Appendix 3 Informal guidelines and sample questions for a PhD applicant interview, from LSE’s Department of Media and Communications

Motivation

- Please tell me something about you, what you have been doing/studying/working on in the past year? (warm-up)

- What led to your making a PhD application at this particular time, and why to this department? (pursue if they seem not to know much about us or if they misunderstand what we do)

- Where do you hope a PhD will lead, in terms of your career development? (if not an academic, pursue why a PhD is needed, to check their commitment)

- To which particular field of study do you wish to make a contribution? (check that it is media and communications, however broadly defined, and check their understanding of what that means, as there’s much national variation).

The project

- Please tell me how you arrived at your proposed research project, and why this fascinates you.

- Discuss in terms of theory and concepts.

- Discuss in terms of relevant research literature they build on, and to which they contribute.

- Check out major/minor themes or interests if the project is complex or includes too much.

- Suggest readings they haven’t mentioned to check out their openness to new ideas or thinking on their feet.

- Focus on the proposed method – design, rationale, feasibility, likely value.

- Pursue whether they have the skills to pursue the project and what would they need to develop through courses here.

Practicalities

- Is their English expression sufficiently fluent? Can they understand when you present concepts or ideas at a fair pace?

- Funding – have they funding, what funding do they expect from us, if they don’t get funding what will happen, clarify their expectations of us and definitely don’t promise more than we can deliver.

- Teaching experience – clarify that as a graduate-only department we offer limited teaching opportunities.

- Courses – explain the courses they would take, in brief, and invite questions. Especially make clear that this is not the US system of two years of courses then two years of research.

- Expectations of supervision, research groups, research assistance, etc – just be alert for misconceptions of what we can offer and be clear in correcting these.

Questions they wish to ask?

Allow time for this.

Don’t give an answer in the interview but promise to let them know the decision as soon as is feasible.