partner institution where the PI is based will be responsible for hosting the interviews for a particular project; the SUPER Secretariat does not carry out any interviews. You can generally expect approximately three staff members on the interview panel, including the project supervisor. At this time, interviews are expected to be held online.

When you are invited to an interview, you may be asked to prepare a presentation. Your prospective partner institution will let you know what their expectations are in terms of length and topic. In general, you can expect that the interview will be structured and cover questions relating to you (i.e. your background, skills, motivations and goals), as well as questions relating to the project, (i.e. what you understand about the topic, how you would carry out the research, and what impact you would expect). The length of the interview will differ depending on the format.

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Interview tips

- SUPER and our partners are committed to promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion within environmental sciences. If you feel comfortable doing so, you may make a request to the interview panel for any reasonable adjustments you require for the interview.
- Your PhD interview is similar to a job interview, so dress professionally and come prepared with any materials you think you will need, such as a copy of the research project, a copy of your CV and a handy notepad and pen.
- Take time before your interview to calm your nerves. It is natural to be apprehensive, but you can't do your best if nerves get the better of you. Your interviewers want to get to know you and get a sense of what you are capable of, so will want you to be at ease, and will make every effort to assist with this.
- If you have been asked to give a presentation, make sure that you prepare and practice this well in advance of the interview. This is particularly relevant if you have not had much experience with public speaking and will help ensure that you are confident and clear.
- Whilst grades are important, with SUPER partner institutions generally looking for a minimum 2:1 at honours level (or equivalent), individual experience is also taken into consideration, so be ready to explain why you are a unique best fit for the project and evidence your competency in different areas.
- Be yourself and be genuine. You don't have to be an expert in the topic, but be prepared to show how your skills, abilities, and attributes contribute to your potential, placing you in a good position to learn and be creative throughout the project.
- Express your love and enthusiasm of the science and in particular your research topic. If you don't have as much research experience, make sure you have read around your topic, as well as the project description, and gained an understanding of the background, context, and the gaps in current knowledge, and how this project will address those gaps. You don't need to have all the answers but showing that you have a genuine interest and have explored the subject will help your chances of success.
- Research your interviewers as it is good to know what their research and their professional interests are, and thus what they might ask about. It is also useful to get a feel of the professional work environment and research team to decide whether you are a good fit.
- Know your why, i.e., why do you want to do a PhD, why this PhD in particular, why these institutions and supervisors? This is where your background research is important.
- Finally, the interview is a two-way conversation, ask for clarification if needed throughout and come prepared to ask your own questions. This not only expresses curiosity, motivation, and interest, but this is also an opportunity for you to gain insight into the university, research team, and what to expect as a PhD student.

Thank you for your interest in the SUPER DTP.