



MAKING THE LEAP: FROM UNDERGRADUATE/MASTERS TO PGR

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Pro:NE

A network of five North-East universities – Durham, Teesside, Sunderland, Northumbria, Newcastle – to widen access and participation for racially minoritised ethnic students to postgraduate research.

ADMISSION STRAND

Statistical Analysis of the PGR “Pipeline”

Methods:

- National admissions data analysed.
- Compared with admissions data from the five North East universities.



**DURHAM
UNIVERSITY**

Potential to attract more Black, Asian, and Mixed/Other ethnicity home applicants.

**TEESSIDE &
SUNDERLAND
UNIVERSITIES**

Potential to attract more Asian home applicants.

**ALL FIVE NE
UNIVERSITIES**

Need to improve acceptance rates for racially minoritised applicants.

KEY INSIGHTS

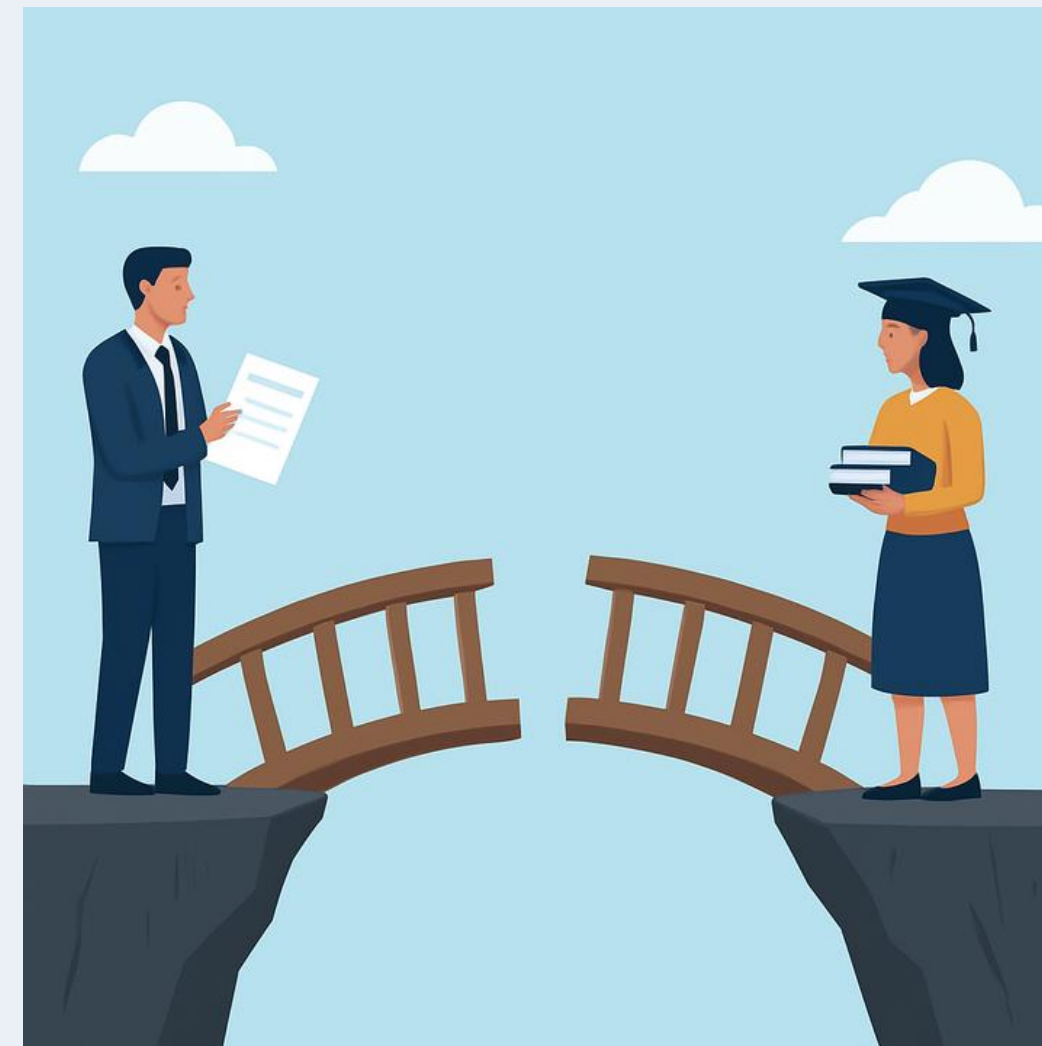
Our analysis of PGR application materials submitted in previous years to the five universities of the North East indicated that unsuccessful applicants were much less likely than successful applicants to have provided a strong research proposal and/or personal statement that clearly identified a suitable supervisor and demonstrated a good knowledge of and fit with the academic department they were applying to join.



FINDINGS FROM TEESSIDE UNIVERSITY

In multiple cases possible contribution to knowledge was not clearly stated

Notably lack of evidence of contact with proposed supervisor – even though application form asks for this to be indicated



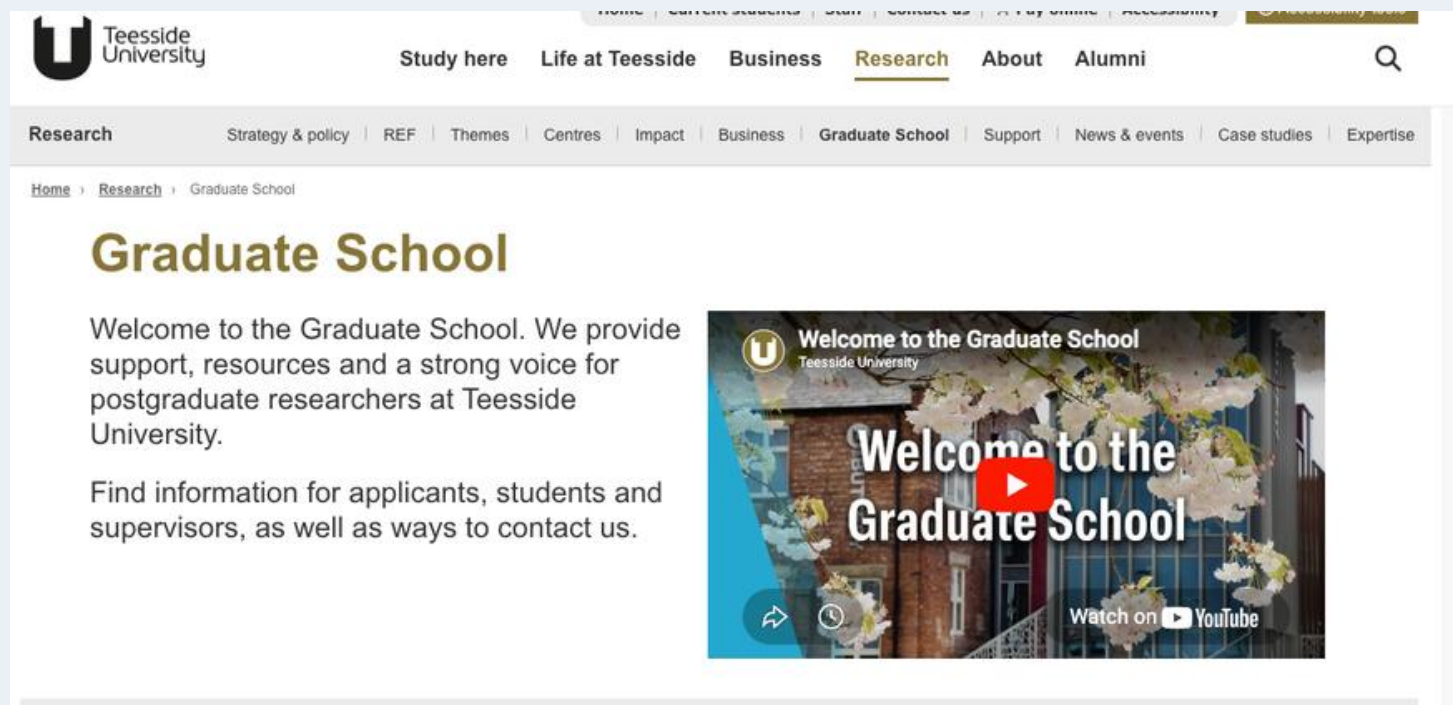
PHD APPLICATION VIDEO GUIDE



<https://www.pronortheast.org.uk/phd-application-video-guide/>

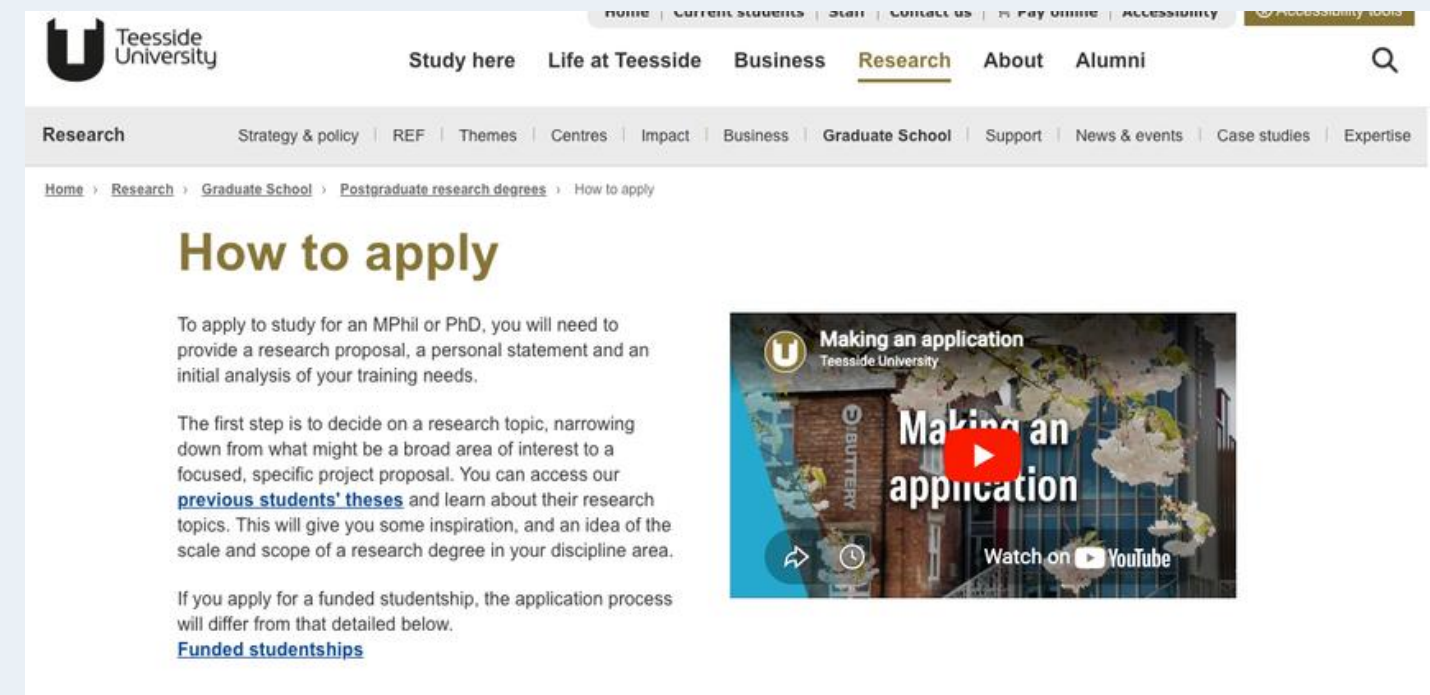
TEESSIDE UNIVERSITY

At Teesside University written materials to support prospective students to write their research proposal and personal statement



The screenshot shows the Teesside University website's 'Graduate School' page. The header includes the university logo and navigation links: 'Study here', 'Life at Teesside', 'Business', 'Research', 'About', and 'Alumni'. A secondary navigation bar lists 'Research' sub-pages: 'Strategy & policy', 'REF', 'Themes', 'Centres', 'Impact', 'Business', 'Graduate School', 'Support', 'News & events', 'Case studies', and 'Expertise'. The breadcrumb trail is 'Home > Research > Graduate School'. The main heading is 'Graduate School'. The text reads: 'Welcome to the Graduate School. We provide support, resources and a strong voice for postgraduate researchers at Teesside University. Find information for applicants, students and supervisors, as well as ways to contact us.' A video thumbnail titled 'Welcome to the Graduate School' is displayed with a 'Watch on YouTube' button.

https://www.tees.ac.uk/sections/research/postgraduate_research.cfm



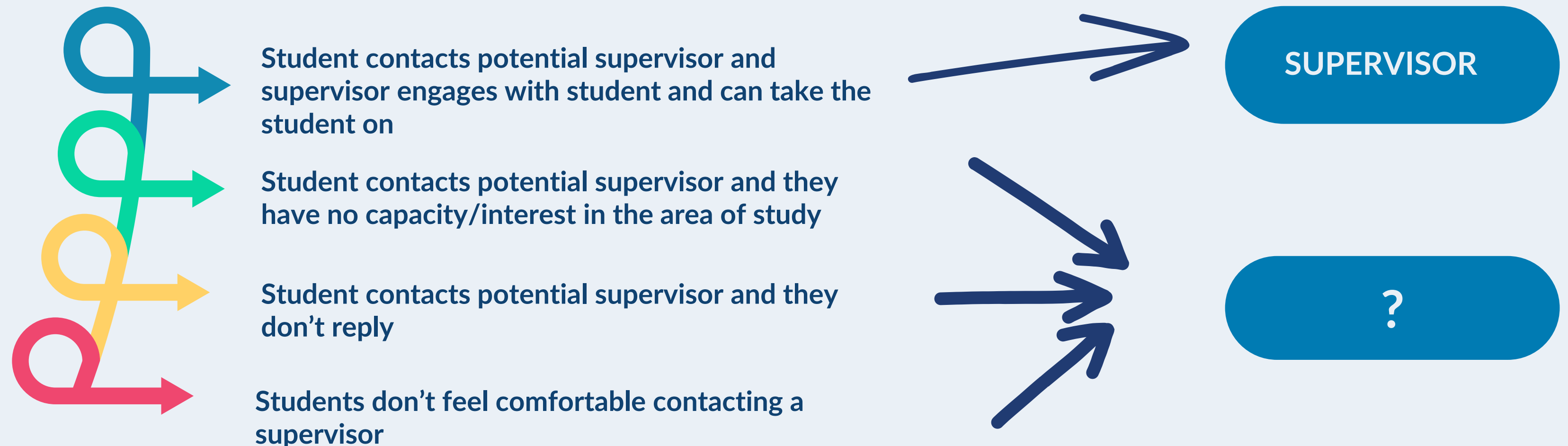
The screenshot shows the Teesside University website's 'How to apply' page. The header and navigation are identical to the previous page. The breadcrumb trail is 'Home > Research > Graduate School > Postgraduate research degrees > How to apply'. The main heading is 'How to apply'. The text reads: 'To apply to study for an MPhil or PhD, you will need to provide a research proposal, a personal statement and an initial analysis of your training needs. The first step is to decide on a research topic, narrowing down from what might be a broad area of interest to a focused, specific project proposal. You can access our [previous students' theses](#) and learn about their research topics. This will give you some inspiration, and an idea of the scale and scope of a research degree in your discipline area. If you apply for a funded studentship, the application process will differ from that detailed below. [Funded studentships](#)' A video thumbnail titled 'Making an application' is displayed with a 'Watch on YouTube' button.

https://www.tees.ac.uk/sections/research/how_apply.cfm

NUMBER OF SCENARIOS

Need to provide information about the importance of engaging with a prospective supervisor to develop a PGR application and guidance on what makes for a strong research proposal and/or personal statement.

But this process can be fraught



SUNDERLAND UNIVERSITY – 'COLD CALL' TO THEIR GRADUATE SCHOOL



Dear X

Thank you for your email. I'm delighted that you are interested in completing a doctorate with us.

Initially, I would recommend that you look at the resources on our website that can support you with looking towards a doctorate. Firstly, take a look at the course page on our website; this will give you information on entry requirements, fees & funding and a snapshot of the way the programme works: [PhD Doctor of Philosophy | The University of Sunderland](#).

I would also recommend that you look at this page: [How to write a research proposal | The University of Sunderland](#). It gives you detailed advice and guidance on what we would be looking for in terms of a viable and robust research proposal, so that you can ensure your potential proposal fits our institutional requirements.

Finally, I would encourage you to look through the staff profiles in the School of X, for those who are research active and taking on doctoral students. You might like to reach out to one or two staff members who you think might be a good fit for your proposed topic of research to see if they might be interested in supervising you.

The faculty research co-ordinator in the School of X is X- you might like to reach out to them if you wish to be further guided on potential suitable supervisors for your project.

I hope that is helpful to you and many thanks, again, for your interest in our programmes.

A MOVE TO CONTEXTUAL ADMISSIONS

Briefing paper from Newcastle University

Ensure that data on race/ethnicity and socio-economic status are provided to selectors Current standard practice is that diversity data are not visible to selectors, on the assumption that this will reduce bias. However, evidence now suggests that blinding has no impact in reducing bias. Where applications from students in under-represented groups are flagged, this allows selectors to take contextual information into account.

Encourage applicants to highlight other relevant information about their experience, skills and mitigating circumstances. Various known as competency-based assessment, strengths-based criteria, or holistic review, this means including a wider range of cognitive and non-cognitive skills alongside academic qualifications in assessment.

Evidence shows that holistic review increases PGR racial/ethnic diversity. In the UK it is a common approach in private sector recruitment, and often used in professional doctorate recruitment to emphasise potential for scholar development.

In the UK, the UK Council of Graduate Education recently published a Competency-Based Framework with useful examples. Discipline-specific measures can be developed. Applicants would be asked to incorporate further information in a longer personal statement.

Provide clear guidance to selectors on how to take race and ethnicity/socioeconomic background into account. A guidance document will instruct selectors on taking students' social background into account – clear instruction on balancing academic qualifications, references, relevant work and other experience, and contextual factors that may have affected performance in other criteria.

IMPORTANCE OF DATA

Academic Year

All ▼

Award Group

All ▼

School

All ▼

Department

All ▼

Subject

All ▼

Route

All ▼

Location

All ▼

Mode Of Study

All ▼

Summary
Route
Demographics

Academic Year	Award Group	School	Department	Subject	Route	Location	Mode Of Study	Fee Status
All	All	All	All	All	All	All	All	All

Applications, Offers & Acceptances by School & Department

		Academic Year		2025/6	
School	Department	Applications	Offers	Acceptances	Acceptance Conversion
<input type="checkbox"/> SACI	Art & Design	38	8	8	100.0%
	Total	38	8	8	100.0%
<input type="checkbox"/> SCEDT	Computing and Games	98	53	32	60.4%
	Engineering	88	65	33	50.8%
	Total	186	118	65	55.1%
<input type="checkbox"/> SHLS	Nursing and Midwifery	44	20	14	70.0%
	Sciences	80	25	18	72.0%
	Total	124	45	32	71.1%
<input type="checkbox"/> SSSH&L	Education, Teacher Training & Social Work	75	33	23	69.7%

IMPORTANCE OF DATA

Academic Year

Multiple selections

Award Group

Multiple selections

School

SCEDT

Department

All

Subject

All

Route

All

Location

Teesside University

Mode Of Study

Multiple selections

Fee Status

Multiple selections

Applications by Disability

Disability ● No ● Yes

2025/6

0%

50%

100%



Applications by Ethnicity

UK Domiciled Only

Ethnicity ● White ● Asian / Chinese

2025/6

0%

50%

100%



Applications by Socio-Economic Class

Applications by Parental Education

Parental Educa... ● Yes ● No

2025/6



KEY RECOMMENDATIONS



- Introduce clear and standardised pre-application guidance for prospective PGR students, explaining supervisor contact routes, expectations, and which demystify application processes. This guidance and information to be easily accessible on institutions' external-facing webpages
- Introduce structured, clear supervisor enquiry and matching systems, replacing informal enquiry routes.
- Implement required inclusive admissions training for all staff involved in PGR recruitment, supported by clear and easily accessible information on institutions' central intranet and external-facing webpages (for example, as hosted by institutions' Graduate/Doctoral Schools, serving as a single point of contact).
- Conduct annual admissions equity reviews using recruitment data, with regular reporting to strategic decision-making committees within each institution, to inform institutional action plans.



**THANK
YOU**