Checklist for use as a guide in recruiting doctoral research students

The following is a generic checklist which can be tailored to individual Faculty and Department requirements. It is intended to be used as a guide (and an aide memoir) in the recruitment process. The checklist lists the main topic areas to be covered (highlighted in bold) with examples of what could be used to explore the topic. The completed checklist should be retained in the department as evidence that the interview took place. It is also a useful record for providing feedback to unsuccessful candidates.

Evidence of Personal effectiveness including:
- that the applicant knows what a PhD involves, including both the process and the final product.
- asking candidates why they want to do a PhD and what they hope it will contribute to their career.
- that the applicant shows ability to be self-motivated, proactive and engaged, discussing the research with enthusiasm, passion and confidence.
- evidence of self-discipline - but welcoming being guided and mentored, (for the more mature home/EU students).
- being flexible, open-minded and adaptable.
- ability to communicate effectively (also see below).
- evidence of ability to manage time effectively e.g. can set clearly defined, realistic and achievable goals. Exploration of this could include posing a question prospectively such as – ‘given that as a PhD student you would need to get your thesis submitted in four years, how do you think you would manage your time to achieve this?’ This would be looking for things such as whether they think about writing pieces for their supervisor to review before the end.
- candidates could also be asked to describe a project or a task they have been involved in or an aspect of a period of employment where they had a deadline or a goal to be achieved. Did they have to respond flexibly and constructively to changes in priorities?

Evidence of knowledge, intellectual ability and the potential to develop the following:
- demonstrate knowledge of the research area that is commensurate with their stated qualifications and experience.
- explore any evidence of ability to think analytically, independently and critically.
- demonstrate having tested a hypothesis and/or translated issues into questions amenable to scholarly enquiry.
- demonstrate signs of previous engagement with the proposed research supervisor and academic department.
- where applicable, explore whether the formal research training and experience of the applicant provides an adequate basis for commencing the proposed PhD topic.
- where a research proposal has been written by the applicant, the interview should aim to establish that the student wrote the proposal themselves.

Evidence of Good communication skills including:
- the ability to present information and ideas effectively (oral, written, visual).
- the ability to respond positively and effectively to questions and challenges.
- for international students, evidence of a sufficiently good command of the English Language to either have achieved or be able to achieve the required IELT score for entry to the programme (i.e. to achieve 6.5 or above). This could also be demonstrated by the requirement to submit a piece of written work (on the research area) prior to interview and/or do a minimal slide presentation. (NB it is important to probe the detail of the presentation because some students use terms on their slides to hide their ignorance).

Other requirements and issues to take into account:
- interviewing should be mandatory for prospective students, whether it is a competitive process or not.
- it is recommended that all applicant interviews be conducted by two or more academics, at least one of whom being the intended supervisor. However, it is acknowledged that occasionally pressure of time can make that difficult, but where possible it should always be sought so as to provide consistency and reassurance. Nonetheless, in exceptional circumstances where only one academic is able to be involved in the interview, that person should be the proposed primary supervisor.
- it is recommended that a record of the interview be completed, and that Faculties and Departments also include within this, the process used in recruitment e.g. through the completion of a graduate recruitment form.
- the application form should be used to gather certain generic information while the interview is designed to verify things and probe more deeply. Note that it is possible to ‘tailor make’ the University application form to include specific questions that an individual department might require.
- it is acknowledged that some issues on a checklist might ‘stump’ international students. To overcome this, it is suggested that, once it has been decided to interview a student, a list of areas to be explored in the interview process could be sent to the student in advance so they know what to expect – the questions on these topics might then be able to be more probing. NB if this approach is taken it should be used for all students and not just international students.