

Speaker 1: [00:00:02] Hi, everyone. I'm Emily. I'm the regional manager for sub-Saharan Africa. [00:00:05][3.6]

Speaker 2: [00:00:07] Hi, everyone. My name is Ron Peter and I'm the international officer for the sub-Saharan region. [00:00:11][4.0]

Speaker 3: [00:00:12] Hi, everyone. I'm blessing. I'm the country manager for the University of Aberdeen and I'm based in Nigeria. [00:00:17][5.2]

Speaker 1: [00:00:18] Welcome to our University of Aberdeen West Africa podcast series. We're going to talk about lots of relevant and interesting topics which we hope you find useful. Join us for this week's episode. Hi everyone and welcome back to this week's podcast. We are very lucky to be joined today by Ruth Quigley, who is the postgraduate research school advisor. Welcome, Ruth. [00:00:45][26.2]

Speaker 4: [00:00:46] Hi, Emily. Thanks for having me today. [00:00:47][1.3]

Speaker 1: [00:00:48] And we're super excited to go through lots of questions. We also have a blessing and run here. [00:00:54][5.3]

Speaker 3: [00:00:54] Hi everyone. [00:00:55][0.3]

Speaker 2: [00:00:56] Welcome back everyone to our next series of podcast. [00:00:58][1.8]

Speaker 1: [00:00:59] Perfect. Okay, so let's go into grilling Ruth, have a go and postgraduate research studies. So maybe you could start by just Thomas a little bit about how you came to be in this position. [00:01:11][12.1]

Speaker 4: [00:01:12] Yeah, no problem. So I've been working at the uni for quite a few years now and I studied biology here myself and when I graduate it started working in the admissions team and then I actually worked for a short while as an international advisor as well. And then I came to my role in the postgraduate research school last year and where I lead the admissions team and all that kind of strategic stuff around PhD recruitment. [00:01:37][24.9]

Speaker 1: [00:01:39] That sounds great. Okay. So obviously, we're going to have lots of people on the hopefully listening to the podcast that want to know all about mainly the outlook application process for applying for PhDs. And I know that there's different options. Can you really talk us through how the application process works? [00:01:57][18.0]

Speaker 4: [00:01:58] Yeah, definitely. So it is a little bit more different as it's involved in applying for a degree or an undergraduate degree because you'll be working with a supervisor essentially for 3 to 4 years. So it takes quite a bit of thought in the application process. We've got on our website, if you go onto our how to apply pages, quite a good run through of what the steps involve. But the main kind of thing to think about initially is what is your research area, what are you interested in studying? And most people have a pretty good idea of what that is from their probably their master's degree or their undergraduate. And essentially it's whether that person wants to apply to a project that's already advertised or maybe they have their own research proposal that they want to apply with. And so it's generally finding a supervisor that fits their area of interest and then putting an application together on our postgraduate application portal with all the documents. And then they would submit that to us for review. And usually kind of at that stage there be an interview, quite a lot of opportunity to discuss the research proposal with a supervisor and then it goes from there, really. [00:03:05][66.8]

Speaker 1: [00:03:07] Okay. That sounds great. [00:03:08][1.1]

Speaker 3: [00:03:09] It's. How easy can applicants access the contact details of supervisors, please? [00:03:14][5.1]

Speaker 4: [00:03:17] So it can be a little tricky. And I know there's been a lot of work recently on our website to try and improve that from an applicant's point of view. But we do have a useful page on peer and which we can maybe share the link to. And on there, if an applicant goes on and puts in their research area. So let's say they're interested in plant and soil science and they type that and they'll bring up a list of all the supervisors that work in that area at the University of Aberdeen, and they'll have their own profiles and you can see contact details within. Also on our own website, there's them. Every staff member has a profile and we're encouraging them to put up on there, whether they're accepting PhDs currently, just so applicants know that they can actually apply to them and they can start conversation at that point. And the good thing about those pages is their past research is shown there. So there'll be links to publications they've made. So that'll really give people a good idea of if it fits in with their area of research. And if applicants do struggle to get in touch with supervisors, they can come via my team as well. [00:04:20][63.2]

Speaker 3: [00:04:22] All right. That's great. Thank you. [00:04:23][1.1]

Speaker 4: [00:04:25] No worries. [00:04:26][0.2]

Speaker 2: [00:04:27] is is there any deadline for the Phd Applications? [00:04:30][2.9]

Speaker 4: [00:04:31] Well, the good thing about applying for a Ph.D. is that you can apply at any time. So unlike the PGT or the UGT sorry UG, we are always open to applications, which means that we're always busy. So it kind of depends. So a lot of applicants will have a funding opportunity they might be applying for in their own country. So that will be a deadline they have to meet. So the important thing is always just communicating with us. If they do have a deadline, just letting us know I need a decision and X amount of days and we can try and push that through. But essentially they can apply throughout the year and it's also free to apply. So there's no application fee. [00:05:09][37.7]

Speaker 3: [00:05:11] So I have a question. Yes. So for West African prospective students, who're looking to study at the level with us. Can they apply directly for a Ph.D. with your first degree or is it mandatory that they should have a master's degree before applying for a start up again? [00:05:27][15.4]

Speaker 4: [00:05:28] That's a good question and one we get quite a lot, actually, and I would say yes. Essentially, our main entry criteria is a 2:1 equivalent honours level. So that would be a bachelor's degree, essentially. And what we do is when someone applies, we check whether that meets our equivalency. However, some things that are advertised and certain specific programmes might ask for a master's. So I'd always advise that the person that supplying just have a good look at exactly what they're applying for. So let's say they're applying for a Ph.D. in mechanical engineering. I would just advise them to have a look at that page to make sure. But generally our entry requirements are just that honours degree, which is probably good for people to hear, I think. [00:06:15][47.0]

Speaker 3: [00:06:16] All right. That's great. [00:06:16][0.6]

Speaker 4: [00:06:17] Thank you. No problem. [00:06:17][0.9]

Speaker 1: [00:06:19] And why should potential students from West Africa choose to study PhD programmes in Aberdeen? Do you know, like if there's any key selling points? Obviously the application process is similar to other unis, but is there things that set us apart from other universities? [00:06:34][15.3]

Speaker 4: [00:06:35] I always think our location is such a great selling point. So I know a lot of students, especially international students that come here, they really like the kind of almost countryside feel that Aberdeen has because it's a small city and and even though we're a small city, we've got two universities here, which is really great because it's got a nice student vibe. And I just always think of the tagline from our School of Biological Sciences, which is Nature on our doorstep. And it's really true. So particularly for students that are interested in things like environmental science. And we do get a lot of students from West Africa that come here to study environmental science. We have amazing kind of nature around us and, you know, field work opportunities and things like that, which I think a lot of universities don't have, especially as they're based in much bigger cities. So to me that's like a really strong selling point for Aberdeen.
[00:07:28][52.9]

Speaker 1: [00:07:29] Definitely. I love the countryside as well. And you touched on there are very popular areas for West African students. Are there other other areas of interest that West African students tend to apply for? When I'm thinking about PhDs. [00:07:44][14.3]

Speaker 4: [00:07:44] Yeah. So plant and soil is probably one of our kind of strongest areas and we've got some projects at the moment advertised and I think within the first week we received about 80 applications. A lot of them.
[00:07:57][12.2]

Speaker 1: [00:07:57] Were from. [00:07:57][0.3]

Speaker 4: [00:07:58] West African students and so we're quite strong in that area, but also in engineering, we get quite a lot of applicants from West Africa and we tend to advertise a number of projects that they don't necessarily have funding attached, but the project is predefined, so someone's not having to write their own research proposal, which can be really helpful. So it does kind of vary, but I would say mainly the STEM subjects, engineering and biological sciences. Yeah. [00:08:25][27.4]

Speaker 1: [00:08:26] Okay, cool. Again, you touched on funding there. I really want to ask this question because I know that West African students will be itching to know if there are opportunities for them to get some funding. So so is there. [00:08:39][12.6]

Speaker 4: [00:08:40] Yeah. Always the key question, isn't it. So whenever we do kind of open day presentations, this is always what we try and focus on because what students want to

know so that the short answer is yes, there are funding opportunities and actually in the last kind of two years that's really been improving as well. So traditionally we've advertised projects and it maybe will cover home fees, but if a student wants an international student wants to apply, they might have to cover the difference. There's been quite a shift in that recently and we have a lot of these large kind of externally funded opportunities at the university that we advertise every year for PhDs, and they're now open to international students as well. So we've got a few I can touch on them a bit more specifically later, but there's a couple that are in the STEM subjects and we also have a few in the arts and humanities. So there's a spread across the university and there are limited numbers for international students. But as I say, they are available and that would cover the tuition fees, a stipend and research costs and also through that. So that's in our main recruitment cycle. We kind of advertise that those between October and December time every year. However, throughout the year, it's just worth checking our current opportunities page because sometimes a supervisor might receive some funding through a grant they have. For example, they can recruit students. So it's always good to kind of keep checking in terms of different types of scholarships. There's also the Elphinstone. On scholarship, which we've traditionally done, and that offers a fee waiver to international students. So there's no living costs associated, but they don't have to pay the fees. But I think now we're only offering that within the area of medical sciences, and there might even be a few projects advertised at the moment. So again, just the best thing for your students to do is just to regularly look on our website to see what's there because it changes all the time. Okay, perfect. On our funding database, essentially. [00:10:39][119.6]

Speaker 1: [00:10:41] And when a student applies for a PhD, if they're unaware of funding is sometimes the supervisors are aware of an opportunity that they can tell the student about. [00:10:49][7.8]

Speaker 4: [00:10:50] I think that can be a little bit more difficult and the supervisors will often kind of refer to my team or to the school administrator. And occasionally they might. They might know if they've got a grant coming up that the student could apply to if they're able to recruit a Ph.D. But more often, they're coming through my team to ask that kind of question. [00:11:08][18.9]

Speaker 1: [00:11:10] Okay, great. [00:11:10][0.4]

Speaker 3: [00:11:11] So, Ruth, I have a question. But taking the step back to the application process, just to confirm, our

applicant is required to have supervisors before submitting an application or can they apply to the university and be assigned supervisors later on? [00:11:26][14.7]

Speaker 4: [00:11:26] Yeah. Another key question. So this is where it can get a little bit more tricky and it can vary between schools. So some schools are quite happy to just receive a research proposal on their line that student up for the supervisor. Other schools are a little bit more reluctant to do that and they maybe want the student to kind of put a lot of effort in beforehand and find someone suitable. But I appreciate the kind of the latter are. There can be quite difficult for students if you can't find someone. So I suppose my general advice for that really would be it's a good idea for students to look in advance and to try and find someone to at least just name on their application that maybe don't necessarily need to have had a conversation with them. But if they can put the name of a supervisor on it points us in the right direction with where to put their application. And so it's not a straight answer, but it doesn't hurt for them to look and to try and make contact with them. But it's not always essential. We are actually doing some work on that at the moment, so we're trying to kind of make sure schools can assign supervisors for applicants and it's something that we're we're always trying to work on. [00:12:36][69.3]

Speaker 3: [00:12:37] That's helpful to know. Thank you. Oh. [00:12:39][2.1]

Speaker 4: [00:12:40] Yeah, no problem. [00:12:41][0.7]

Speaker 2: [00:12:43]. What is the next step after submitting an application? So is there any interview? [00:12:48][4.5]

Speaker 4: [00:12:51] Yeah. So this is another thing that can vary, but we do try to encourage interviews for old Ph.D. applicants because it just gives and it gives the applicant a chance to get a bit more information about what it's going to be like to study Aberdeen. And also, you know, I mentioned before that they're going to be studying here for three or four years with one supervisor or two supervisors. That's a long time to be standing with someone. So really we want them to kind of have a good relationship. And so it's not always the case. They'll be interviewed. But essentially what happens is someone submits an application and that comes to an administrator for review. And if we think there's something missing, maybe there's not provided a CV, but we'd like to see one will communicate with the applicant at that stage to let them know what's going on with their application, and then it will be sent to the supervisor. And generally most schools are organised in an interview, but it's, it's not a really formal

process. It tends to just be online, more of a conversation to get a bit more of the applicant. [00:13:49][58.6]

Speaker 2: [00:13:51] Thanks, Ruth, for this information. [00:13:52][0.8]

Speaker 4: [00:13:54] No problem. [00:13:54][0.2]

Speaker 1: [00:13:55] And what about the number of applications a student can submit? Is there a limit or do you tend to find that students only submit one application? [00:14:02][7.0]

Speaker 4: [00:14:06] You definitely don't. I mean, we've seen some applicants that have maybe said it's sort of eight or ten. Wow. But is it? I know. It's a good question, though, because it's. It's worth saying that if you're applying to a school so say you're you're an engineering student and you want to study engineering. If you select ten different PhD titles in engineering, they're actually only going to one person. So it may only be coming to me to review them. So I'm probably just going to go back to the applicant and say, Hey, I see that you've submitted all these different titles, but I'm just going to take one of those applications for your supervisor to review. So it saves the applicant time if they don't have to do that, but they can submit more than one. So see, there's a couple of projects that are advertised that they're interested in. They can apply to more than one of them. That's fine. But if they receive an offer of study or two, for example, they can only accept one of those and it'll automatically reject the other one. So we're thinking about that. [00:15:07][61.1]

Speaker 1: [00:15:07] Is definitely some important points. I'm hoping this duration of a PhD, is it the same for every PhD or does it? [00:15:15][7.4]

Speaker 4: [00:15:15] It varies a little bit. So I believe the minimum would be 36 months, which obviously in normal speak is three years and that's what we tend to offer for international students. And the reason for that is it's the three year period is it's less tuition fees and a four year Ph.D. and there is some opportunity to extend the period of study if they need extra time for writing up, for example. It's not a given that that can happen, but there is opportunity for it. And however, some of our funded opportunities the international students can apply for might be a little bit longer in duration, so they'll maybe be three and a half or four years. And if an international student has received external funding, that's for four years. That's also fine. We

can we can amend an offer for the duration and but 3 to 4 is the standard really great. [00:16:04][49.3]

Speaker 1: [00:16:05] And what about internships and is there opportunities or not internships as such? But are there opportunities for graduate assistant ships, for international students or anything like that that students can take up during their degrees? [00:16:21][16.3]

Speaker 4: [00:16:23] Yeah. This is when I was a little bit less sure about because I'm more focussed on the kind of student side of things and I think this fits in a little bit better with more of a like a job contract. I think Ron maybe had a bit of information on that. Is that right, Ron? [00:16:37][14.4]

Speaker 2: [00:16:38] Ruth I'm not familiar about the internship opportunities that we offer, but I know we do offer to our students opportunities like teaching assistant demonstrator and marketing opportunity. And through this, the Ph.D. student will be able to develop their skills to pursue their career in academic and research industry. [00:16:55][16.7]

Speaker 4: [00:16:55] Yeah, so when a student is doing their PhD, there's opportunity for being a demonstrator within schools, which is basically helping out with the undergraduate and master's teaching. And that is a page pay job. It's not a guarantee that a student will get the opportunity, but generally the schools are advertising them every year and students can apply for that. But in terms of kind of a different kind of research assistant type role that I'm not too sure about is. [00:17:27][31.9]

Speaker 1: [00:17:30] Do you guys have any other questions for Ruth Everard's? [00:17:33][2.7]

Speaker 3: [00:17:34] What advice or tips would you give to West African students who are looking to apply for a Ph.D.? With those, they have to write a two page research proposal. You know, something of that sort. [00:17:46][12.3]

Speaker 4: [00:17:48] Yeah. So a couple of tips just from. So I've probably been doing research applications for about four years, as I've probably done thousands of them. But at some point you get a good idea of what a good application might look like. And I would say generally, if if an applicant is submitting a research proposal, it's something that we're looking to develop on our website actually is a bit of guidance around what that should look like. So hopefully that will be someone at some point. But I would say probably trying

to keep it quite succinct. Like you say, you know, not more than kind of a few pages because some supervisors have received so many applications and it can be difficult for them to go through that in depth. So keep it quite short. The other really big piece of advice I would give is if an applicant from West Africa is applying for a funding opportunity in their home country, try and get the application to us and really good time in advance of the funding deadline because it can take kind of 5 to 6 weeks to get a decision on the future application. We obviously try to get them out much quicker than that, but it can take a little bit of time. And the other thing is just communicate with us. You know, when the applications in keep in contact with us as administrators so that we know what your deadlines are, what you're applying for, and and critically is just making sure that all the documents we need are uploaded at the time of application because that can cause a delay. So let's say, for example, someone's applying to the Ghana scholarship secretariat, but they don't provide us with a transcript from their bachelor, which they've finished. We really need that to make sure that we can check that they're equivalent. So it's just going to delay the application because we'll have to go to that and say, actually, can you give us this document? And so that's probably the main tip, is just to kind of speed up the process for them and make it a bit smoother. [00:19:43][115.4]

Speaker 3: [00:19:45] Oh, that's good. Thank you. Really helpful to know. [00:19:47][2.1]

Speaker 4: [00:19:48] No problem. [00:19:48][0.2]

Speaker 1: [00:19:50] Is there anything else off the top of your head that you can take that we may have missed? [00:19:53][3.4]

Speaker 4: [00:19:56] I would say that just for applicants to look out for opportunities like our postgraduate virtual open day because we kind of on them, I think it's 2 to 3 times a year at the moment and usually myself and my team are there and we can give advice on their applications there and give kind of in-depth information about applying for PhD. So look out for those opportunities and come along and really just regularly kind of look at what we've got available because new stuff is coming up all the time and there's a lot more opportunities for international students to get funding as well. And I'll maybe touch a little bit more on the student trips. I can give you a little bit of specific detail about them, if that's helpful. [00:20:36][39.4]

Speaker 1: [00:20:36] Yeah, that'd be great. Thank you. [00:20:37][1.3]

Speaker 4: [00:20:38] Yeah. So probably around October this year, we'll be advertising off the top of my head. It's about four big studentship opportunities and mainly in the areas of STEM so and the sciences and they're out of those kind of four opportunities, they'll probably be 5 to 6 places available for international students. So it's such a great opportunity because it covers the fees. There are stipend and research costs, so all the applicant has to do is cover the relocation costs, which is obviously a big thing as well. And relocating to Aberdeen from West Africa is probably quite a big deal, but it gives a really good leg up. So I would say to look out for those and I don't know what else has been say because it's left my head. Sorry. Oh, that's what I wanted to mention. So I'm not quite sure when this podcast will be going out. But at the moment we have a number of opportunities advertised in plant and soil sciences and that would be a Ph.D. in the School of Biological Sciences, and there is an international place there as well. So it's worth applying for. And if your applicants are interested in that area and that will be advertised every year as well, we'll have an international spot for them. [00:21:49][70.4]

Speaker 1: [00:21:50] Super. That sounds great. Thanks, Ruth. Yeah, that's. [00:21:54][3.9]

Speaker 4: [00:21:54] Good. Yeah, it's a great opportunity. So. [00:21:56][1.6]

Speaker 1: [00:21:56] Yeah. Yeah. On today's podcast. Been great. You've given us so much insight and definitely refreshed blessing and myself understanding of these as well. So thank you. And hopefully the students listening will also have all of their quiz answered. But as always, if they do have questions, they can always just email in or, as Ruth said, attend the virtual open days and where hopefully you'll get to speak to Ruth and her team. And virtually at that point that. Yeah, just on behalf of all of us, thanks so much for joining us today, Ruth, and hopefully have you on another podcast again soon. [00:22:34][37.7]

Speaker 4: [00:22:35] Yeah, thank you for having me. It's been great and I appreciate it. And study can be complex, so hopefully that's been helpful. [00:22:41][5.8]

Speaker 1: [00:22:43] Definitely. Bye, guys. [00:22:44][1.0]

Speaker 4: [00:22:44] Thanks. Bye. [00:22:45][0.7]

Speaker 3: [00:22:46] Thank you. It's very helpful session by now. [00:22:49][2.9]

Speaker 2: [00:22:49] Thanks for coming to our podcast and providing this information. [00:22:49][0.0]

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