

PHD APPLICATION SERVICE ELEMENT NINE



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PHD ADMISSION INTERVIEW

QUESTIONS

1. Your 3rd research question references **policy initiatives**, which itself is a broad topic which will include many EZ's and other initiatives as mentioned. How do you plan to study all these initiatives in one PhD?

It may be that your supervisor questions the ability of one study to answer this full question, and may challenge this, with the idea that your PhD focuses on one area or policy initiative. For instance, you may undertake a case study on one Free-Trade Zone or other area.

2. Under the purpose of the research, you mention building a new spatial database. What database(s) already exist, and what are the limitations of these which make it valid to build a new one?

Here, your supervisor may ask you to explain what data and database(s) already exist and what the limitations of these which makes another database worthwhile. I note that ONS and others produce data related to labour productivity, see link below.

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/economicoutputandproductivity/productivitymeasures/bulletins/regionalandsubregionallabourproductivityuk/2022>

3. Is this all achievable in one PhD?

Looking at the five bullet points, which state the purpose of your research, there is a lot of work to be undertaken, and it does not necessarily flow, in that bullet point one can be expanded with the second bullet point and then on. I think your supervisor may question why you have not decided to focus your PhD on one case study (i.e. Humber Freeport/ other examples at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/enterprise-zones>)

4. How do you plan to include all the structural mechanisms in this study?

The second research question refers to several structural mechanisms which could influence differences in productivity. I would assume that for these, you will mainly use secondary data to test for any correlation with the regional productivity data. If so, your supervisor may ask you whether this has been done before. You may also be wondering whether any primary data could be collected for any of these, though to do so would require a case study to be selected. Finally, your supervisor may question how all these can be properly included within the PhD and whether it would be better to focus on one of two, which would provide a narrow focus for your study.

5. Use of difference in difference analysis?

I think your plan here would be to estimate the causal effect of a treatment or policy by comparing the change in an outcome over time between a treated group and a control group. With this, your supervisor may ask for more details on your proposed sample. So, I can see you mention three in Greater Manchester, Tees Valley and West Midlands, though your supervisor may ask for more detail on specific areas, on the timeline of your analysis and the lag you are considering to fully assess the impact on the treated group.

6. The value of semi-structured interviews?

You mention 40-50 semi-structured interviews with the likes of business leaders, LEPs, and civil servants. What is currently missing from this proposal is what the key questions are that you would like to ask these people, which may not already have been seen in secondary data available, whether there is any risk of bias in their responses and how you plan to gain access to the needed respondents. Do you plan to share any data with these respondents, such as the quantitative analysis you may have from regional productivity datasets to focus the interview?

7. Your plans to categorise place-based policy initiatives?

There is a large body of data already available which shows how productivity differs widely by sector, with productivity of financial and professional services higher than some types of manufacturing. Therefore, your supervisor may ask how you plan to categorise these policy initiatives so that your sample does not include a policy which supported the development of warehouses versus the development of the life science industry, given the expected outcome would be different due to the different focus of the policy (by sector)?

8. What results/ conclusions did you find in your dissertation?

The supervisor would be very interested in your previous study (Labour Immobility and Spatial Inequality in the Northeast), given that it links with your PhD. Prepared to be asked to summarise your research, the results found, how this links to your proposed PhD and what methods you used (benefits and limitations of such).

9. Further explanation of the below, which is on Pg3 of the proposal?

*Your proposal mentions - **The topics that I will test with these theoretical frameworks include English regional data, specifically, how initial conditions in 1980 influence successive developmental outcomes.***

Your supervisor may ask for additional explanation around the statement above, in particular, further explanation around how initial conditions in 1980 influence successive developmental outcomes. Your supervisor may also ask you, based on the previous studies presented in your literature review, whether you are inclined to form hypotheses which will determine the direction of your study, or whether this is more explanatory (inductive versus deductive research)?

10. Questions around your comment on the 'long-run productivity differences across regions in England'

Your supervisor may ask you to expand on your comment in the conclusion section that this study will offer 'the first detailed study of the long-run productivity differences across regions in England.'

I think there are many studies which have looked to explain regional productivity to some extent in the UK (one link below). Your supervisor may ask for more specific details on how this study differs, and therefore, you may be asked to expand on this point, and it may direct the discussion back to the specific case study chosen for your PhD, which may differ from others and therefore make this study unique.

<https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/national-institute-economic-review/article/productivity-performance-of-different-types-of-uk-regions-and-the-challenges-of-levelling-up/911E83D56B395A2E1FF689208B6DB222>

11. How will you consider inter-region impacts and the negative impacts of policy?

A key question around your study may be how you plan to consider the wider impact of these policies, if you do plan to consider them at all. For example, one argument for policies such as EZ's or more recently Freeports is that they create competition between English regions and rather than attract new business to the UK, just move facilities around the UK to take advantage of UK government support and preferential tax treatment. So it could be that a certain policy in Greater Manchester has benefitted regional productivity;

however, has this benefit come at the expense of another English region, or is this a completely new economic activity created?

It may be that this is not considered, I just wanted to identify this as the focus of your research questions, and the focus at the start seems to be UK-wide, rather than on one specific policy or region.

The questions above are specific to the proposal. You may also be asked more generic questions, such as:

12. Why a PhD and why our programme?
13. What do you hope to achieve from this PhD, and what are your long-term career goals?
14. What are your strengths and weaknesses? How do you plan to develop during the PhD?
15. What are your expectations around supervisor support and access to resources?
16. How do you handle challenges, especially if your proposal may change (for instance, driven by access to data)?
17. What are your general thoughts on the current policy of re-industrialisation, which many Western governments are prioritising? (Similar may also be asked on re-shoring/ de-globalisation/ trade)