

Institute of Astronomy: PhD Applications for 2024 from MAST/PtIII students

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Presentation Outline

- Three department options
- Application timetable
- Basis for assessing applications
- Post-application process for considering applications and funding nominations
- More on funding opportunities by University Fee Category – Home, Ireland, Overseas
- How the Institute works for Home-fee Ph.D. students
- Advice/requirements for scholarship applications for Overseas-fee students

PhD 2024 Applications

- There are three departments involved in astrophysics/cosmology research
 - Institute of Astronomy, Cavendish Astrophysics, DAMTP
- University requires a separate application for each department
- Institute of Astronomy – 5 December 2023
- Cavendish Astrophysics (Physics) – 5 December 2023
 - research project descriptions available on-line
- DAMTP – check with department
 - HEP/GR/Cosmology group
 - 15 December 2023 – can arrange to take the “admissions test” in January 2024
 - Astrophysics group (small) – mostly discs

PhD 2024 Admissions Timetable

- Institute Application deadline
 - 5 December 2023 – for **all** applications
 - Not sensible to leave until the last day
 - You will likely be disadvantaged if your two (or three for Gates) references are not available on 5 December
- Other UK and non-UK universities
 - Most, but not all, operate on a similar time line. Do not restrict applications to just one university

PhD 2024 Admissions

- Assessed on academic grounds
 - Your interests and skill-set relative to research undertaken in the Institute
 - Make clear in “Statement of Interests”
 - Availability of supervisors in each research area (list of potential supervisors on website)
 - Competition for limited number of places such that academic attainment needs to be equivalent to a strong first-class performance at masters level

PhD 2024 Admissions

- Institute participates in University contextual-information pilot
- Provides background information including non-academic circumstances
- You are all at a very advanced stage
- Information could relate to academic performance
- We do need evidence about abilities

PhD 2024 Admissions

- Post-submission process from 5 December
 - Overseas-fee students
 - Academic record
 - Statement of Interests in application form
 - Availability of supervisors in each research area (list of potential supervisors on website)
 - Most promising applicants contacted by potential supervisor(s)
 - References
 - Generate a project description
 - Interview with Admissions Committee

PhD 2024 Admissions

- Overseas-fee students (continued)
 - Strongest students (both for supervisor and Admission Committee) ranked according to University scoring system
 - Top-scoring students submitted for University scholarships, Gates,...
 - All completed by end of January 2024

PhD 2024 Admissions

- Home-fee students
 - Will also be considered as per Overseas-fee students **BUT**
 - Prospect of success very small and even then only for a few students
 - Selection for interview in late February and award of STFC Ph.D. places based on academic record, references and general research interests

PhD 2024 Admissions

- Offers of admission for Overseas- and just possibly one or two Home-fee students in February
- Actual award/success in University funding competition are separate
- Unfortunately the options for full funding vary depending on University Fee status
 - Home
 - Ireland
 - Overseas

PhD 2024 Admissions

- “Home” fee status based on residence in the UK or Ireland or EU nationals with Settled or Pre-settled status under the EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS)
- Is anyone unclear about their University fee status?
- Institute “Ph.D Programme” pages on the website contain all the information you will need about applying

PhD 2024 Admissions

- In practice, given the cost of a Ph.D. (~£90k Home ~£170k Overseas), funding availability is key for most applicants
- Unfortunately the fraction of students who can be allocated scholarships/funding is small compared to the number who apply [and could obtain a strong Ph.D.]
- Make sure that you apply to multiple universities where research matches your interests

PhD 2024 Admissions Process

- Will run through the process for each of the fee categories
- Includes numbers of scholarships and probability of success

PhD 2024: Home Fee Status

- Small probability of University scholarship awards – nomination end January
- Probably 4 or 5 STFC Ph.D. awards
- An additional ~ 2 STFC CDT data-science Ph.D. awards
- Interviews will be held in week 26 February – 1 March [in person]
- Offers from early March with everything tied-up by 31 March (STFC deadline)

PhD 2024: Home Fee Status

■ Academic Competition

- Is significant and normally offers made to students with first-class degree expectation
- Some Part III/MASt students with 2:i performance and expectation of first-class degree competitive
- Not normally true for 2:ii performance and definitely not true if interested in theoretical topics (e.g. cosmology)
- Few projects in theoretical cosmology

Institute of Astronomy: Home students, funding, projects and supervisors

- ~20 potential Ph.D. Supervisors
 - ~ 40 (or more) potential projects
 - Total of about 12 new Ph.D. Students
 - Supervisor/project rich : student poor
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- Not obvious that Ph.D. choice related to topic of your final year project (or best lecture course) is optimal

Institute of Astronomy: Students, projects and supervisors

- Taking time to identify the right project / supervisor / work methodology is really worthwhile
- Normally, for Home-fee students we do not match students to project/supervisor on admission
- Students encouraged to spend first term exploring research topic, style, supervisors to identify a good match
- Possible because of STFC awards and no UK Government immigration issues

PhD 2024: Ireland

- Possibility of University scholarship awards
 - nomination end January
- Also STFC Ph.D. studentships
- Some interviews late January and maybe also February
- Offers from early March with everything tied-up by 31 March (STFC deadline)
- Students are unique as eligible for STFC funding and “University” scholarship funding

PhD 2024: Overseas Fee Status

- ATAS (Academic Technology Approval Scheme) for many Overseas students required
- Nominations for scholarships (end January 2024) **require** supervisor and project description
- Must match applicants to supervisors December and January for supervisor and project identification
- Supervisors should be interested in engaging and will expect you to contribute to develop a project description
- Students are eligible for one or two STFC studentships [extra fees from the University]

PhD 2024: Overseas Fee Status

- The uncomfortable reality check is that competition for scholarships from the University is extreme
- For University/College scholarships you will need
 - An outstanding academic record
 - Two very strong references of some length
 - Research experience outside of your academic course to even be competitive

PhD 2024: Overseas Fee Status

- To apply, simply tick the funding box on the form. Gates - tick box and complete the 500 word statement
- Contextual information aside, there are almost no exceptions to the requirements on last slide
- If you have an impressive (as opposed to outstanding) academic record then
 - Some “Developing world” scholarships
 - Gates Cambridge look at additional factors

Overseas Referee Choice

- Referee choice for Overseas applicants
 - Extent of referee letters is an important factor for University scholarship awards
 - A “Cambridge” reference is not helpful if it says very little
 - Current MAST/Part III Project involvement normally modest – only very rarely is it sensible to choose your project supervisor
 - Consider reference from summer project or research internment
 - One academic and one research normally good

PhD 2024 Gates Applications

- IoA allowed only one nomination
- You must be able to write the 500 word statement with significant “leadership” and “helping others” content
- Your personal (third) referee should be able to comment on the leadership and helping aspects
- Do not use one of your academic referees as your personal referee [only very rarely appropriate]

PhD 2024 Additional Funding Options for Overseas students

- College awards – choose your college and apply. Effectively only one option [your first choice on form]
- Talk to your graduate tutor about options with your current college
- Own country competitions – down to you to identify.
 - For suitable qualified students we can help via the project and supervisor links [you have identified]

