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REAL PhD

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White Paper on Doctoral Study Abroad 2026

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Research Background and Significance

As 2026 marks the inaugural year of the "15th Five-Year Plan", the core orientation of national study abroad policy has shifted from encouraging overseas study to precisely serving national strategic needs and cultivating reserve talent for international organizations. According to the "2026 Guidelines for the Selection and Dispatch of State-funded Study Abroad Personnel" issued by the China Scholarship Council, the state continues to prioritize funding for doctoral students and joint training doctoral students to study abroad through channels such as the "State-funded Graduate Student Program for Building High-Level Universities". Unlike previous years, the 2026 policy places greater emphasis on "problem-oriented" approaches and "talent reserve", particularly through collaboration with international organizations such as renowned overseas universities to establish special scholarships. The aim is to cultivate interdisciplinary doctoral talents with international perspectives and a thorough understanding of international rules.

From the perspective of overseas study trends, Chinese students' choices for doctoral studies exhibit significant characteristics of rationalization and diversification. Influenced by the international situation and the global economic environment, the traditional "US-only theory" has been broken, giving rise to a multipolar landscape encompassing the United Kingdom, Hong Kong (China), the United States, and continental Europe. Notably, the Hong Kong region of China, leveraging its high-quality educational resources, safe environment, and talent attraction policies, has for the first time risen to become the second most popular study abroad destination. In terms of motivation, "gaining experience overseas first, then returning to China for development" has become the mainstream. Over 40% of students plan to accumulate work experience abroad after graduation before returning to China at an opportune time. This indicates that contemporary doctoral students are more inclined to enhance their workplace bargaining power through overseas experience, pursuing pragmatic career development.

In this context, the research significance of pursuing an overseas doctoral degree has transcended mere "gilding" and evolved into a deep integration of personal academic aspirations with the national high-quality development strategy. For

individuals, receiving rigorous scientific research training in top overseas laboratories (especially in engineering powerhouses like the US) is not only about obtaining high-level academic achievements but also about accumulating "invisible wealth" — namely, cross-cultural communication skills, international academic network resources, and cutting-edge research perspectives. For the nation, these deeply specialized doctoral graduates are valuable assets driving industrial upgrading and technological innovation. Therefore, overseas doctoral study is becoming a crucial link connecting China with the world, bridging the talent chain of the "domestic and international dual circulation", holding long-term strategic significance.

1.2 Research Methodology

First, this study employed the questionnaire survey method. The research team of REAL PhD designed a rigorous questionnaire from the perspective of overseas doctoral students, utilizing online self-administered questionnaires as the primary data collection method. The questionnaire design covered dimensions including demographic information (such as age, educational background), study abroad preparation paths (e.g., direct PhD entry, PhD after Master's, PhD after work), target country and region selection, application motivations, and influencing factors. The questionnaire was distributed through multiple targeted channels, covering domestic university students and overseas student communities, and valid samples were collected. After data processing, descriptive statistics and cross-tabulation analysis were used, focusing on identifying distribution patterns of doctoral study abroad behavior across different age groups and educational levels. The questionnaire survey method provided quantitative evidence for this study, ensuring the conclusions are representative and verifiable.

Second, to construct the research background and theoretical framework, this study concurrently adopted the literature review method, systematically examining relevant literature both domestically and internationally concerning doctoral study abroad trends, applicant characteristics, admissions policies, and destination selection logic. It focused on referencing high-quality research from the past five years on topics such as overseas doctoral training mechanisms, the impact of age and educational background on application success rates, and comparisons of doctoral admissions preferences across different countries. Through literature summarization and

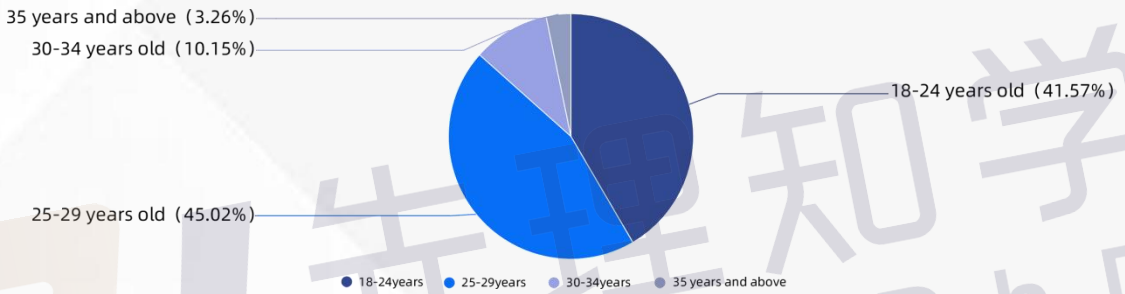
comparative analysis, key variables influencing doctoral study abroad decisions were extracted. The literature review method effectively supplemented the research depth of the empirical data, enhancing the academic rigor of this study.

1.3 Research Subjects

The survey subjects of this study primarily include individuals who are about to study abroad, are currently studying overseas, and those with overseas doctoral study experience. The specific data information is as follows:

Influencing Variable	Specific Variable Data	Percentage
Age Group	18–24 years old	41.57%
Age Group	25–29 years old	45.02%
Age Group	30–34 years old	10.15%
Highest Educational Background	Undergraduate (currently studying)	11.21%
Highest Educational Background	Master's (currently studying)	43.68%
Highest Educational Background	Master's (graduated)	42.91%
Highest Educational Background	PhD (graduated)	0.48%
Highest Educational Background	Other	1.72%
Study Abroad Destination	United Kingdom	8.03%
Study Abroad Destination	Australia	17.61%

Study Abroad Destination	United States	5.96%
Study Abroad Destination	Canada	2.55%
Study Abroad Destination	Hong Kong (China)	30.7%
Study Abroad Destination	Macau (China)	9.02%
Study Abroad Destination	New Zealand	8.42%
Study Abroad Destination	Singapore	7.99%

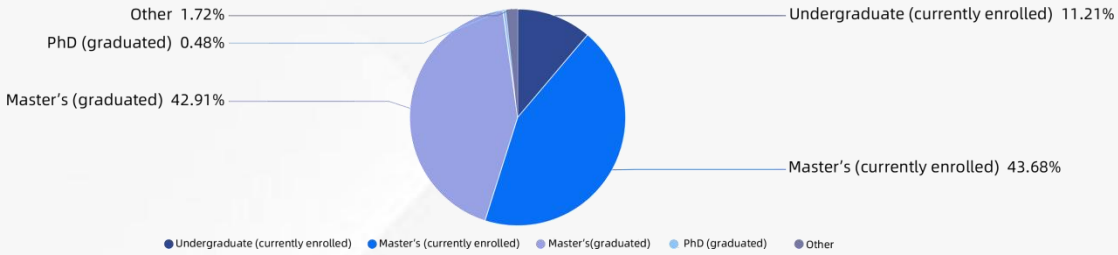


*Data source: REAL PhD Team 2026 Questionnaire Survey (N = 1,015)

From the age group distribution, the combined data for the 18–24 and 25–29 age groups reaches 86.59%, making them the main body of overseas doctoral students. The 18–24 age group corresponds to direct PhD entry or immediate PhD pursuit after a Master's degree; the 25–29 age group corresponds to studying abroad after 1–3 years of work or after completing a domestic Master's. This also indicates that doctoral study abroad decisions are mostly concentrated in the continuous education stage following undergraduate or Master's graduation.

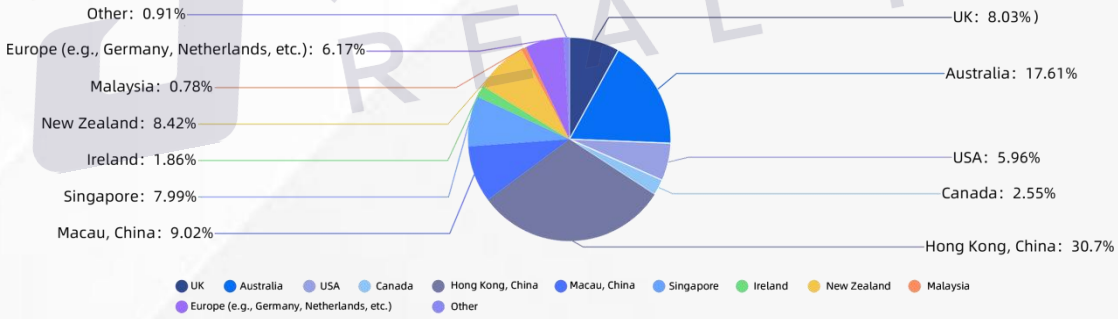
Relatively speaking, doctoral students aged 30 and above are fewer. The main reason is that individuals in this age group typically have entered the career development phase or family formation stage. At this point, giving up work income and leaving established social networks to pursue a PhD overseas entails significant economic pressure and family responsibilities. Simultaneously, overseas doctoral programs (especially fully-funded STEM programs) often favor younger applicants with greater academic potential, higher adaptability, and longer training cycles. Applicants over 30, even with rich resumes, might be perceived as having "passed their prime research years" or having "decreased compatibility for long-term

collaboration with supervisors". Furthermore, implicit age restrictions in some scholarships (e.g., CSC) objectively also suppress the proportion of older students pursuing doctoral studies abroad.



*Data source: REAL PhD Team 2026 Questionnaire Survey (N = 1,015)

From the perspective of educational background, the large number of Master's degree holders reflects the prevalence of this qualification level in overseas PhD applications. Overseas doctoral programs (especially research-oriented ones) generally require applicants to possess the ability to conduct independent research. The systematic research training received during the Master's stage (such as topic selection, experimentation, thesis writing) and the completed Master's thesis are key credentials for demonstrating research potential. In contrast, undergraduate graduates who lack solid research experience often have a lower success rate when applying directly for a PhD.



*Data source: REAL PhD Team 2026 Questionnaire Survey (N = 1,015)

In terms of destination choices for studying abroad, Hong Kong, China has emerged as the most preferred destination among respondents, owing to its high-quality education and convenient geographic location. Meanwhile, traditional study abroad countries such as the United Kingdom, Australia, and the United States also account for a significant share.

Overall, the subjects of this study exhibit typical characteristics of being "young, predominantly master's degree holders, and diverse in destination choices." Based

on comprehensive analysis, the data collected in this study aligns well with the sample data, indicating that these findings can serve as a representative snapshot of Chinese overseas PhD students and provide a solid empirical foundation for this research.

Chapter 2 Macro Environment Analysis of Overseas Doctoral Study

2.1 Macro Context: Polarization and Competition

At present, the landscape of doctoral study abroad is undergoing a profound reconstruction shaped by both global and domestic macro forces, characterized by the core dynamics of "**intensifying global competition alongside escalating domestic demand**."

The uneven recovery of the global economy, the transformation of educational paradigms, and the restructuring of geopolitical relations have collectively reshaped the cost structure, talent mobility rules, and student recruitment landscape of international doctoral education. Meanwhile, the growing demand for high-end talent driven by domestic industrial upgrading, increasingly fierce competition in higher education, and the rationalization of decision-making among families seeking overseas studies have together built a solid "demand foundation" for the doctoral study abroad market. This transformation is propelling the industry from pursuing "**degree credentialism**" toward emphasizing "value investment," creating a new paradigm where opportunities and challenges coexist.

2.1.1 Global Context: Regional Divergence and Intensified Talent Competition

The global macro environment presents a distinct feature of " **intensified regional differentiation, national strategic game, and reconstruction of student source pattern** ". The three major variables of economic trend, educational reform, and geopolitics are intertwined, directly determining the development direction, resource allocation, and competition landscape of global doctoral study abroad. The competition for doctoral talents in various countries has risen to the national strategic level.

(1) Global Economy and Talent Mobility: Dual Differentiation in Costs and Flows

In 2026, the global economy will exhibit a trend of "regional differentiation and slow recovery", which will directly transmit to the field of doctoral study abroad,

manifesting in cost investment and employment space, and driving talent flow to form a two-way pattern of "retention in developed countries and diversion to emerging economies".

- **Developed countries: high costs and strong talent retention**. To curb inflation, developed countries represented by the US and the United Kingdom have continuously increased the cost of studying abroad. For example, the average annual tuition for STEM doctoral programs at private institutions in the US has reached $52,000 *(Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics [BLS], 2024)*, and the standard for proof of living expenses for doctoral students in the London region of the United Kingdom has also been raised by 15% *(Source: UKVI Maintenance, 2025)*. Meanwhile, these countries have strengthened "talent retention" by expanding the quota of research positions. The US alone has added 12,000 doctoral-level research positions, aiming to retain high-end talent trained domestically *(Source: UKVI Maintenance, 2025)*.

- **Emerging Economies: Low Cost and Strong Talent Diversion**. Emerging economies represented by Singapore, Malaysia, and Middle Eastern countries have created a strong "talent diversion" effect by increasing investment in scientific research and optimizing scholarship policies. For example, Singapore has seen a year-on-year increase of 40.3% *(Source: Singapore Economic Development Board, 2025)* in newly added doctoral-level positions, Malaysia has raised the coverage rate of doctoral scholarships to 65% *(Source: Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2025)*, and Middle Eastern countries have targeted and attracted core doctoral talents in fields such as energy and AI through high-value scholarships, exerting a strong appeal to price-sensitive overseas study groups.

(2) Educational Globalization and Talent Competition: From Academic Selection to National Game

The iteration of the education globalization model has propelled the form of doctoral training to upgrade to **a full-chain competition system of "attraction – cultivation – retention"** . The global competition for doctoral talents has evolved from simple academic selection to direct competition for national strategic resources.

- **Innovation in Training Models**: The popularization of transnational joint training and the "micro-credential" system has made "online learning + offline

research" the new normal for doctoral training. For example, the EU's "Erasmus+" program has added 120 new joint doctoral training projects, greatly expanding the geographical boundaries of traditional training models *(Source: European Union Erasmus+ Programme, 2025)*.

- **Policy Dividend Intensifies**: Countries have successively introduced policies to optimize full-chain support from attraction to retention. The US extended the OPT visa duration for STEM doctoral students to 48 months *(Source: H.R. 9023, 118th Congress)*; the United Kingdom provided a 3-year PSW work visa for doctoral graduates *(Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA))*; Canada opened a green channel for immigration for doctoral candidates, with the approval cycle compressed to 6 months. These policy dividends have continuously strengthened their talent attractiveness, making global talent competition increasingly intense *(Source:IRCC official website)*.

(3) Geopolitics and Student Source Reconfiguration: Combining Strictness with Lenience and Remodeling the Landscape

Geopolitical fragmentation has led to the "divergent strictness" of doctoral study abroad policies among countries, while the global doctoral student source structure has also undergone fundamental restructuring, and the rise of Emerging Markets is driving the transformation of institutional recruitment strategies towards diversification.

- **Policy Level: "Combining Leniency with Strictness"**. On the tightening side, the US has cumulatively revoked over 8,000 student visas (mainly targeting STEM fields), and the visa review period has been extended to 6-8 weeks; the United Kingdom has continuously strengthened the ATAS review for sensitive majors. On the loosening side, Singapore has cancelled the rigid language requirement for the doctoral stage and opened spousal work visas; New Zealand has cancelled the requirement for proof of study funds and provided a 2-year work visa, using policy relaxation to attract high-quality global students.

- **Student Source Level: Traditional student source countries (such as China) are affected by the weakening of the demographic dividend, and the long-term scale of student sources faces pressure**. Meanwhile, Southeast Asia and Africa are becoming core growth poles, with the annual growth rate of demand for doctoral study abroad exceeding 15%, and Nigeria has already ranked among the top ten global doctoral student source countries. The rise of emerging

student source markets is driving the doctoral recruitment strategies of global institutions to transform towards greater diversification *(Source: OECD, Education at a Glance)*.

2.1.2 Domestic Macroeconomic Environment: Demand-Driven and the Return of Value Rationality

The domestic macro environment provides dual support of "demand-driven + channel supplementation" for doctoral study abroad. The shortage of high-end talents caused by industrial upgrading has laid the foundation for long-term value, the involution of further education has driven the spillover of demand, and the rationalization of study abroad decision-making and the improvement of supporting systems have further broadened the space for the doctoral study abroad market.

(1) Economic Transformation and Rational Investment: From "Face Consumption" to "Value Investment"

The rapid development of domestic strategic emerging industries has given rise to a large demand for doctoral talents, and the salary advantage of doctors with international research backgrounds is significant. Against this backdrop, the decision-making model of families sending their children abroad for studies is shifting from irrational "face consumption" to prudent "rational investment"

- **Demand Side: Rigid Gap in the Industry** . In strategic emerging industries such as domestic high-end manufacturing, digital economy, and new energy, the total shortage of doctoral talents exceeds 180,000. The salary premium for doctors with international research backgrounds reaches 30%-50%, which provides a clear value outlet for doctoral students studying abroad.

- **Decision-making end: ROI-oriented.** Data shows that in 2023, the average annual income of families with the intention to study abroad was 435,000 yuan, but the budget for doctoral study abroad was generally lower than that for master's. Return on Investment (ROI) has become the core indicator for family decision-making. Doctoral programs in countries such as Singapore and Malaysia, featuring "low cost (only 1/3 – 1/2 of that in Europe and the United States), short duration (3 – 4 years), and high employment suitability", precisely meet the rational investment needs of families, and market popularity continues to rise *(Source: Ministry of Education, Singapore (MOE))*.

(2) Pressure to Advance Academically and Cognitive Iteration: From "Degree Gilding" to "Capacity Enhancement"

The spillover effect of domestic academic pressure has driven high-quality students to turn to overseas education, while the iterative evolution of Generation Z's perception of studying abroad has propelled the core value of doctoral study abroad to shift from "degree gilding" to "ability enhancement".

- **Spillover of Academic Pressure**: Despite the number of domestic postgraduate entrance exam applicants dropping to 3.43 million in 2026, the application-to-admission ratio remains at a high level of 3.2:1, the overall admission rate for domestic doctoral programs is only 12%, and the proportion of recommended admission in doctoral recruitment at top-tier institutions is approaching 50%. The highly competitive environment has prompted a large number of high-quality master's and doctoral candidates to turn to overseas applications, becoming the core source of incremental demand in the overseas doctoral study market *(Source: China Graduate Admissions Information Network, 2025)*.
- **Profound Cognitive Transformation**: As the main force of applicants, Generation Z has highly rational decision-making logic. They no longer blindly pursue university rankings but instead deeply weigh the professional research prospects, study abroad costs, and employment suitability. Studying abroad for a doctorate is positioned as a Critical Path to enhance academic capabilities and core competitiveness, rather than simply a "gilding" behavior, which lays a cognitive foundation for the long-term healthy development of the market.

2.2 Employment Trends: Dividends and Barriers Coexist

The employment situation of the group of doctoral students studying abroad presents a core pattern of **"prominent domestic research orientation, coexistence of overseas opportunities and barriers"** . The employment trend is driven by three core factors: **industry demand, policy orientation, and talent structure** . Overall employment competitiveness has undergone a profound transformation from relying on "study-abroad background" to relying on "research capabilities and industrial transformation experience".

2.2.1 Domestic Employment: Strengthened Research Orientation and Evident Value Differentiation

The core of employment for domestic returnee doctoral students highlights a research orientation, forming a significant distinction from the groups of undergraduate and master's degree students who have studied abroad. The industry distribution is characterized by "leading in emerging fields and upgrading in traditional fields", with a significant polarization in salary levels, while the weakening of the "returnee halo" and the reevaluation of value have become prominent trends.

(1) Industry and Salary Structure: Focus on Scientific Research, Polarization

The domestic employment of returnee doctors is highly concentrated in scientific research-related fields, with industry distribution and salary levels showing distinct characteristics of differentiation and polarization.

- **Industry Landscape: "Emerging Sectors Lead, Traditional Sectors Upgrade".** In emerging sectors, biomedicine and artificial intelligence have become the core growth drivers, with the proportion of returnee doctoral students in the R&D teams of leading enterprises exceeding 40% and 37.2% respectively. In traditional sectors, education accounts for 35.1% of the total employment of returnee doctoral students, and together with finance, consulting, etc., is achieving transformation and upgrading by recruiting returnee doctoral students. The former focuses on scientific research and teaching positions in universities, while the latter delves into niche tracks such as quantitative analysis and industrial research.

- **Salary Differentiation: Core Competencies Determine Premium.** Salary levels show a clear polarization. The starting salary of returnee doctoral students from top-tier universities in emerging fields can reach 35,000-50,000 yuan per month, with an annual salary exceeding 500,000 yuan; while that of returnee doctoral students from ordinary universities in traditional fields is only 18,000-25,000 yuan per month. Analysis shows that interdisciplinary background (resulting in a 42.3% salary premium) and top journal publications and experience in top overseas laboratories (resulting in a 38.7% salary premium) are the two core factors contributing to salary premiums.

(2) Employment Pain Points and Value Reassessment: Fading Glory and Value

Reassessment

The domestic employment satisfaction of returnee doctoral students is generally low, with "returns falling short of expectations" and "insufficient ability fit" being the core pain points. Multiple factors are causing the "halo of returnees" to fade, but their value in high-end scientific research fields remains irreplaceable.

- **Core Pain Points**: Data shows that only 57.8% of returnee doctoral students are satisfied with their current jobs. The main pain points are concentrated in "employment returns falling short of expectations" (68.3%) and "insufficient ability fit" (47.9%).
- **Value reassessment**: The rising cost of studying abroad, the expansion of domestic doctoral training scale, and the mismatch between industry demand and basic research direction have all led to a significant weakening of the "overseas returnee halo". 42.7% of respondents believe that the value of doctoral study abroad has decreased. However, there are obvious differences in this cognitive differentiation – in top universities, research institutes, and core R & D positions of top enterprises **In the high-end scientific research field, the doctoral experience of top overseas universities is still an indispensable core competitiveness and important threshold** *(Source: Annual Report on the Development of Chinese Students Studying Abroad 2025 Blue Book (No. 9, 2024–2025)*.

2.2.2 Overseas Employment: Policy Dividend Unleashed, Invisible Ceiling Still Exists

Overseas employment of returnee doctors, on the one hand, relies on the differentiated policies of various countries to gain development space, with highly concentrated employment fields and significant salary advantages; on the other hand, deep-seated pain points such as invisible ceilings, identity binding, and cultural adaptation continue to exist, and the dynamic adjustment of policies has become the core variable affecting their career planning.

(1) Differentiated policy landscape: Three major types, with both advantages and disadvantages coexisting

Employment and immigration policies targeting the doctoral population in various

countries can be classified into three major types, which provide support for overseas employment of doctoral students, but their uncertainty also poses challenges to long-term planning.

Immigration-oriented (Canada, Australia, New Zealand) : Policies are significantly tilted, such as bonus points for doctoral immigration applications, up to 4 years of post-graduation work visas, etc.

- **Research Absorption Type (US, United Kingdom)**: Provides channels for doctoral students to enter core R&D positions, such as the 3-year STEM OPT in the US, the 3-year PSW work visa in the United Kingdom, and lower work visa salary thresholds *(Source: UKVI Skilled Worker salary threshold)*.
- **Risks and Opportunities Coexist (US)** : The H-1B visa policy is fraught with uncertainties, such as rising application fees and adjustments to the lottery mechanism. The dynamic changes in policy quotas across countries have all increased the difficulty of long-term overseas career planning for doctoral students *(Source: National Science Foundation)*.

(2) Employment Opportunities and Deep-seated Pain Points: The Three Big Mountains Under High Salaries

Overseas employment fields for doctoral degree holders are highly concentrated in technology (47.8%), education and scientific research (32.1%), with a median salary reaching $68,000 per year, showing significant advantages *(Source: OECD, Education at a Glance 2023)*. However, three deep-seated pain points have always constrained their long-term development:

- **Glass ceiling**: In corporate management promotions and university tenure evaluations, there is a significant disadvantage compared to local doctoral students.
- **Identity Binding**: Employment often relies on employer-bound identity permits such as OPT and work visas, which weakens salary bargaining power and career choice options.
- **Cultural Adaptation**: Language communication differences, workplace philosophy disagreements, etc., continue to impede career advancement and the upper limit of development.

2.2.3 Motivation Decoding: Three Major Factors Reshape the Employment Landscape

The changes in the employment trends of the group of overseas doctoral students are primarily driven by three factors: industry demand, policy orientation, and talent structure. These three factors interact with each other, promoting the transformation of the core of employment competitiveness from "overseas study background" to "core capabilities".

- **Industry demand-driven**: Domestic industrial upgrading and overseas industrial layout have jointly given rise to a massive demand for interdisciplinary and internationalized scientific research talents. For example, the shortage in the fields of biomedicine and AI reaches hundreds of thousands, which is the fundamental driving force behind the changing employment trends.
- **Policy Orientation Impact**: The dynamic adjustments of talent introduction policies across domestic regions and work visa and immigration policies in overseas countries jointly shape the employment flow of the doctoral group. Policy uncertainty has become a core variable in overseas employment planning.
- **Upgrading of Talent Structure**: Currently, STEM majors account for as high as 78.3% among doctoral international students, and combined with the weakening of the "returnee aura," it has forced a shift in the core of the employment competitiveness of the doctoral group: from simply relying on "overseas study background" to relying on "scientific research and innovation capabilities and industrial transformation experience," which has become the key for them to gain a foothold in the workplace *(Source: OECD, International Mobility of Higher Education Talent Report)*.

2.3 Policy Orientation: The Dual Logic of Incentives and Constraints

The overseas and domestic doctoral study policies present **a core pattern of "parallel implementation of full-chain domestic support and tightened compliance, coexistence of differentiated overseas adjustments and dynamic risks"** . Policy orientation is directly reshaping the market structure, group decision-making logic,

and industry service models, driving the market to transform from "scale expansion" to "quality compliance".

2.3.1 Domestic Policy: Talent Recruitment Upgrade, with Standardization and Constraints Going Hand in Hand

Domestic policies focus on attracting high-end doctoral talent, while strengthening overseas study certification and industry compliance management and control, forming **a dual orientation of "talent attraction guarantee + regulatory constraints"**.

- **Talent Recruitment Upgrade**: First-tier and new first-tier cities have established a full-chain support system of " household registration + relocation subsidy (up to 500,000 yuan) + research start-up funds (200,000-1 million yuan) + entrepreneurship support (up to 5 million yuan) ", with a focus on national strategic sectors such as AI, new energy, and biomedicine.
- **Certification Specification**: The policy of not certifying remote teaching textbooks has been implemented, and the standard that the Time Stay abroad must meet 80% of the academic program duration has fully returned, guiding doctoral overseas study to return to its academic essence.
- **Educational Orientation**: Continuously increase the number of government-sponsored doctoral students (reaching 8,000 in 2025, a year-on-year increase of 15%), add over 200 new special positions for civil servants in foreign-related affairs, and guide the flow of doctoral students studying abroad to precisely align with national strategic needs.
- **Industry Rectification**: Strictly removed over 120 unlicensed overseas study agencies, promoting the industry's transformation from "scale expansion" to "quality improvement".

2.3.2 Overseas Policy: Differential Adjustment, Dynamic Risks Emerge

Overseas doctoral study policies exhibit the characteristics of "differentiated adaptation and dynamic adjustment", mainly divided into two major orientations: tightened control and relaxed convenience. Policy uncertainty has become a key variable influencing study abroad decisions.

- **Tightening Controls (US):** Visa reviews for STEM sensitive majors have been upgraded, with the review period extended to 6–8 weeks; the threshold for non-sensitive fields has been moderately relaxed. The H-1B doctor quota proposal remains pending, becoming the biggest risk for staying in the US *(Source: U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), 2025)*.

- **Relaxed and Convenient (United Kingdom):**The requirement for proof of funds has been cancelled, and visa approval has been shortened to 5 working days; the PSW visa for doctoral graduates has been extended to 4 years, significantly lowering the threshold for staying in the UK.

- **Immigration Orientation (Canada, Australia):** Doctoral graduates receive significant policy preferences in provincial nominations and skilled immigration, but need to closely monitor the risks associated with annual quota adjustments.

- **Emerging High Ground (Germany, France, Ireland, and Malta):** Leveraging advantages such as tuition-free education, high-value scholarships, and cost-effectiveness, it is systematically reshaping the global landscape of doctoral study abroad. Data shows that in 2025, the number of Chinese students pursuing doctoral studies in Germany, France, and Ireland will increase by 25% year-on-year, becoming a core growth pole in the market *(Source: German Federal Ministry of Education and Research; Higher Education Authority, Ireland)*.

2.3.3 Policy Stacking Effect: Reshaping the Doctoral Overseas Study Market

Policy adjustments are reshaping the doctoral study abroad market from three core dimensions:

- **Pattern Reshaping**: The proportion of traditional destinations is slowly contracting, while the market share of high-cost-performance emerging destinations such as Germany, France, Ireland, and Malaysia has exceeded 30%, officially forming a diversified pattern.

- **Rationalization of decision-making**: Policy adaptability, cost-effectiveness of studying abroad, and the alignment of majors with national strategies are gradually replacing the "sole focus on institutional rankings" as the core

considerations in group decision-making.

- **Service Model Transformation**: The traditional service model of "pure application and admission" has been broken, with research background enhancement, policy interpretation, and career planning becoming core modules. Meanwhile, compliance has become the bottom line for industry survival, and leading institutions have significantly strengthened their competitive advantages by virtue of their full-chain service capabilities and compliance advantages *(Source: Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China; Zhaopin, 2025 China Returnee Employment Survey Report)*.

2.4 Doctoral Degree Advancement Pathways: Multiple Choices and Adaptation Logic

Combining the differentiation characteristics of the macro environment with the core orientation of employment trends, the path of doctoral degree promotion has been formed **"Overseas study, domestic further study, and public sector development"** The three core tracks present the core characteristics of "path diversification, personalized selection, and adaptability as king". The core logic of path selection should be **"fit their own development demands, refuse to blindly follow the trend"**.

2.4.1 Overseas Education: Comprehensive Competence Decides Success, Structural Opportunities Emerge

The competition for overseas doctoral admissions is becoming increasingly fierce, presenting the dual characteristics of **"qualitative changes in admission criteria and prominent structural opportunities"** . Comprehensive research ability has become the core competitiveness, while opportunities such as the expansion of emerging majors and increased scholarships provide differentiated choice space for applicants with different backgrounds.

(1) Qualitative change in admission criteria: The end of the sole focus on scores

By 2026, global doctoral admissions have completed the paradigm shift from **"standardized thresholds" to "comprehensive ability assessment"** . Standardized

scores are only basic screening criteria, while research fit, academic output, and comprehensive performance have become the core considerations for admission.

- **Differential performance**: Top US institutions place greater emphasis on the alignment of research directions and strong recommendation letters; UK G5 institutions have rigid requirements for GPA and IELTS scores, and highly rely on research proposals (RP) and interview performance; competition in Hong Kong, China, and Singapore has reached a fever pitch, with nearly 70% of admitted STEM students having research outputs from their master's programs.
- **Common Trend**: 57% of admissions officers ranked "the alignment of research experience with the application direction" as the top consideration, and standardized test scores are no longer the core competitiveness.

(2) Core Opportunities: Four Structural Breakthroughs

Despite intensifying competition, four major structural opportunities have emerged, providing applicants with diversified breakthrough paths:

- **Expansion of Emerging Majors**: Doctoral programs in interdisciplinary fields such as AI ethics, new energy materials, and ESG management continue to be added, with enrollment quotas increasing by 15%–20%.
- **Scholarship Increase**: The French Eiffel Scholarship has been raised to 2,100 euros per month; Dutch position-based doctoral programs (paid employees with a monthly after-tax salary of 1,400 – 2,200 euros) are the most cost-effective in Europe *(Source: Jiaodong Online, "The Dutch PhD System and Application Methods," published in 2025)*.
- **High-cost-performance destination diversion**: Germany (tuition-free, closely integrated with the industry), Malaysia (branch campuses of UK, US, and Australian universities, with costs 1/2 – 1/3 of the main campuses), and Ireland (immigration-friendly, European research hub) are effectively diverting students from traditional popular destinations.
- **Value Depressions of Research-based Programs**: Compared to taught master's programs, research-based master's/Ph.D. programs have relatively less competitive pressure and higher scholarship coverage, making them an excellent pathway for further doctoral studies.

2.4.2 Domestic Further Education: The Halo of Returned Overseas Students and Localization Challenges

The number of returnees applying for domestic doctoral programs has increased significantly, with the core driving force being the adaptation of overseas backgrounds to the domestic market. The special policies for returnees at top-tier institutions and extremely low training costs have made it the preferred path for accumulating local resources and enhancing employment competitiveness.

- **Data and Motivation**: The number of overseas returnees applying for domestic doctoral programs has increased by 85% compared to 2020, and the intensity of competition has already reached the same level as that of regular postgraduate entrance examinations (the admission rate for popular 985 universities is 12%–15%). The core motivation lies in achieving the background superposition of "overseas academic vision + domestic industry adaptation" through domestic further education, thus addressing the pain point of "insufficient ability adaptation" *(Source: Ministry of Education, 2024 Statistical Communiqué on National Education Development)*.
- **Policy and Value**: Top universities such as Tsinghua and Peking have established special channels for returnees from overseas (exempting written tests/language requirements), with special scholarships covering tuition fees and living expenses. Those with the background of "overseas master's + domestic doctorate" have significantly enhanced competitiveness in teaching positions at universities and R&D positions in enterprises, and the cost of the domestic doctoral stage is extremely low (annual tuition fee < 15,000 yuan, scholarship coverage rate over 90%), highly meeting the needs of families for rational investment.

2.4.3 Public Sector: Trend towards specialized positions, with the adaptability threshold raised

The demand for returnee doctors to enter the public sector continues to grow, with their advantages concentrated in high-end foreign-related positions and scientific research policy positions. However, obstacles such as insufficient professional fit are prominent, and they need to prepare for exams in advance and focus precisely.

- **Opportunities and Advantages**: In recent years, the proportion of returnee doctoral students entering the public sector has increased significantly (72% higher in 2025 compared to 2020). Their competitive advantages are highly concentrated in two types of positions: high-end foreign-related positions (such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Commerce, etc., with an admission rate of 28%) and scientific research policy positions (such as the Ministry of Science and Technology, the Chinese Academy of Sciences, etc.).
- **Challenges and Responses**: The main obstacles lie in insufficient professional suitability, unfamiliarity with the domestic examination system, and differences in career development concepts. Path selection needs to be highly focused on the target position, with early preparation for exams and accumulation of relevant practical experience to achieve precise alignment between the returnee background and job requirements.

2.4.4 Path Selection Strategy: Adaptation is better than blind following, and rationality prevails over popularity

Path selection should be based on one's own development plan, precisely match with the core characteristics of each path, and avoid blindly chasing hotspots.

Dimension	Overseas PhD	Domestic PhD	Public Sector
Focus	Independent research, cross-cultural competence	Exam skills, local system fit	Policy understanding, execution
Cost	High (¥300k–600k/year); budget ¥100k–250k/year	Very low (≤ ¥15k/year)	Exam costs only
Career Fit	Global R&D&academia	Domestic academia&R&D	Foreign affairs& research roles
Ideal For	Global ambition, strong academics	Local focus, network building	Stability, specialized majors

Strategic Recommendations:

- Those inclined towards international development: Prioritize matching high-cost-performance overseas projects and scholarships, focusing on emerging interdisciplinary fields.
- Those inclined to focus on local development: Make full use of the special channels for returnees from top domestic universities to accumulate local resources and enhance employment suitability.
- Those seeking career stability: Familiarize themselves with the domestic public sector examination system 1–2 years in advance to precisely overcome adaptability barriers.
- For those without a clear plan yet: The "overseas + domestic" connection path can be used as a risk hedging option, taking into account both international perspectives and local adaptability, to achieve a closed loop of the core logic of the full text.

2.5 Trends in the Overseas Doctoral Study Industry: From Scale Expansion to Value Deep Cultivation

In 2026, the field of doctoral study abroad will face **three major challenges: "the industry itself, the study abroad population, and the external environment"** . Meanwhile, destination diversification, major rationalization, service upgrading, and industry compliance will become the core development trends.

Dimension	Main manifestations
Industry itself	Small and medium-sized institutions make illegal commitments, with uneven service quality; technology application is polarized; the cost of studying abroad continues to rise (annual tuition fee increase ranges from 3% to 15%), intensifying the survival pressure on the industry.

Overseas Study Group	The acceptance rate for doctoral programs at top-tier institutions has dropped below 5%, with competition reaching a fever pitch; application costs exceed 100,000 yuan, highlighting economic pressure; the help-seeking rate for mental health issues has increased by 18% year-on-year; employment satisfaction stands at only 68%, lower than that of master's degree holders; and uncertainties in domestic and international policies have intensified decision-making anxiety.
External Environment	The global economic recovery is weak, with research funding at some European and American universities cut by 10% – 20%; geopolitical conflicts affect the stability of some study-abroad destinations; the expansion of domestic doctoral enrollment (the enrollment scale will exceed 150,000 in 2025, with professional doctorates accounting for over 60%) intensifies competition in the job market.

Prospects for Development Trends in 2026:

- **Destination diversification**: The proportion of traditional destinations such as Europe, the United States, Australia, Hong Kong, and Singapore will drop to 65%-70%, while the market share of emerging high-cost-performance destinations such as Germany, France, Ireland, and Malaysia will continue to rise to over 30%.
- **Rationalization of major selection**: Applications for applied and interdisciplinary majors (AI, new energy, ESG, biomedicine) will continue to surge, with an average annual growth rate of 42%. The proportion of applications for pure liberal arts and pure science majors will continue to shrink.
- **Service Model Upgrade**: Technology empowerment (AI school selection, intelligent application essays) and full-cycle companion services (covering pre-application, during application, post-application, and career planning) will become standard features of leading institutions, providing applicants with more accurate decision-making support.
- **Deepening of industry compliance**: The access standards for the overseas study service industry continue to rise, and data compliance costs have been incorporated into the normal operation of institutions. The industry will form a

competitive landscape of "full-chain and brand-driven development of leading institutions, and differentiated and vertical deep cultivation of small and medium-sized institutions".

Chapter 3 The Triple Logic of Doctoral Study Abroad Choices

3.1 Policy Landscape: Global Game and China's Role

Currently, **global doctoral study abroad has formed an overall pattern of "agglomeration in core countries and complementary multi-directional flows"**. Policies of various countries are all guided by three core principles: scientific research innovation, talent retention, and the integration of industry, academia, and research, presenting a development trend of "coexistence of differentiated competition and collaborative cooperation". As core destinations for study abroad, the US, the United Kingdom, Germany, Australia, and Canada rely on their respective scientific research advantages to establish distinctive and well-developed doctoral study abroad policies, focusing on different dimensions such as research priority, efficient cultivation, research freedom, innovation-driven development, and diversified cultivation respectively. All countries continue to enhance their attractiveness to international doctoral talents through diversified funding support and convenient talent retention policies.

3.1.1 Global Policy Landscape: Overall Structure and Core Orientation

Combining the current development situation and policy practices of global doctoral study abroad, its overall pattern and core orientation can be summarized as**"one core pattern, three common orientations, and one development trend"**:

- **In the overall landscape**, the scale of global doctoral students has continued to expand, forming a pattern centered around countries with strong scientific research capabilities and characterized by complementary development among countries. According to the OECD report "Trends Shaping Education 2025", the number of doctoral students worldwide exceeded 2 million in 2024, among which international doctoral students accounted for 38%, a 7 percentage point increase compared to 2019. Talent flow is highly concentrated in countries such as the US, United Kingdom, Germany, Australia, and Canada. These countries, with their well-established scientific research systems and sufficient funding support, have become the main gathering places for international doctoral

talent. Different from studying abroad at the undergraduate and master's levels, the policies for studying abroad at the doctoral level place more emphasis on the scientific research attribute, rather than simply academic qualification improvement or cultural experience, which is the core difference in the positioning of global doctoral study abroad policies *(Source: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD))*.

- **In terms of core orientation**, global doctoral study abroad policies exhibit three common characteristics: First, they focus on scientific research innovation, deeply integrating doctoral training with national scientific research strategies and emphasizing the enhancement of doctoral students' original scientific research capabilities; Second, they strengthen talent attraction and retention, attracting international top doctoral talents through supporting policies such as visas, immigration, and employment, and promoting their long-term service to the country's scientific research and industrial development; Third, they promote the integration of industry, academia, and research, generally encouraging doctoral students to participate in enterprise scientific research projects and interdisciplinary research topics, strengthening the transformation ability of scientific research results, and achieving precise alignment between doctoral training and the needs of scientific research and industry. This is also one of the core features that distinguish doctoral-level overseas study from undergraduate and master's-level study.

- **In terms of development trends**, global doctoral study abroad policies exhibit the characteristic of "coexistence of differentiated competition and collaborative cooperation". Developed countries, leveraging their advantages in scientific research resources, focus on attracting and cultivating high-end doctoral talents, with policy design becoming more refined and personalized; developing countries, on the other hand, take cultivating local scientific research talents as their core objective, with policies leaning towards funding support and incentives for returning home, while actively carrying out joint doctoral training programs with developed countries, leveraging external resources to improve the quality of local doctoral training, thus forming a global doctoral study abroad ecosystem featuring complementary advantages and collaborative development *(Source:RePEc (Research Papers in Economics))*.

3.1.2 Decoding Key National Policies: Differentiated Competition Strategies

The US, the United Kingdom, Germany, Australia, and Canada, as the core destinations for global doctoral study abroad, have built a comprehensive policy system **around four key dimensions of doctoral training, namely research attributes, funding support, supervisor matching, and talent retention**, each with its own focus and distinct characteristics.

(1) US

The US is the top destination for doctoral study worldwide, as well as the country with the largest scale of doctoral training and the strongest scientific research capabilities. The core orientation of its policies is "research priority, diversified funding, and talent retention." In 2024, the number of doctoral students in the US reached 3.4328 million, with doctoral students accounting for 1.04%, among which international doctoral students accounted for 42%, mainly concentrated in STEM fields *(Source: Institute of Education Sciences (IES), U.S. Department of Education)*.

- **In terms of admission and cultivation**, US doctoral programs adopt the "application–review system", with the core assessment focusing on the applicant's research potential, academic background, and the alignment of their research plan; the program duration is typically 5–6 years, and supervisors have the dominant authority over the scientific research guidance, funding allocation, and academic output of doctoral students.
- **In terms of financial support**, more than 90% of international doctoral students can receive various types of funding, which are mainly divided into three categories: Research Assistant (RA), Teaching Assistant (TA), and Fellowship.
- **In terms of talent retention**, STEM doctoral graduates can enjoy an extension of OPT (Optional Practical Training) up to 3 years; meanwhile, the US has opened a "talent immigration" channel for doctoral graduates, and eligible doctoral graduates can quickly obtain US permanent residency *(Source: NSF)*.

(2) UK

The United Kingdom is the core destination for doctoral study in Europe, with its policy orientation being **"efficient cultivation, focused funding, and visa**

convenience" .

- **In terms of admission and cultivation**, doctoral programs in the United Kingdom also adopt the "application–review system", focusing on examining the alignment between the research plan and the supervisor's research direction, with a relatively short duration of study and emphasis on research efficiency and output of results.
- **In terms of funding support**, funding is mainly provided by the UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), institutions, and research foundations. Funding available for international doctoral students includes UKRI scholarships, institutional scholarships, and special research scholarships.
- **In terms of visa and employment**, the United Kingdom provides "Student Visa" (Student Visa) for international doctoral students, allowing them to work 20 hours per week and full–time during holidays, providing them with flexible channels for practice and income generation *(Source: UKRI)*.

(3) Germany

The core orientation of Germany's doctoral study abroad policy is " **research freedom, tuition–free, and integration of industry, academia, and research** ". In 2024, the number of doctoral students in Germany will reach 139,061, of which international doctoral students account for 38% *(Source: OECD)*.

- **In terms of admission and training**, German doctoral programs adopt the "supervisor invitation system", with the core assessment focusing on the applicant's research ability and the feasibility of the research plan; the duration of study is usually 3 – 4 years, implementing the supervisor responsibility system, and granting doctoral students full research freedom.
- **In terms of financial support**, Germany implements a "tuition–free" policy, where all international doctoral students can enjoy full tuition exemption and only need to pay an annual registration fee of 50–200 euros; funding mainly comes from Humboldt Foundation scholarships, institutional research project grants, and corporate sponsorships.
- **In terms of talent retention**, doctoral graduates can apply for the "EU Blue Card", enjoy work and life benefits substantially equivalent to those of German citizens, and are not restricted in their employment fields *(Source: DAAD)*.

(4) Australia

The core orientation of Australia's doctoral study abroad policy is " **scientific research innovation, generous funding, and convenient immigration** ".

- **In terms of admission and cultivation**, the "application–review system" is adopted, focusing on assessing academic background, research potential, and the feasibility of research plans. The program duration is 3–4 years, concentrating on the writing of doctoral dissertations and original research.
- **In terms of funding support**, the funding system mainly includes the government scholarship Research Training Program (RTP), institutional scholarships such as the University International Postgraduate Award (UIPA) from the University of New South Wales (UNSW), and research project funding.
- **In terms of talent retention**, Australia provides a fast-track "skilled migration" pathway for doctoral graduates, which offers additional migration points and allows them to apply for a 4-year work visa, significantly enhancing their competitiveness in migration and employment *(Source: Australian Department of Education and Training)*.

(5) Canada

The core orientation of Canada's doctoral study abroad policy is "**diverse scientific research, comprehensive funding, and talent priority**" .

- **In terms of admission and cultivation**, the "application–review system" is adopted, comprehensively evaluating the applicant's academic background, research potential, and research plan. The program duration is 4–5 years, emphasizing interdisciplinary integration and practical application.
- **In terms of funding support**, the funding is mainly provided by three major research institutions (NSERC, SSHRC, CIHR), which jointly implement the Canada Graduate Research Scholarship — Doctoral (CGS-D) program, providing doctoral students with an annual grant of CAD 30,000 for a period of 3 years, thus establishing a comprehensive and diversified funding support system *(Source: Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada)*.
- **In terms of talent retention**, Canada provides a "fast-track immigration" channel for doctoral graduates, streamlining the application process and attracting doctoral talent to stay in the country for the long term.

3.1.3 China's Policy Positioning: From a Country of Overseas Student Outflow to a Participant in Talent Competition

Policies related to doctoral study in China have formed a pattern of " **two-way efforts, perfect guarantee** ". On the one hand, through diversified funding and comprehensive services, support Chinese citizens to pursue doctoral degrees overseas; on the other hand, through preferential funding, access and employment policies, attract top doctoral talents from around the world to study in China.

- **Regarding Chinese citizens pursuing doctoral degrees overseas, the relevant policies take "fallback funding and service support" as the core**. In terms of funding, the China Scholarship Council (CSC) provides core funding, and universities and research institutions also establish special funding programs. For example, Tsinghua University provides funding for doctoral students for short-term visits, participation in international conferences, etc., forming a dual funding system of "state + institutions". In terms of services and support, the CSC cooperates with Chinese embassies and consulates abroad to provide pre-departure training, academic connection, emergency assistance and other services;The China Service Center for Scholarly Exchange under the Ministry of Education provides services such as degree certification, employment guidance, and household registration support for returnees. For example, returnee doctoral students can directly obtain household registration in first-tier cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen, and enjoy preferential policies such as housing subsidies and research start-up funds *(Source: China Scholarship Council (CSC); Office of International Education, Tsinghua University; Chinese Service Center for Scholarly Exchange, Ministry of Education)*.

- **Regarding overseas doctoral students coming to China to study, relevant policies are guided by the principles of "attracting talent and optimizing the environment"**. In terms of funding, the "Chinese Government Scholarship – Doctoral Program" has been established to provide full tuition waivers, living allowances, accommodation, and medical insurance for overseas doctoral students. The living allowance is set at 3,000 – 3,500 yuan per month, and the funding period is 3 – 4 years. In terms of admission, the "application – review system" is adopted, and some universities offer bilingual teaching to lower the language threshold. In terms of employment and development, overseas doctoral students can enjoy the same employment benefits as Chinese doctoral

graduates after graduation, and obtain long-term residence facilitation through the "talent visa" channel.

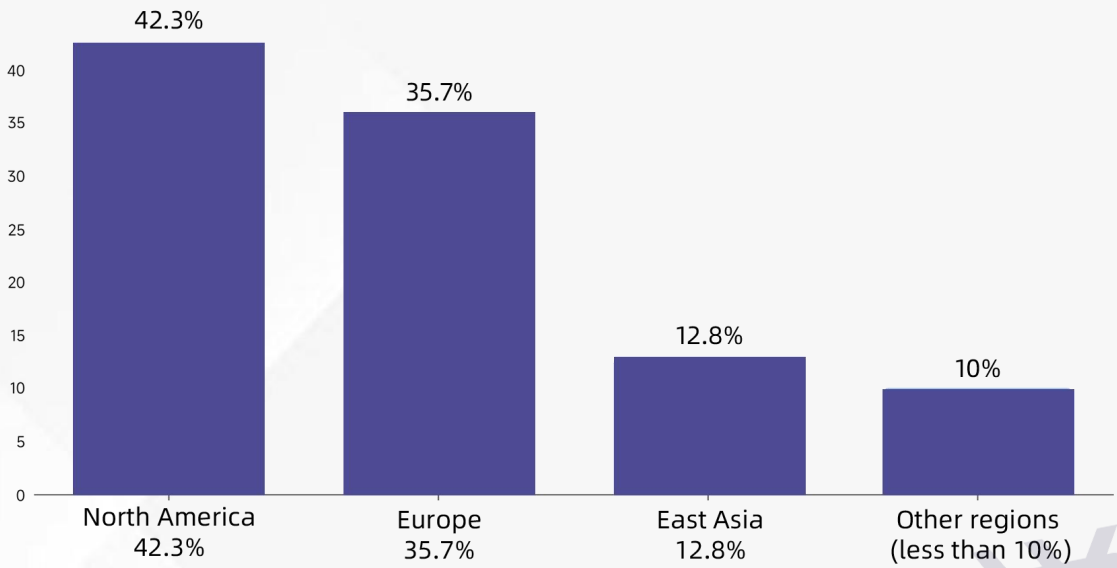
3.2 Regional Selection: Differentiated Decision-Making Driven by Scientific Research Resources

The choice of study abroad region during the doctoral stage is centered around "**matching of scientific research resources**" as the core orientation, which is fundamentally different from the selection logic during the undergraduate and master's stages, presenting "**high concentration, obvious differentiation, and prominent regionalization trends**" characteristics. The three major regions of North America, Europe, and East Asia account for over 90% of the total number of doctoral international students globally, and will maintain their core positions in the future while showing a trend of diversified development.

3.2.1 Core Features: Scientific research resources are directed towards specific areas, and regional differentiation has become the norm

The core of choosing a study-abroad region for doctoral studies is "matching of research resources," that is, the degree of match between regional research capabilities, cutting-edge layout, supervisor resources, etc., and one's own research direction, which overall presents characteristics of high concentration, distinct differentiation, and prominent regionalization. According to QS's "2024 Global Doctoral Study-Abroad Trends Report," the regional distribution of global doctoral students is highly concentrated, with North America, Europe, and East Asia accounting for over 90%, among which North America accounts for 42.3%, Europe accounts for 35.7%, and East Asia accounts for 12.8%.

Global Distribution of International Doctoral Students by Region



In addition, the choice of overseas study destinations for doctoral students also shows obvious "differentiated" characteristics: students majoring in cutting-edge STEM fields tend to choose North America and Europe, while those who value cultural fit and career development are more inclined to choose East Asia. In recent years, the "regionalization trend has become prominent", with an increasing number of doctoral students choosing to move within regions, relying on regional scientific research cooperation networks to enhance their own capabilities *(Source: QS World University Rankings)*.

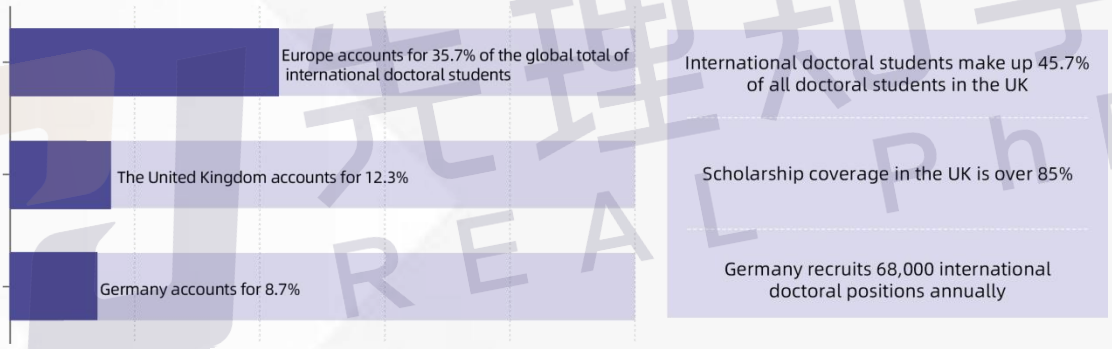
(1) North America: The Core of Global Doctoral Education

North America (US, Canada) accounts for 42.3% of the total number of international doctoral students globally, becoming the top choice due to its top-notch research resources, sufficient funding, and strong academic atmosphere. The US accounts for 35.1% of the global total, with NSF data showing that its international doctoral graduates account for 38.7%, and the average number of SCI papers published by doctoral students is 2.3 *(Source: Nature)*. Canada accounts for 7.2%, with institutions such as NSERC investing over 5 billion Canadian dollars annually, and the coverage rate of doctoral scholarships exceeding 90%. The drawbacks include high living costs, long training periods, and intense research competition *(Source: Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR); Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC))*.

(2) Europe: Strong scientific research foundation, friendly and diversified policies

Europe accounts for 35.7% of the total number of international doctoral students globally, becoming the second most popular choice region thanks to its profound scientific research foundation, diversified training models, and friendly study-abroad policies. Among them, the United Kingdom accounts for 12.3%, with HESA data showing that international doctoral students account for 45.7% and the scholarship coverage rate exceeding 85%; Germany accounts for 8.7%, implementing a tuition-free position system, and BMBF data shows that it recruits 68,000 international doctoral positions annually; countries such as France and the Netherlands each have their own characteristics. The drawbacks include obvious language barriers, uneven distribution of scientific research resources, and significant differences in training standards among countries *(Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA); UK Research and Innovation (UKRI); German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF))*.

Data on International Doctoral Students in Europe



(3) East Asia: An Emerging Hotspot Region

East Asia (Japan, Singapore, Hong Kong, China, and South Korea) accounts for 12.8% of the total number of international doctoral students globally, and has seen a significant increase in attractiveness in recent years, thanks to its high-quality research resources, convenient cultural adaptation, low cost of living, and friendly talent retention policies. Among them, Singapore accounts for 3.8%, with a 100% scholarship coverage rate and a permanent residency approval rate exceeding 92% *(Source: National Research Foundation, Singapore (NRF); Ministry of Education, Singapore (MOE))*. Hong Kong, China accounts for 2.7%, with generous HKPFS scholarships, and 78.6% of doctoral students are from the Chinese mainland. Japan and South Korea serve as supplementary *(Source: Education Bureau, Hong Kong (EDB); University Grants Committee, Hong Kong (UGC))*. The drawbacks lie in

relatively low internationalization and weak autonomy in doctoral training.

(4) Other regions: great potential but limited scientific research resources

Regions such as South America, Africa, and Oceania account for less than 10% of the total number of international doctoral students worldwide. Their advantages include low study-abroad costs and low application thresholds; their drawbacks are a shortage of scientific research resources and insufficient funding, making it difficult to meet high-end scientific research needs.

3.2.2 Key Factors and Evolution Trends: From Ranking-Driven to Resource Adaptation

The core influencing factors for doctoral students' choice of study abroad regions, ranked by importance, are: **Research Resource Fit (35%), Policy Support (25%), Supervisor Resources (15%), Cost of Living (15%), and Career Development Prospects (10%)** . Among them, Research Resource Fit is the primary consideration for doctoral students when choosing a region, directly determining their research output and academic growth.

Over the next five years, global doctoral study abroad will exhibit a trend of "decreasing proportion in core regions, the rise of East Asia, and prominent regionalization and diversification". North America and Europe will still occupy a core position, but their proportion will decline; the proportion of doctoral students in East Asia is expected to rise to around 18%, becoming an important growth pole for global doctoral study abroad *(Source: QS World University Rankings)*.

3.3 Professional Selection: Resonance between Cutting-edge Research and Demand-driven Forces

The choice of majors for doctoral study abroad is centered around "**research orientation" and "demand-driven**" , presenting characteristics of being cutting-edge, cross-integrated, and highly differentiated. STEM majors are the core popular choices for doctoral study abroad globally, while humanities, social sciences, and other majors exhibit differentiated development.

3.3.1 Core Features: The Convergence of Academic Frontiers and Industrial Demands Forms a Momentum

The choice of majors for doctoral students studying abroad revolves around "scientific research and innovation" and "market demand", focusing on cutting-edge fields, aligning with industrial needs, and emphasizing interdisciplinary integration. OECD data shows that STEM majors account for 68.7% of the total number of doctoral students studying abroad globally, while humanities and social sciences account for 22.3% *(Source: OECD)*. The trend of interdisciplinary integration is prominent, with cross-disciplinary doctoral students studying abroad accounting for 32.7% globally, a year-on-year increase of 18.9% *(Source: Natural)*. In addition, the characteristics of differentiation in major selection are significant: students from North America and Europe are more inclined to choose cutting-edge STEM majors; East Asian international students tend to choose STEM majors and distinctive humanities and social sciences majors that are closely integrated with industries *(Source: QS World University Rankings)*.

3.3.2 Global Popular Majors Map: Trends and Shifts in Popularity

STEM majors are the core hotspots for global doctoral study abroad, among which artificial intelligence, biotechnology, and Big data are the three majors with the highest proportion and the fastest growth. Humanities and social science majors focus on characteristic and differentiated development, while other majors exhibit niche and precision characteristics. Each major has clear advantages and challenges:

(1) STEM majors: The core and popular choice for global doctoral study abroad, with a huge demand gap

STEM majors are the core hotspots for doctoral students studying abroad, accounting for 68.7% of the total number of doctoral students studying abroad globally. Among them, artificial intelligence, biotechnology, and Big data together account for 35.2%. This is mainly due to the large talent gap, sufficient research funding, and high conversion rate of scientific research achievements brought about by global technological development, making them the preferred fields for doctoral students studying abroad *(Source: OCED)*.

(2) Artificial Intelligence major: the world's hottest doctoral major with the fastest growth rate

The Artificial Intelligence major is the most popular field for global doctoral students studying abroad, accounting for 14.3% of the total number of global doctoral students studying abroad, with a year-on-year growth rate of 25.7%, significantly higher than other majors, and focusing on cutting-edge research directions such as artificial intelligence algorithms, machine learning, and intelligent interaction. In terms of regional distribution, the US accounts for 42.3% of the global doctoral students in this major, with its scientific research strength leading globally; both Europe and East Asia are developing rapidly, and countries such as Singapore attract a large number of students in related fields through high-quality scientific research resources. The core challenges of this major include intense scientific research competition, rapid technological updates, and high research pressure *(Source: NSF)*.

(3) Biotechnology major: Outstanding scientific research potential and close integration of industry, academia, and research

The biotechnology major accounts for 11.7% of the total number of international doctoral students globally, with a year-on-year growth rate of 21.3%, second only to the artificial intelligence major, and focuses on cutting-edge research directions such as gene editing, cell therapy, and biopharmaceuticals *(Source: International Life Sciences Society (ILSS))*. In terms of regional distribution, it presents a pattern of "North America leading, Europe deeply involved, and East Asia rising": North America accounts for 45.2% of international doctoral students in this major globally. The US, relying on top-notch scientific research institutions and industrial clusters, leads the world in scientific research strength, with the NIH investing over $80 billion in research funding annually, and the coverage rate of doctoral funding support exceeding 95% *(Source: National Institutes of Health (NIH))*. Europe, centered around Germany, the United Kingdom, and France, accounts for 32.8% *(Source: European Federation of Biotechnology (EFB))*. Germany implements a post system, while the United Kingdom focuses on a tutor system, each with its own research characteristics. East Asia accounts for 16.3%, with Singapore, Hong Kong (China), etc., attracting a large number of Asian international students through high-quality resources. The advantages of this major include high research potential and broad employment prospects, while its disadvantages are high research difficulty,

long research cycles, and extremely high requirements for research foundation and perseverance *(Source: Asian Biomedical Association (ABA))*.

(4) Big data major: significant cross-border integration and strong talent demand

The Big Data major accounts for 9.2% of the total number of international doctoral students globally, with a year-on-year growth rate of 19.8%. It focuses on research areas such as Big Data analysis, data mining, and data security, aligning with the global digital transformation trend and enjoying strong market demand. The popularity stems from the urgent need for Big Data research talents in various industries. Sectors such as the internet, finance, and healthcare all require doctoral degree holders to engage in technological innovation, and countries also continue to increase research investment in the digital field. In terms of regional distribution, North America is the core region, accounting for 48.7%. The US, relying on top universities and internet industry clusters, emphasizes interdisciplinary integration and has a high conversion rate of research results; Europe, centered around the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and Germany, accounts for 30.5%, focusing on characteristic research directions such as data privacy protection; East Asia accounts for 15.8%, with Singapore and Hong Kong, China focusing on niche areas closely integrated with industry and having high cultural adaptability. The advantages of this major are strong cross-border integration and a wide range of employment opportunities, while the disadvantages are the rapid pace of technological updates and high requirements for logical thinking and data analysis capabilities *(Source: International Data Science Association (IDSA); Internet Society (ISOC); Asian Data Science Association (ADSA); European Data Science Association (EDSA))*.

(5) Other popular STEM majors: Parallel development of basic and applied aspects, with distinct characteristics

Apart from the three core popular STEM majors, majors such as computer science, engineering, mathematics, physics, and chemistry together account for 33.5% of the total number of international doctoral students worldwide, showing the characteristics of "in-depth exploration of basic disciplines and practicality of applied disciplines". Among them, the computer science major (excluding sub-disciplines) accounts for 8.6%, focusing on areas such as computer system architecture and software development, with North America and Europe as the core

regions; the engineering major accounts for 7.9%, covering sub-disciplines such as mechanical engineering and electrical engineering, meeting the needs of global industrial transformation and upgrading, with Germany and the US having prominent advantages; Basic science majors such as mathematics, physics, and chemistry together account for 17.0%, serving as the core support for scientific research and innovation. North America and Europe possess top-notch scientific research resources, and graduates mostly engage in scientific research at universities or work in high-end scientific research institutions *(Source: Institute of International Education (IIE); Nature; Association for Computing Machinery (ACM); International Engineering Association (IEA); International Basic Science Association (IBSA))*.

(6) Humanities and social science majors: Focus on characteristics and pursue differentiated development

Humanities and social sciences majors account for 22.3% of the total number of international doctoral students globally, covering fields such as literature, economics, and sociology, and exhibit the characteristics of "focusing on specialties and strong regional adaptability." Different from STEM majors, their core orientation is academic in-depth exploration and cultural inheritance. International students pay more attention to the compatibility between the major and the regional academic heritage, and their research output focuses on theoretical innovation and social value. Although less popular than STEM majors, they are still chosen by a large number of high-quality international students. In terms of regional distribution, Europe accounts for 42.7%, making it the top choice for international doctoral students in humanities and social sciences, with the United Kingdom, Germany, and France each having their own professional characteristics; North America accounts for 35.8%, focusing on the social application of scientific research results; East Asia accounts for 16.5%, focusing on characteristic fields such as Chinese language and literature, and East Asian cultural studies. The advantages of this type of major are diversified career development, with opportunities to engage in university teaching, scientific research, public service, etc., while the disadvantages are long research cycles and relatively low funding support *(Source: International Humanities and Social Sciences Association (IHSSA))*.

(7) Other Majors: Niche Features, Precise Demand

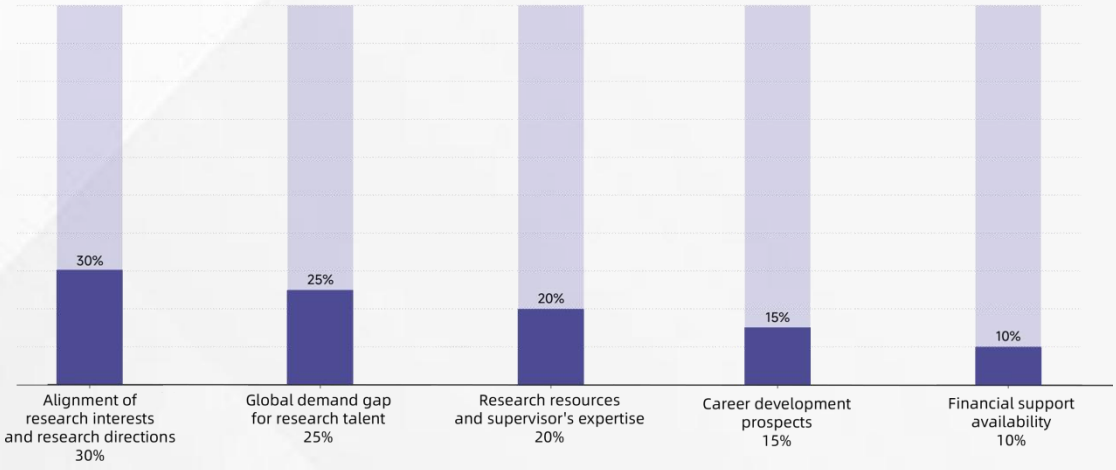
Other majors such as art, sports, and medicine (non-biotechnology), account for

less than 9% of the total number of international doctoral students globally, exhibiting characteristics of niche specialization and precise demand. Among them, the art major focuses on areas such as fine arts, music, and design, with Europe and North America as the core regions, attracting international students through their profound artistic heritage and high-quality educational resources; medicine-related majors (non-biotechnology) focus on areas such as clinical research and public health, with North America, Europe, and East Asia as the core regions, requiring solid medical foundations and clinical experience, and graduates often engage in clinical research or high-end diagnosis and treatment work after graduation *(Source: International Art Education Association (IAEA); International Medical Education Association (IMEA))*.

3.3.3 Influencing Factors and Trend Prediction: Professional Trends in the Next Five Years

The choice of major for doctoral study abroad is influenced by five core factors, which are ranked in order of importance as follows: the suitability of research interests and research directions (30%), the global demand-supply gap for scientific research talents (25%), scientific research resources and supervisor strength (20%), career development prospects (15%), and the level of funding support (10%) *(Source: OECD; International Federation for Research Talent Development (IFRTD); International Doctoral Education Research Association (IDERA))*.

Factors Influencing International Students' Major Preferences



Based on the OECD's "2024 Global Research Talent Demand Report" and Nature's predictions, in the next five years, **doctoral study majors will exhibit three major**

trends:

- **STEM majors continue to occupy a central position**: It is projected that their proportion will rise to 72% by 2029; among them, the combined proportion of the three popular majors of artificial intelligence, biotechnology, and big data will exceed 40%, remaining the top choice for international doctoral students .
- **Interdisciplinary fields continue to heat up**: It is projected that by 2029, the proportion of international doctoral students in interdisciplinary fields will exceed 40%, and research directions integrating multiple fields (such as artificial intelligence + biology, big data + healthcare, etc.) will become new hot spots.
- **Major selection becomes more personalized**: The proportion of niche specialty majors will gradually increase, and more international students will combine their own interests with the research needs of niche fields to choose suitable majors, breaking the pattern of "crowding into popular majors" *(Source:Global Association for Cross-Disciplinary Research (GACI); Global Center for Student Development Research (GCSDR))*.

In addition, **the choice of majors for future doctoral students studying abroad will show a distinct trend of "deep binding between regions and majors"** :

- **North America**: will continue to strengthen its advantages in cutting-edge STEM majors, focus on high-end fields such as artificial intelligence and Quantum Computing, and consolidate its leading position in scientific research.
- **European Region**: Will deepen its focus on basic sciences and humanities and social sciences majors, while combining the needs of the industrial sector to promote the in-depth integration of basic scientific research and industrial applications.
- **East Asia Region**: Focus on STEM majors closely related to local industries, while exploring the advantages of characteristic humanities and social science majors such as Chinese Language and Literature and East Asian Cultural Studies, to form a professional layout with distinct regional characteristics *(Source: Centre for Higher Education Research (CHER); International Association of Universities (IAU))*.

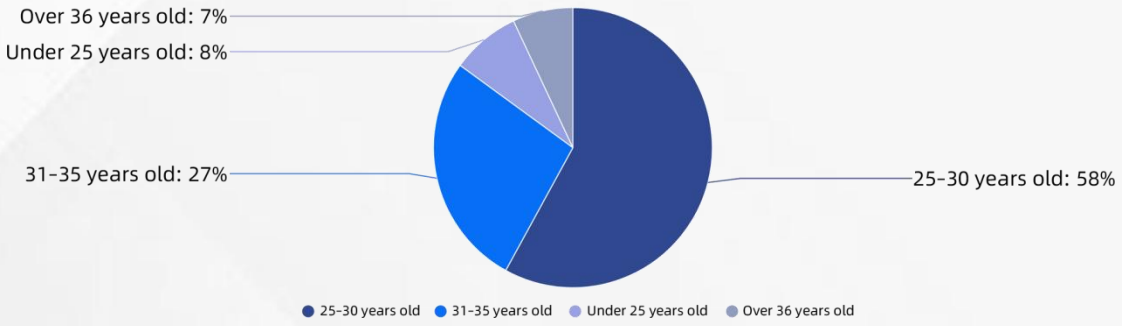
3.4 Age Structure: Diversification and Maturation Proceed in Parallel

The age distribution of global doctoral students studying abroad shows the distinct characteristics of "**dominated by maturity and steadily diversifying**" . The core age group is concentrated between 25 and 35 years old, accounting for over 80%; meanwhile, the proportion of those aged 36 and above has been steadily increasing, mainly due to the promotion of part-time doctoral study programs in some countries.

3.4.1 Global Age Group Distribution of Doctoral Students Studying Abroad: From Single to Diverse

The age distribution of global international doctoral students is highly concentrated in the mature age group of 25–35 years old. According to the OECD's Global International Doctoral Mobility Report 2025, among global international doctoral students in 2024, the 25–30 age group had the highest proportion, reaching 58%; the 31–35 age group followed, with a proportion of 27%; the group under 25 years old accounted for 8%; and the group over 36 years old accounted for 7%. This distribution fully reflects the core characteristic of "maturity" in doctoral study abroad, the fundamental reason being that doctoral training has high requirements for research accumulation *(Source: Editorial Office of Higher Education Research)*.

The Statistical Data of HESA in the United Kingdom for 2024/25 confirms this trend: the core age group of international doctoral students in the country is also concentrated between 25 and 35 years old, consistent with the overall global distribution characteristics *(Source:HESA)*.



Notably, the proportion of the group aged 36 and above increased from 5% in 2020 to 7% in 2024. This change is mainly attributed to the on-the-job doctoral overseas

study programs launched by some countries, which have provided convenient overseas study channels for working professionals with work experience who wish to enhance their research capabilities, thus promoting the diversified development of the age groups of doctoral overseas study *(Source: OECD)*.

3.4.2 Portraits of Different Age Groups: Fresh Graduates, Working Professionals, and Career Changers on the Same Stage

Global doctoral study abroad groups across different age brackets exhibit distinct differential characteristics. The core group (25–30 years old) consists mainly of fresh master's graduates, focusing on popular STEM fields; the mature group (31–35 years old) pursues targeted development based on work and research experience; the two niche groups (above 36 years old and below 25 years old) center around in-service improvement and academic talent respectively. Each group shows significant differences in study abroad motivation, major selection, supervisor preference, etc., which are highly consistent with their own research accumulation and career planning.

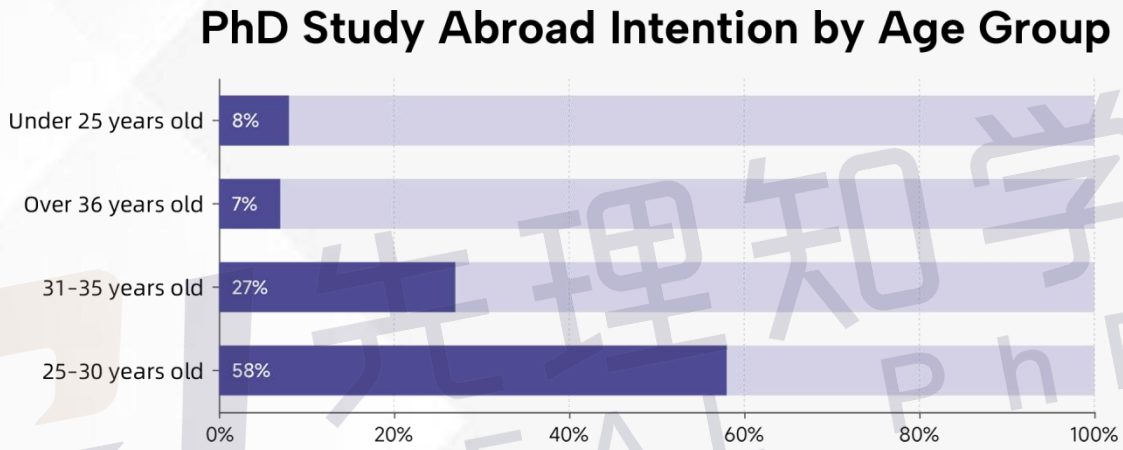
- **25–30 years old (core group)**: Accounting for 58%, mainly consisting of recent master's graduates, with the motivation to systematically improve research capabilities. They tend to prefer popular STEM fields such as artificial intelligence and biotechnology, favor top universities in North America and Europe as well as young top-tier mentors, and highly rely on full scholarships. Overall, their research accumulation is relatively weak, but they have high academic enthusiasm and great potential.

- **31–35 years old (mature group)**: accounting for 27%, most with 1–5 years of work experience, motivated by breaking through career bottlenecks. Their major selection is more targeted, preferring senior and top-notch mentors, and they pay more attention to cost-effectiveness in their choice of study-abroad destinations, with a practical research orientation. Overall, they exhibit characteristics of clear goals, strong autonomy, and outstanding research execution ability *(Source: German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD))*.

- **Over 36 years old (niche group)**: Accounting for 7%, mainly consisting of working professionals, with motivations stemming from the improvement of research capabilities and personal academic interests. Their choice of major is

highly aligned with their own interests and work fields, and their choice of supervisor emphasizes the alignment of academic concepts. Funding mainly comes from unit sponsorship and personal contributions. Overall, they have deep academic accumulation and pure research goals *(Source: Nordic Association of Higher Education)*.

- **Under 25 years old (niche group)**: Accounting for 8%, mostly gifted students in integrated undergraduate and postgraduate programs, motivated by the pursuit of academic breakthroughs. They tend to major in basic sciences such as mathematics and physics, and prefer top research universities in North America. This group has outstanding talent but lacks research practice experience, with a relatively impetuous academic mindset.



3.4.3 Deep-seated Drivers and Challenges: Transformation and Anxiety Amid the Lifelong Learning Wave

The age group tendency of doctoral students studying abroad is mainly influenced by **four core factors: research accumulation, career planning, economic strength, and family factors**. There are significant differences in the weights of the influence of each factor on different age groups, which in turn leads to differentiated tendencies to study abroad.

- **Research accumulation directly determines the adaptability of international students to the research rhythm of the doctoral stage.** The research accumulation of those under 25 is weak, that of those aged 25–35 gradually improves, and that of those over 36 is profound, which in turn affects their

major choices and supervisor preferences.

- **Career planning shows significant differences in career aspirations among different age groups**. Fresh master's graduates (aged 25–30) pursue degree advancement, working professionals (aged 31 and above) seek career breakthroughs, and gifted students (under 25) aim for in-depth academic exploration, which directly determines the motivation and direction of studying abroad *(Source: Editorial Office of Higher Education Research; OECD; National Science Foundation (NSF))*.

- **Economic strength influences the sources of funding and the choice of study-abroad destinations**.Core groups rely on scholarships, while employed groups rely on institutional and personal sponsorship.

- **Family factors mainly influence the decision to study abroad among those aged 31 and above.** It is necessary to balance the relationship between work, family, and studying abroad.

The challenges faced by each age group are highly targeted and closely related to their own characteristics:

- **Group aged 25–30:** Facing the dual challenges of research pressure and employment anxiety, they must not only rapidly improve their research capabilities and complete high-quality doctoral dissertations but also plan ahead for their career development after graduation.

- **Group aged 31 and above**: The core challenge lies in balancing the relationships among work, family, and studying abroad. Under the on-the-job learning model, energy is scattered, and the pressure of time management is relatively prominent.

- **Group under 25 years old:** They mainly face the problems of insufficient research experience and impetuous academic mentality, lack systematic scientific research training, are prone to develop a mindset of seeking quick success and instant benefits, which affects the continuous output of research results.

Chapter 4 Trend Analysis of Mainstream Study Abroad Destinations

4.1 Overview of Trends in Mainstream Study Abroad Destinations: Echelon Differentiation and Dynamic Evolution

Currently, the mainstream destinations for global doctoral study abroad are showing **the core trends of "leading in the first echelon, breaking through with high cost-effectiveness, and binding research and industry"**, forming an overall differentiated pattern of three echelons: the first echelon takes top-notch research resources as its core competitiveness, the second echelon has become a popular growth point by virtue of high cost-effectiveness, and the third echelon features low budget and policy orientation as a supplement. Meanwhile, doctoral study abroad is showing three key changes in application mode, major selection, and career trajectory, aligning with the needs of global research and industrial development.

The mainstream destinations for global doctoral study are clearly divided into three tiers based on comprehensive strength, attractiveness, and target population, with each tier having a clear positioning, prominent advantages, and demonstrating differentiated development characteristics.

(1) First Echelon (Core Preferred): US, United Kingdom, Singapore

The US, the United Kingdom, and Singapore consistently rank among the top three destinations for Chinese students' doctoral study abroad intentions, forming the core first-tier group. Leveraging core advantages such as top-notch scientific research resources and a well-established training system, this tier has become the primary choice for domestic high-achieving talents pursuing further education, with intense application competition and a high concentration of majors in the fields of science and engineering.

The core competitiveness of the three major countries/regions in this echelon is concentratedly reflected in four major advantages: First, they possess top-notch global scientific research resources, gathering world-class universities and research institutions, with sufficient research funding and a strong academic atmosphere; Second, they have a complete doctoral training system, forming a standardized and

refined training process from application review, supervisor guidance to research output; Third, they enjoy extensive academic recognition, with doctoral degrees having extremely high value globally, providing strong support for subsequent academic pursuits or career development; Fourth, it has diverse career development paths, providing broad development space whether one chooses to delve deeply into academia or pursue employment in the industrial sector.

As the primary choice for domestic highly educated talents pursuing doctoral studies, this echelon has the most intense application competition, and its professional distribution exhibits highly centralized characteristics, mainly focusing on science and engineering fields such as artificial intelligence, biotechnology, and computer science, which is highly consistent with the global demand trend for high-end scientific research talents *(Source: NFS, MOE, UKRI)*.

(2) Second Echelon (High Cost-Effectiveness Preferred): Germany, Hong Kong, China

Germany and Hong Kong, China, leveraging their core advantages of policy friendliness, controllable costs, and outstanding scientific research capabilities, have emerged as popular growth points for doctoral study abroad in recent years. Relying on tuition-free benefits and geographical and policy advantages respectively, they have attracted a large number of students aspiring to pursue a doctorate, with the application popularity rising year by year.

Germany's core attractions lie in the tuition-free policy of public institutions and its well-established welfare system for position-based doctoral programs, which can effectively reduce the financial burden on international students *(Source: German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD); Federal Foreign Office, Germany (visa and residence policies))*. Meanwhile, it has strong scientific research capabilities in fields such as engineering and natural sciences, and its training quality is widely recognized. Hong Kong, China, stands out by relying on its unique advantages: its geographical proximity to the Chinese mainland, high cultural compatibility, and convenient travel back and forth; favorable visa policies, with a simple and efficient application process; generous talent introduction policies, allowing doctoral graduates to enjoy relevant benefits such as household registration and employment; and close academic connection with the mainland, frequent scientific research cooperation, making it an optimal choice that combines both research quality and living convenience*(Source: Immigration Department, Hong Kong (employment and*

visa policies for staying in Hong Kong)). Both have shown a trend of increasing application popularity year by year, becoming highly cost-effective and popular choices for doctoral study abroad.

(3) Third Echelon (Potential Supplement): Japan, South Korea, and "Belt and Road" cooperation institutions

Japan, South Korea, and the partner institutions under the Belt and Road Initiative form the third echelon, characterized by low budget and policy orientation as their core features. They are mainly targeted at applicants with limited budgets who rely on special scholarships for further study, suitable for students with specific backgrounds to choose as a potential supplement for doctoral study abroad.

The core advantage of this echelon lies in its high scholarship coverage, which can effectively alleviate the financial burden on international students. Meanwhile, its admission requirements are relatively flexible, with more targeted background requirements for applicants. The suitable candidates mainly include those with limited budgets who hope to complete their doctoral studies relying on special scholarships, or applicants with a foundation in minority languages and specific research directions (such as East Asian cultural studies, research fields related to minority languages), providing diverse options for aspiring doctoral students from different backgrounds and becoming an important supplement to the global doctoral study abroad landscape *(Source: CSC, Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, South Korea (MEST))*.

In addition, global doctoral study abroad also shows three key changes , which profoundly affect study abroad decisions and development paths: doctoral study abroad applications have entered a stage of "intensive cultivation", major selection is highly concentrated in the fields of science and engineering, the career trajectories of doctoral graduates show diversified differentiation, and "academic training + industrial application" has become a new paradigm for compound development, meeting the needs of global scientific research and industrial development

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- **First, the application model has entered the "intensive cultivation" stage,** no longer simply relying on academic performance. Pre-planning and research accumulation (such as research project experience and academic paper

publications) have become the core competitiveness for admission. Prospective applicants pay more attention to pre-matching with the research directions of supervisors and accumulating relevant research experience to enhance their application competitiveness.

- **Second, the choice of majors is highly concentrated,** with science and engineering fields such as engineering, biology, and computer science becoming absolute hotspots. This trend is highly consistent with the global demand for high-end industrial talent, reflecting the continuously strengthening linkage between the choice of majors for doctoral study abroad and industrial development.

- **Third, the career trajectories of doctoral graduates show obvious differentiation,** breaking the traditional single path of "in - depth academic research" and gradually shifting from the traditional academic community to high - value - added industries such as industrial R&D and fintech. The compound development model of "academic training + industrial application" has become a new choice for doctoral graduates, highlighting the deep binding between doctoral training and industrial needs *(Source: OECD; Higher Education Division, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO))*.

4.2 Policy Interpretation of Mainstream Study Abroad Destinations

The policies of the three echelons of global doctoral study abroad **all revolve around the three core dimensions of "scientific research training, funding support, and retention and development"** , presenting distinct echelon differentiation characteristics: The first echelon (US, United Kingdom, Singapore) takes the well-established scientific research training system, diversified scholarship support, and clear post-graduation retention path as its core advantages, catering to the needs of high-end scientific research talents; the second echelon (Germany, Hong Kong, China) highlights high cost-effectiveness with its policy friendliness, controllable costs, and close connection between scientific research and the local context; the third echelon (Japan, South Korea) features policy-oriented funding and targeted retention policies, catering to applicants with specific backgrounds. Overall policies

are in line with the positioning of each echelon and the core demands of doctoral international students.

4.2.1 First Echelon (Core Preferred): US, United Kingdom, Singapore

The policies of the first-tier three countries all take **" strengthening scientific research training, improving funding system, optimizing retention path "** as the core orientation, which fits the scientific research needs and Career Development demands of the doctoral stage. The US focuses on scientific research practice and industrial adaptation, the United Kingdom focuses on efficient training and flexible retention, and Singapore relies on high-quality resources to create a convenient and friendly study abroad environment. The policy system is perfect and targeted, providing comprehensive support for doctoral students.

(1) US

The US doctoral study abroad policy is centered around the core guiding principles of "research priority, diversified funding, and smooth retention." Its visa policy is stable, scholarships are widely available and tilted towards science and engineering, the post-graduation retention path is clear, and the training model focuses on cultivating independent research capabilities, highly adapting to the dual needs of doctoral international students for in-depth research and industrial transformation.

- **Visa Policy:** During the doctoral stage, the F1 visa is the primary type. Visa review focuses on the rationality of the research direction and the sufficiency of financial proof (especially for applicants without full scholarship coverage), with no additional targeted restrictions, and the overall visa approval rate remains stable; applicants in science and engineering fields need to cooperate in completing academic background checks to ensure that the research direction has no sensitive associations, further ensuring research compliance *(Source: U.S. Department of State)*.

- **Scholarship Policy:** The scholarship system is well-established, mainly divided into three categories – full scholarships (covering tuition fees + living expenses), half scholarships (covering partial tuition fees), and research assistant (RA) and teaching assistant (TA) stipends. Among them, the proportion of full funding for doctoral students in science and engineering

exceeds 85%, while that for humanities and social sciences is only about 42%. Scholarship competition is directly linked to applicants' research background and academic output, with competition for full scholarship spots at top-tier institutions reaching a fever pitch, highlighting the core value of research strength *(Source: NSF)*.

- **Graduation Retention Policy:** After graduation, doctoral students can apply for a 12-month OPT (Optional Practical Training) visa, with those in STEM fields eligible for an extension to 36 months. During the OPT period, they can legally engage in scientific research and R&D work related to their majors. After accumulating work experience, they can apply for an H-1B work visa, which has no explicit quota restrictions, providing a clear retention path that precisely aligns with the development trend of doctoral graduates transitioning to the industrial sector *(Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) — U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE))*.

- **Training Policy**: Mainly research-oriented, the program usually lasts 4 – 6 years, with a core focus on scientific research practice and academic output, requiring the completion of a high-quality doctoral dissertation and successful defense; the curriculum is mainly research-oriented, encouraging students to participate in research group projects and international academic conferences, with a key emphasis on cultivating independent research capabilities and academic innovative thinking, meeting the core needs of in-depth scientific research at the doctoral stage *(Source: U.S. Department of Education)*.

(2) United Kingdom

The United Kingdom's doctoral study abroad policy is centered around the core principles of "efficient cultivation, flexibility and convenience, and friendly retention". It features simple visa review, diverse types of scholarships, lenient post-graduation retention policies, and a cultivation model that focuses on the integration of research output and industry, meeting the needs of doctoral international students for efficient completion of their studies and diverse career development.

- **Visa Policy:** When applying for a T4 student visa at the doctoral stage, you need to provide the school admission letter, proof of funds (covering the tuition fees and living expenses for the first academic year), and proof of language proficiency; the visa review process is concise, there is no mandatory requirement for an interview, and the overall approval rate is relatively high; in

2025, there will be no major adjustments to the visa policy, continuing the orientation of "simplifying materials and accelerating review" to further enhance the convenience of applications *(Source: UKVI)*.

- **Scholarship Policy:** Scholarships mainly include United Kingdom government scholarships (such as UKRI), institutional special scholarships, corporate cooperation scholarships, and scholarships sponsored by the CoinEx Smart Chain (CSC); the overall coverage rate is approximately 50%, and applicants need to apply actively. Affected by the global economic environment, the number of full scholarships has tightened, and the competition difficulty has increased year by year *(Source: UKRI)*.
- **Graduate Retention Policy:** After graduating, doctoral students can apply for a 2-year Post-Study Work (PSW) visa (Graduate Work Visa), with no restrictions on majors and no requirement for employer sponsorship, allowing them to legally work and start businesses in the United Kingdom; after accumulating work experience, they can apply for skilled migration or visa renewal, with a friendly retention policy that fully meets the diverse career choice needs of doctoral graduates *(Source: UKVI)*.
- **Training Policy:** The academic system is relatively flexible, usually lasting 3-4 years, with doctoral dissertation research as the core. The curriculum is concise, emphasizing the combination of scientific research output and practice, and encouraging students to cooperate with industry enterprises to conduct research; some institutions offer joint doctoral programs with enterprises to achieve in-depth integration of academia and industry; applications are led by supervisors, and students need to communicate with supervisors in advance to confirm the supervisor's willingness to recruit and the match of research directions, ensuring the targeted nature of training *(Source: HESA, Universities UK (UUK))*.

(3) Singapore

Singapore's doctoral study abroad policy is centered around the core guiding principles of "resource allocation, generous funding, and market-oriented retention." It features efficient visa review, high scholarship coverage that favors cutting-edge disciplines, clear pathways for post-graduation retention, a bilingual Chinese-English environment suitable for Chinese students, and a balance between academic depth and industrial application.

- **Visa Policy:** During the doctoral stage, students need to apply for a Student's Pass. Application materials include a passport, notarized transcripts and enrollment certificate, and admission letter. Full-time doctoral students at public institutions can legally engage in part-time work without working hour restrictions, while doctoral students at private institutions are not allowed to engage in paid work. Visa review is efficient, usually taking 1-2 months to complete the approval process, enhancing the convenience of applications *(Source:Immigration & Checkpoints Authority (ICA), Ministry of Education (MOE), Singapore)*.

- **Scholarship Policy:** The policy shows a clear bias. Those pursuing research-based master's and doctoral degrees can enjoy up to 80% tuition fee reduction; the doctoral scholarships from the National University of Singapore (NUS) and Nanyang Technological University (NTU) can cover full tuition fees plus a monthly living allowance of S$2,200, with the full scholarship coverage rate exceeding 90%, and it is focused on cutting-edge disciplines such as artificial intelligence and quantum computing, while the coverage rate for traditional disciplines is approximately 30%; students receiving financial aid are required to commit to working for a Singapore-registered enterprise for at least 3 years after graduation (they may serve at overseas branches) *(Source: National University of Singapore (NUS), Nanyang Technological University (NTU))*.

- **Graduate Retention Policy:** Doctoral graduates can directly apply for Singapore work visas (EP/SP) without any graduation year restrictions; among them, the minimum monthly salary threshold for the EP visa is S$5,600 (S$6,200 in the financial sector), and it requires passing the Complementary Specialists Assessment Framework (accumulating over 40 points), while the minimum monthly salary for the SP visa is S$3,300 (S$3,800 in the financial sector); after working for a certain number of years, they can apply for permanent residency without quota restrictions, and the retention policy has a clear market-oriented orientation, adapting to the diverse development needs of doctoral graduates *(Source: ICA, MOE)*.

- **Cultivation Policy:** The program has a duration of 3 – 4 years, relying on top – tier public institutions, with concentrated research resources, emphasizing interdisciplinary research and international cooperation; the curriculum takes into account both academic depth and industrial application, encourages students to participate in international academic exchanges, has strict

requirements for doctoral dissertations, and its academic recognition is on par with that of British and American institutions; the Chinese – English bilingual environment is suitable for Chinese students' learning, reducing the cost of language adaptation *(Source: NUS, NTU)*.

4.2.2 Second Echelon (High Cost-Effectiveness Preferred): Germany, Hong Kong, China

The policies of the second-tier regions in the two locations take **"policy friendliness, cost controllability, and practical scientific research**" as their core advantages , with Germany focusing on tuition-free benefits and a well-established postgraduate training system, and Hong Kong, China emphasizing geographical convenience and connection with the Chinese mainland, both taking high cost-effectiveness as their core attraction, suitable for doctoral international students who value the balance between cost and scientific research.

(1) Germany

The German doctoral study policy is centered around the guiding principles of "research freedom, tuition-free education, and friendly retention policies" , featuring a high visa approval rate, comprehensive welfare, a diverse training model that emphasizes practical experience, leveraging the advantages of the position-based system to reduce financial pressure, and is suitable for applicants who aspire to delve deeply into research and pursue high cost-effectiveness.

- Visa Policy : When applying for a student visa at the doctoral stage, you need to provide the admission letter from the institution, proof of funds (not less than 12,000 euros per year, approximately 98,000 yuan), and a research plan; the visa approval rate is high, and there is no mandatory language requirement (English test scores can be provided); during the period of holding a student visa, you can legally work/intern for up to 6 months per year, and after graduation, you can obtain a 18-month job-seeking visa, providing sufficient time for staying and finding employment *(Source: German Ambassador to China, DAAD, Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF), Germany)*.
- Scholarship Policy: The vast majority of public universities in Germany

waive tuition fees for international doctoral students, only charging a registration and management fee of 100–300 euros per semester (Baden–Württemberg charges non–EU students 3,000 euros per year in tuition fees); scholarships mainly include DAAD scholarships, special scholarships from institutions, and CSC government–sponsored scholarships, with an overall funding rate of approximately 60%. Some programs additionally provide research subsidies and living allowances, further reducing the financial burden.

- Graduate Retention Policy: After graduating with a doctorate, one can apply for an 18–month job–seeking visa. After working in Germany for 2 years, one can apply for permanent residency; the doctoral stage generally adopts the post–based model, where doctoral students sign formal employment contracts with universities, enjoy full sets of social welfare such as statutory salary (starting full–time salary approximately 3,500 euros per month), medical insurance, and endowment insurance. The retention threshold is low, the welfare is comprehensive, and the attractiveness is prominent *(Source: DAAD, BMBF)*.

- Cultivation Policy: The program has a duration of 3–5 years, with a diverse cultivation model that includes four types: apprenticeship system, structured doctoral program, enterprise joint doctoral program, and EU Marie Skłodowska–Curie doctoral program; it emphasizes the cultivation of scientific research practice and independent research capabilities, with professors providing fixed 4 hours of one–on–one guidance per week, advanced laboratory equipment, sufficient funding, and encourages students to publish high–level academic achievements, meeting the in–depth research needs of doctoral students *(Source: German Rectors' Conference (HRK), German Research Foundation (DFG))*.

(2) Hong Kong, China

The policy for studying for a doctorate in Hong Kong, China, is guided by the core principles of **"convenience, efficiency, connection with the mainland, and lenient retention"** , featuring rapid visa review, high scholarship coverage, a training system that is in line with international standards and deeply connected to the mainland, making it suitable for applicants who wish to balance research quality, geographical convenience, and development opportunities in the mainland.

- Visa Policy : When applying for a student visa at the doctoral stage, applicants are required to provide an admission letter from a Hong Kong, China

institution, proof of funds, and proof of identity; the visa review process is simple and fast (usually 1–4 weeks), with no mandatory language requirements (some institutions may offer exemptions); its geographical proximity to the Chinese mainland makes travel convenient, the visa renewal process is straightforward, making it suitable for applicants who wish to balance access to mainland research resources with overseas study *(Source: Immigration Department (IMMD), Hong Kong)*.

- Scholarship Policy: Scholarships mainly include the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government Scholarship (HKPFS), institutional special scholarships, enterprise cooperation scholarships, and CSC government–sponsored scholarships; the scholarship coverage rate is high, with some institutions providing full tuition waivers + living allowances for outstanding doctoral students, effectively alleviating financial pressure and lowering the application threshold *(Source: Research Grants Council (RGC), University Grants Committee (UGC), Hong Kong)*.

- Graduate Retention Policy: After graduation, doctoral students can apply for the Non–local Graduate Immigration Arrangement (IANG) in Hong Kong, which has no limit on the length of stay. They can legally work and start businesses in Hong Kong, enjoying the same employment benefits as Hong Kong permanent residents. The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government has launched multiple talent introduction schemes, and doctoral graduates can apply for them on a priority basis. After staying in Hong Kong for 7 years, they can apply for permanent residency. The retention policy is lenient and favorable *(Source: IMMD)*.

- Cultivation Policy: The program has a duration of 3 – 4 years, primarily focusing on research – based cultivation. Relying on top – tier universities in Hong Kong, China, it is rich in scientific research resources, emphasizing international academic cooperation and scientific research output; the curriculum is in line with international standards, encouraging students to participate in scientific research projects and academic exchanges in the Chinese mainland. Doctoral dissertations are subject to strict requirements, with high academic recognition, and are closely connected with academic institutions and enterprises in the Chinese mainland, laying a foundation for students to develop in the Chinese mainland after graduation *(Source: UGC)*.

4.2.3 Third Echelon (Potential Supplement): Japan, South Korea

The doctoral study abroad policies of the two countries in the third echelon are characterized by **"policy orientation, precise funding, and appropriate retention**" as their core features. Visa reviews are strict but with a stable approval rate. Scholarships are mainly government-specific, with relatively high thresholds. Retention policies are highly targeted, suitable for applicants with limited budgets, a foundation in small languages, and who wish to develop in East Asia.

- **Visa Policy**: When applying for a student visa at the doctoral stage, you need to provide the admission letter from the institution, proof of funds, and language proficiency scores (Japanese N2 / Korean TOPIK Level 4 or above, with some English-taught programs exempted); visa review is strict but the approval rate is stable, so you need to prepare materials in advance and complete notarization and certification to ensure a smooth application process.

- **Scholarship Policy**: Mainly government special scholarships, among which the Japan Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology Scholarship (JASSO) and the Korean Government Scholarship Program can cover most of the tuition fees and living expenses, with a high coverage rate; however, the application threshold is relatively high, requiring a certain academic background and language proficiency. Some joint training programs of "Belt and Road" cooperation universities also provide special funding to support specific applicants *(Source: Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), Government of Japan; Embassy of Japan in China; Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST), Republic of Korea; National Institute for International Education (NIIED), Republic of Korea)*.

- **Graduate Retention Policy**: After graduating with a doctorate, one can apply for a local work visa, which requires finding a matching employer sponsorship; both Japan and South Korea provide visa preferences to high-educated talents (doctors), and after working for a certain number of years, one can apply for permanent residency. The retention difficulty is moderate, and it is overall suitable for applicants who hope to deeply engage in scientific research and career development in East Asia *(Source: Ministry of Justice (MOJ), Japan; Ministry of Justice (MOJ), Republic of Korea)*.

Chapter 5 Overview of Chinese Overseas Doctoral Students

5.1 Distribution Pattern: Structural Features Behind the Data

5.1.1 Overall Trend: Scale Growth, Structural Differentiation

The policy orientation of doctoral study abroad in major study destinations directly determines the study abroad choices, application difficulty, funding support, and post-graduation career paths of Chinese doctoral students, which is also the core focus of the policy interpretation in the previous text.

By analyzing the core data from 2021 to 2025 across five major core dimensions – "proportion distribution, application and admission, scholarship coverage, graduation destinations, and employment trends" – it can be seen that Chinese doctoral students' overseas study presents overall characteristics of "significant regional differences, obvious competitive differentiation, prominent funding stratification, diversified and adaptable destinations, and employment focusing on high-end sectors". The data differences in each dimension all stem from core factors such as policy drivers, research fit, and industrial demand, which can provide precise support for subsequent overseas study planning.

Region	Application Success Rate	Enrollment Rate (Admission → Registration) / Completion Rate (Enrollment → Graduation)	Scholarship Probability (Overall / STEM / Humanities & Social Sciences)	Proportion of Chinese PhD Students in the Local International PhD Student Population	Local Retention Rate After Graduation	Return-to-China Employment Rate After Graduation
US	Overall: 16%–20%; Top-tier Institutions: 5%–8%; STEM: 12%–18%; Humanities & Social Sciences: 8%–12%	Enrollment Rate: 90%–93%; Completion Rate: STEM ≥ 92%, Humanities & Social Sciences: 82%	Overall: 65%–70%; STEM ≥ 85% (Full Tuition); Humanities & Social Sciences ≈ 42%	37% (2023; ≥42% in STEM Fields)	55%–60% (≥65% in STEM; ≥35% in Humanities & Social Sciences)	40%–45%
United Kingdom	Overall: 12%–15%; G5 Institutions: 5%–7%; STEM: 12%–18%	Enrollment Rate: 94%–97%; Completion Rate: 85%–90%	Overall: 50%–60%; STEM: 60%–70%; Humanities & Social Sciences: 30%–40%	25%–30% (≥35% at G5 Institutions)	40%–45% (Boosted by the PSW Policy)	55%–60%
Singapore	Overall: 15%–20%; Popular Programs at NUS/NTU: 8%–10%	Enrollment Rate: 97%–99%; Completion Rate: 90%–93%	Overall: 80%–90%; STEM ≥ 95%; Humanities & Social Sciences ≈ 30%	40%–45% (≥45% at NUS/NTU)	60%–65% (Influenced by the 3-Year Post-Graduation Employment Bond Policy)	35%–40%
Germany	Application-based Track: 18%–22%; Position-based Track: 25%–35%; Elite Universities / Key Institutes: 10%–15%	Enrollment Rate: 92%–96%; Completion Rate: 90%–94% (Higher for Position-based Track)	Overall: ~60% (Scholarships + Government Sponsorship); Position-based Track: 100% Funded; STEM: 65%–75%; Humanities & Social Sciences: 40%–50%	18%–22% (≥25% in Position-based Track)	70%–75% (≥80% Retention Rate for Position-based Track)	25%–30%
Hong Kong, China	Overall: 6%–10%; Popular Programs at Top 3 Universities: 2%–5%	Enrollment Rate: 95%–98%; Completion Rate: 90%–92%	Overall: 70%–80%; STEM: 80%–90%; Humanities & Social Sciences: 50%–65%	30%–35% (≥40% at Top 3 Universities)	30%–35% (Local Employment + Entrepreneurship)	65%–70%
Japan	Overall: 10%–15%; CSC Government-Sponsored Track: 18%–25%	Enrollment Rate: 90%–93%; Completion Rate: 88%–92%	Overall: 70%–75%; STEM: 75%–85%; Humanities & Social Sciences: 55%–65%	15%–20% (≥25% in Government-Sponsored Programs)	20%–25%	75%–80%
South Korea	Overall: 8%–12%; KGSP Government Scholarship Program: 10%–15%	Enrollment Rate: 88%–92%; Completion Rate: 82%–87%	Overall: 65%–70%; STEM: 70%–80%; Humanities & Social Sciences: 50%–60%	10%–15% (≥20% in KGSP Programs)	15%–20%	80%–85%

*Based on a 5-year data aggregation

Unified Explanation of Data Caliber:

1. Timeframe: All data are annual averages for the past 5 years.

2. Definition of Core Indicators:

* Application success rate = Number of admitted students / Total number of applicants, distinguishing differences between overall levels and top-tier institutions/popular majors, as well as between STEM and humanities and social sciences.

* Enrollment rate = Number of students actually registered / Number of admitted students; Doctoral completion rate = Number of students graduating normally after enrollment / Number of enrolled students. Overseas official institutions more commonly use "completion rate" as the core assessment indicator.

* Scholarship Probability = Number of recipients of full/main funding / Number of doctoral students enrolled in the current year, clearly distinguishing the differences between overall coverage and those in science and engineering, and humanities and social sciences, where doctoral students on postdoctoral positions in Germany are uniformly counted as "100% salaried" (including statutory wages and benefits).

* Proportion of Chinese doctoral students = Number of Chinese doctoral students / Total number of local international doctoral students, highlighting the proportion differences in government-sponsored programs and top-tier institutions.

* Retention and Return Ratio = Proportion of those who stay locally or return to their home country for employment or further study within 1-3 years after graduation, reflecting the short-term career flow of doctoral graduates and significantly influenced by national policies and industrial demands.

Explanation of Commonalities and Differences:

All regions exhibit the characteristic that "the success rate of applications, probability of scholarships, and retention rate in science and engineering are higher than those in humanities and social sciences", with the gap generally ranging from 20 to 30 percentage points; the application competition at top-tier institutions (such as the US Top 10, UK G5, Singapore NUS/NTU, etc.) is more intense, with the success rate 5 to 10 percentage points lower than that of ordinary institutions.

5.1.2 Regional Distribution: Asia Concentrated, Europe Differentiated,

Adaptability Determines Attractiveness

The proportion of Chinese doctoral students among international students in major study-abroad destinations shows distinct regional differentiation, generally forming a pattern of "higher in Asia and lower in Europe". The core driving factors are the compatibility of each region's research system and training model with Chinese highly educated talents, while the government-sponsored policy also plays a significant guiding role in study-abroad choices. Specifically:

- **Singapore (40%-45%), the US (37%), and Hong Kong, China** (30%-35%) have the highest proportions of Chinese doctoral students , with their core advantage lying in outstanding adaptability: the US has the world's top-notch scientific research resources, meeting the needs of Chinese doctoral students for in-depth research; Singapore focuses on cutting-edge disciplines and has sufficient scientific research investment, and its bilingual environment in Chinese and English reduces the adaptation cost; Hong Kong, China, relying on its geographical advantages, has close academic connections with the Chinese mainland and extremely high cultural adaptability *(Source: NSF, IIE, MOE, UGC)*.
- **Japan (15%-20%) and Germany (18%-22%) have moderate proportions, while South Korea (10%-15%) has the lowest proportion**. The main constraining factors are as follows: Japan and South Korea have clear language barriers, requiring at least Japanese N2 or Korean TOPIK Level 4 (some English-taught programs may be exempted); the research directions of some disciplines in Germany do not match well with those of Chinese doctoral students, resulting in a relatively low proportion. It is worth noting that the proportion of Chinese doctoral students in government-sponsored programs (CSC, KGSP) is significantly higher than the overall level in each region, fully demonstrating the guiding role of government-sponsored policies in the overseas study choices of Chinese doctoral students *(Source: DAAD, HRK, MEXT, MEST)*.

5.1.3 Application for Admission: Competition Differentiation is Evident, and Mode and Fit Affect Success Rate

The success rates of PhD applications vary significantly across the seven major study-abroad destinations, mainly influenced by application models, levels of competition, and regional fit; admission rates and doctoral completion rates

generally perform well, with their differences mainly related to post-admission adaptation costs, the perfection of the training system, and the strength of scholarship support.

(1) In terms of application success rate, regional differentiation characteristics are prominent:

- Germany has the highest success rate for postdoctoral position applications, primarily due to its application model of "job matching first." Postdoctoral position candidates sign formal employment contracts with universities, resulting in relatively moderate competition pressure *(Source: DAAD, HRK, DFG)*.
- Hong Kong, China has the lowest overall application success rate, with the core reason being that the number of applicants for the top three popular majors in Hong Kong (such as AI and fintech) has been increasing year by year, but the number of available spots is limited, leading to intense competition *(Source: UGC)*.

(2) In terms of enrollment rate, the overall rate in each region remains between 88% and 99%, among which:

- **Singapore, Hong Kong (China), and the United Kingdom lead in enrollment rates (94%-99%),** reflecting low post-admission registration thresholds and low student adaptation costs in these regions, with no need for additional language adaptation or complex procedures, and extremely high adaptability. Doctoral completion rates generally range between 82% and 94%, with Singapore, Germany, and the US having higher completion rates (90%-94%), which are closely related to sufficient scholarship support, well-established training systems, and effective research guidance in these regions *(Source: MOE, UGC, HESA)*.
- **South Korea and Japan have relatively low completion rates (82%-88%) ,** mainly affected by factors such as language adaptation difficulties, differences in research rhythms, and academic atmosphere suitability, resulting in some students being unable to graduate normally *(Source: MEXT, MEST)*.

5.1.4 Scholarship Coverage: Asian Top Universities and Germany's Position-based System Stand Out

Scholarship coverage in major study-abroad destinations shows distinct hierarchical characteristics, with the overall situation being **"Asian top-tier institutions and Germany's position-based system stand out significantly"**. Both the scholarship coverage rate and funding intensity are highly correlated with local policy orientation, and generally tend to favor the fields of science and engineering. Specifically:

- **Singapore**: boasts the highest overall scholarship coverage rate (80%-90%), with the STEM field reaching over 95%. Doctoral scholarships at the National University of Singapore (NUS) and Nanyang Technological University (NTU) can cover full tuition fees plus living allowances, and are focused on cutting-edge disciplines, which is highly consistent with Singapore's policy orientation of "attracting high-end scientific research talents" *(Source: MOE)*.
- **Germany**: Doctoral students on a post-based system 100% enjoy statutory salary and benefits (starting full-time salary is approximately 3,500 euros per month), while the general application system combined with DAAD and CSC funding has an overall coverage rate of 60%. At the same time, public institutions generally waive tuition fees and only charge a small registration fee, highlighting its policy features of "research-friendly and reducing financial burden" *(Source: DAAD)*.
- **US, Hong Kong, China**: The scholarship coverage rate is moderate (65%-80%), and both are clearly skewed towards science and engineering. The full funding rate for science and engineering in the US exceeds 85%, and the scholarship coverage rate in the STEM fields in Hong Kong, China is 80%-90%, which is consistent with the policy orientation of "strengthening science and engineering research and adapting to industrial needs" in both regions *(Source: NSF, UGC)*.
- **Japan, South Korea, and the United Kingdom**: The scholarship coverage rate is relatively low (50%-75%), but the government's special scholarships (UKRI, JASSO, KGSP) provide relatively large amounts of funding. However, the application threshold is also relatively high, with clear requirements for academic background and language proficiency, reflecting the policy approach of "targeted funding and screening for high-quality talent" *(Source: HESA, UKRI, MEXT, MEST)*.

5.1.5 Graduation Destination: Regional differences are significant, with policies and culture dominating destination choices

The proportion of Chinese doctoral graduates staying locally and returning to China for employment shows distinct regional differences, with the core driving factors being the retention policies of various countries, industrial talent demand, and geographical and cultural suitability. The flow characteristics of different regions are highly consistent with the policy orientation interpreted earlier.

(1) In terms of Retention Rate:

- **Germany has the highest (70%–75%),** mainly due to its well-developed post-based welfare system and friendly retention policy that allows those who have worked for 2 years to apply for permanent residency. Among them, the retention rate of post-based doctoral students in Germany even exceeds 80%, fully demonstrating the guiding role of the policy in talent retention *(Source: DAAD)*;
- **Singapore comes second (60%–65%).** Influenced by the policy of signing a contract to stay in Singapore for three years with a scholarship, the retention rate remains high. Meanwhile, Singapore's market-oriented employment environment also attracts a large number of Chinese doctoral graduates *(Source: MOE)*;
- **The US and the United Kingdom have a medium retention rate (40%–60%).** The UK's PSW visa and the US's STEM OPT extension policy provide sufficient time and channels for graduates to stay, supporting the retention rate to remain within a reasonable range *(Source: NSF, UGC, HESA, UKRI)*.

(2) In terms of the return rate:

- **South Korea (80%–85%), Japan (75%–80%), and Hong Kong, China (65%–70%) have the highest rates:** Hong Kong, China benefits from its convenient geographical location, with a large number of graduates returning to mainland universities and research institutions; in Japan and South Korea, due to factors such as fierce employment competition among local highly educated talents and differences in cultural adaptability, most Chinese doctoral students choose to return to China, and after returning, they are mainly concentrated in fields such as materials, precision instruments, and semiconductors *(Source:*

MEXT, MEST, UGC);

- **The US and Germany have the lowest return rates (25%–45%):** Returnees mainly focus on high-end manufacturing, university research, and other fields, with the core being that the scientific research and industrial resources in these two regions are of high quality, providing greater room for development and retention *(Source: NSF, DAAD)*.

5.1.6 Employment Destinations: Diversified Pathways, with High-End Industries Reverse-Trailing Study Abroad Choices

In the past five years, the proportion of Chinese doctoral students returning to China has continued to rise, and the employment path has shown the characteristics of " **from academic singularity to diversified diversion** ". The demand for high-end industries has become the core factor guiding the choice of Chinese doctoral students' study majors and graduation flows, which echoes the policy tilt direction of various regions.

- **Overall**: Combined with the data from the Blue Book on Returned Overseas Chinese Scholars in Beijing, 15.86% of returned doctoral scholars choose to work and live in Beijing, and 60% are concentrated in new productive forces sectors such as artificial intelligence and medical health, reflecting the growing demand for doctoral talents in high-end domestic industries, and also closely related to the guidance of domestic policies on industry-university-research integration and talent introduction.

- **From the perspective of career paths**: Chinese doctoral graduates are breaking the traditional "single academic" development model and moving towards "diversified divergence": traditional universities and research institutes remain the main destinations (accounting for approximately 54.7%), but the attractiveness of R&D positions in enterprises is gradually increasing, especially the demand for engineering and applied doctoral graduates from high-tech enterprises has increased significantly.This employment trend has also indirectly influenced the choice of overseas study majors among Chinese doctoral students, resulting in the popularity and retention rate of overseas study for science and engineering doctoral students remaining consistently higher than those of humanities and social sciences doctoral students. This forms a two-

way correspondence with the characteristic that scholarships and retention policies in various regions are tilted towards science and engineering, further highlighting the linkage logic of "policy guidance – major choice – employment flow" *(Source: Statistics on Chinese Students Studying Abroad, Ministry of Education of China)*.

5.2 Portrait of the Group of Overseas Doctoral Students: Who Chooses to Pursue a Doctorate Abroad?

Based on the collected 1015 valid questionnaires, this paper analyzes various core dimensions of doctoral study abroad from three levels: " **Accurate presentation of data – in-depth interpretation of industry trends – practical suggestions for applicants** ", deeply related to global university policies, industry competition landscape and employment market dynamics, ensuring that the interpretation is based on evidence and the suggestions are feasible.

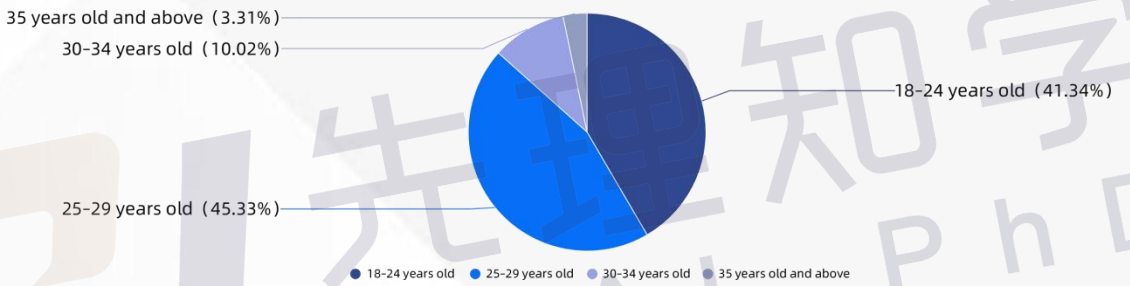
5.2.1 Student Portrait: Balancer of Academic Aspirations and Career Anxiety

(1) Age Structure: Overall, the youth group dominates, age barriers are prominent, and applications for career transition are on the rise:

- **The youth group has become the absolute main force, and "academic continuity" has become the core characteristic of the industry**: The combined proportion of the 18–29 age group reaches 86.59%, with the 25–29 age group having the highest proportion. This reflects that the current mainstream path for overseas doctoral applications is the continuous further education model of "undergraduate – master – doctor". Young people, with their advantages of high energy and strong academic plasticity, have become the core preferred group for admission by institutions and the core service target of study abroad agencies.
- **Age barriers are significant, and older applicants are caught in a double bind:** The proportion of those aged 30 and above is only 13.33%, highlighting the implicit age barriers in overseas doctoral applications. Top overseas

institutions tend to recruit younger applicants, believing they have greater research potential and longer cultivation periods. Meanwhile, older applicants face dual constraints from family and career, resulting in both low application willingness and success rates, a trend that is particularly evident in top institutions in Europe and the United States.

- **Career transition applications have emerged as a niche growth point**: The proportion of the 30–34 age group has reached 10.02% and is showing an upward trend year by year, reflecting that an increasing number of professionals are achieving career transition and title promotion through overseas doctoral studies. Especially in fields such as education and scientific research, a doctoral degree has become the core support for career advancement, driving the emergence of the niche track of "on-the-job doctoral applications" in the study-abroad industry.



*Data source: REAL PhD Team 2026 Questionnaire Survey (N = 1,015)

(2) Educational background: With the master's degree group as the core, early applications from undergraduates are on the rise, and educational stratification determines the application path

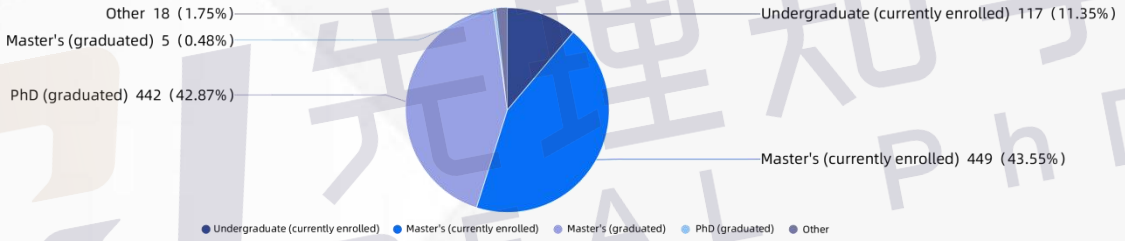
- **The master's degree group forms the core of the industry, and the competition for applications has reached a white-hot stage**: The combined proportion of current master's students and graduated master's degree holders is 86.42%, making them the absolute core of overseas doctoral applications. The research training experience accumulated during their master's stage is their core competitiveness, but it also directly leads to a continuous decline in the admission rates of popular majors at top universities.

- **The rise of the early application group for undergraduate programs is expected to become an incremental market in the future**: The proportion of undergraduate students currently enrolled has reached 11.35%, highlighting the trend of "early planning, early application." Undergraduate students are aware

of the advantages of direct doctoral programs and are preparing in advance, which is driving study abroad agencies to launch segmented services such as early application and early planning for undergraduate programs.

➢ **Educational background stratification determines the application path, with significant differences**: Applicants with a prestigious university background have more advantages in applying to top-tier institutions; those with a non-985/211 university background tend to choose mid-tier institutions and applied doctoral programs, forming an industry pattern of "educational background stratification corresponding to application stratification".

➢ **Application paths are becoming increasingly diversified**: The "Other" category (accounting for 2.23%) reflects that overseas doctoral applications are no longer limited to traditional paths, with an increase in special paths such as applying after upgrading from junior college to master's degree and on-the-job further education, providing more possibilities for applicants with different educational backgrounds.



*Data source: REAL PhD Team 2026 Questionnaire Survey (N = 1,015)

5.2.2 Family Portrait: Decision-Makers in Educational Investment and Risk Aversion

(1) Annual household income situation: Middle-class families are the main force, with a prominent demand for cost-effectiveness, and product stratification has become an inevitability in the industry

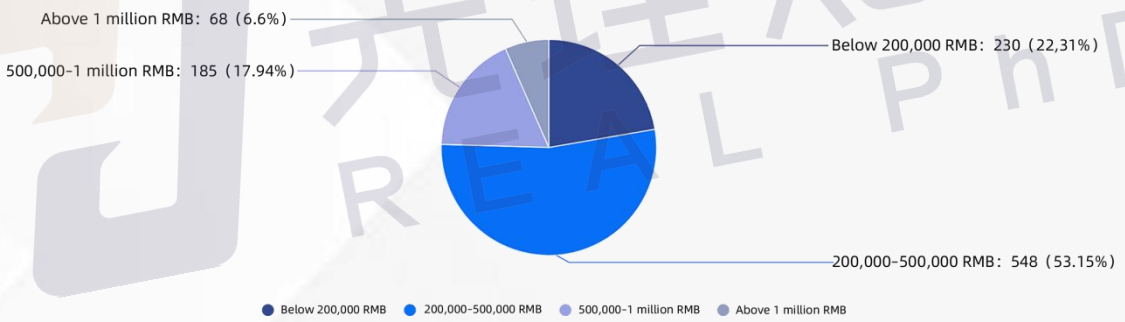
➢ **Middle-class families have become the core support of the industry, with cost-effectiveness emerging as the core consumption logic: Families with an annual income of 200,000 – 500,000 yuan account for 53.15%, making them the absolute economic powerhouse.** This group has driven institutions to launch high-cost-effectiveness core packages, making them the mainstream products

in the industry.

➢ **Scholarship demand among low-income groups is strong, focusing on low-cost destinations:** Families with an annual income below 200,000 yuan account for 22.31%, facing significant economic pressure and highly relying on scholarships and government-sponsored programs. Most will prioritize low-cost destinations such as Europe and Southeast Asia.

➢ **High-income groups drive the development of high-end customized services:** Households with a total income of 500,000 yuan and above account for approximately 25.54%, emphasizing personalization and professionalism, willing to pay a premium for high-quality services, and becoming a profit growth point for institutions.

➢ **Income stratification determines application choices, leading to the formation of a product stratification pattern**: Different income groups show significant differences in destination and service selection, driving the industry to form a service model of "product stratification, precise matching".



*Data source: REAL PhD Team 2026 Questionnaire Survey (N = 1,015)

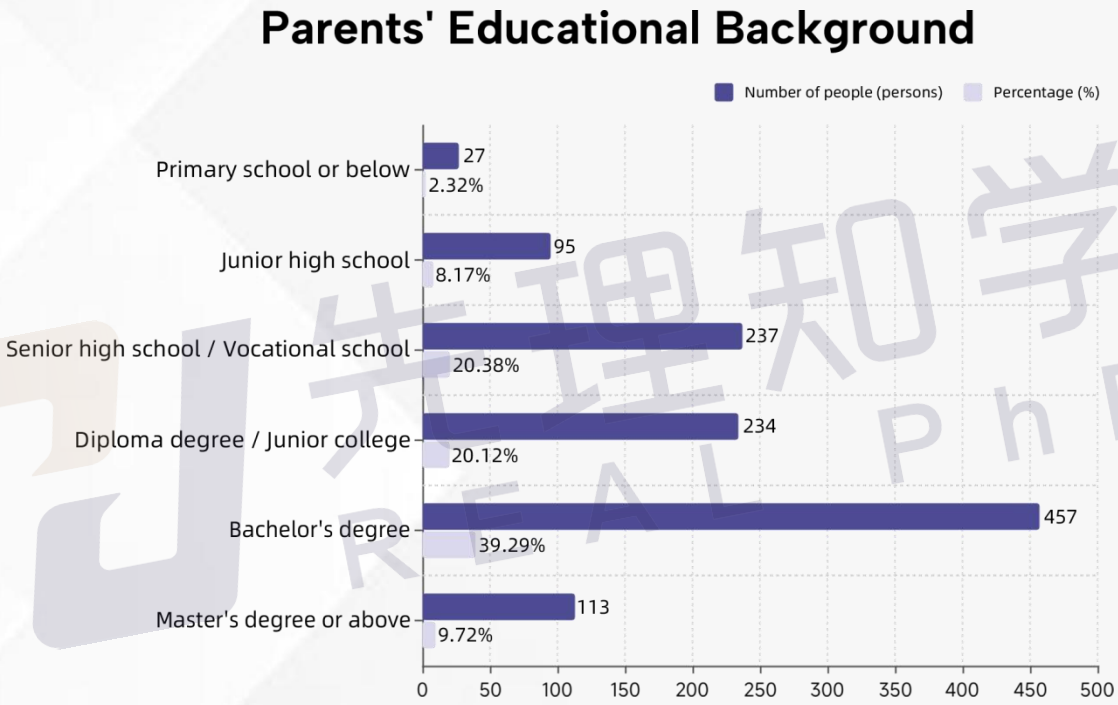
(2) Parental educational background: Dominated by highly educated families, with differentiated information acquisition capabilities, and trust building is the key to service

➢ **Highly educated families have become the core of decision-making, with professional needs becoming prominent**: Parents with a bachelor's degree or above account for 49.01%, and they lead or are deeply involved in decision-making, having higher requirements for institutional professionalism, academic alignment, etc., thus driving institutions to improve their service professionalism.

➢ **Families with secondary education backgrounds are the core target**

audience: Parents with high school/secondary vocational school and junior college education levels together account for 40.5%. They highly rely on professional guidance from institutions, with their core needs being process popularization and one-stop services, and their trust directly affects customer conversion.

- **Highly Educated Families Drive the Academic Upgrade of Services**: Parents with a master's degree or higher have in-depth knowledge of overseas education, and their core needs are academic alignment and resource connection, which drive institutions to transform towards academicization and strengthen their research tutoring capabilities.



*Data source: REAL PhD Team 2026 Questionnaire Survey (N = 1,015)

(3) Parents' overseas experience: The inexperienced group dominates, information gap becomes the core pain point, and trust building becomes the core competitiveness of institutions

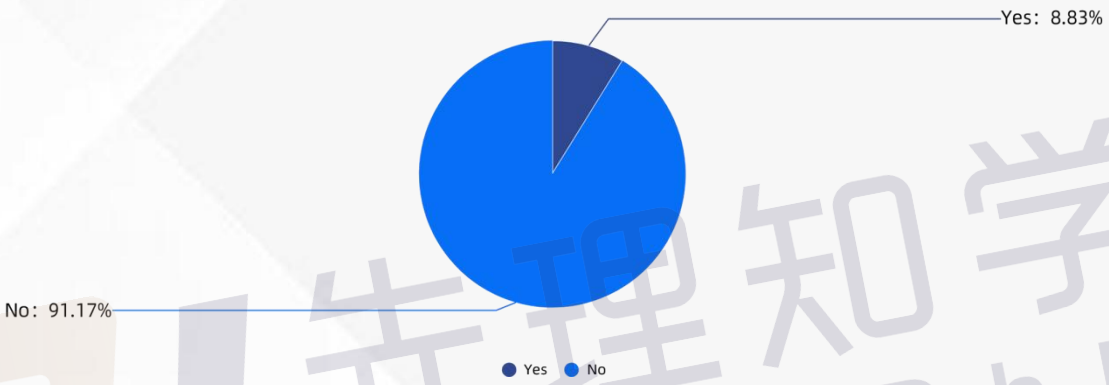
- **Information gap is the core pain point of the industry, and the value of institutional popular science is prominent**: 91.17% of parents have no overseas experience, families lack information, and their dependence on institutions is high. Therefore, institutional popular science and guidance have become the core competitiveness.

- **Families with overseas experience have precise needs and value academic**

alignment: 8.83% of parents have overseas experience, and their needs focus on academic alignment and resource connection, preferring institutions with high professionalism and abundant academic resources.

➢ **Information transparency and word-of-mouth have become the core advantages of institutions**: Information asymmetry has led families to highly value institutional transparency and word-of-mouth. Leading institutions have gained market advantages through transparent services and high-quality cases, making it more difficult for small and medium-sized institutions to build trust.

Whether parents have overseas study or work experience



*Data source: REAL PhD Team 2026 Questionnaire Survey (N = 1,015)

5.3 Decision-making Logic for Doctoral Overseas Study: Interweaving and Trade-off of Multidimensional Factors

5.3.1 Application Objectives and Research Directions: Emphasize both academic and career orientation, and promote the upgrading of industry services through disciplinary diversification

➢ **Equal emphasis on academic pursuit and career development:** "Academic interest and further study" (33.95%) and "Enhancing employment competitiveness" (32.30%) account for almost the same proportion. This reflects that doctoral applicants not only value in-depth academic exploration but also highly focus on career development prospects, presenting a dual-core motivation structure of "academics + employment".

- **Prominent personal growth aspirations:** "Enhancing personal capabilities and internationalization vision" (27.74%) accounts for nearly 30%, indicating that doctoral study abroad is not only an academic or career choice but also an important path to achieve self-improvement and broaden global horizons, reflecting the comprehensive consideration of long-term development by high-level talents.

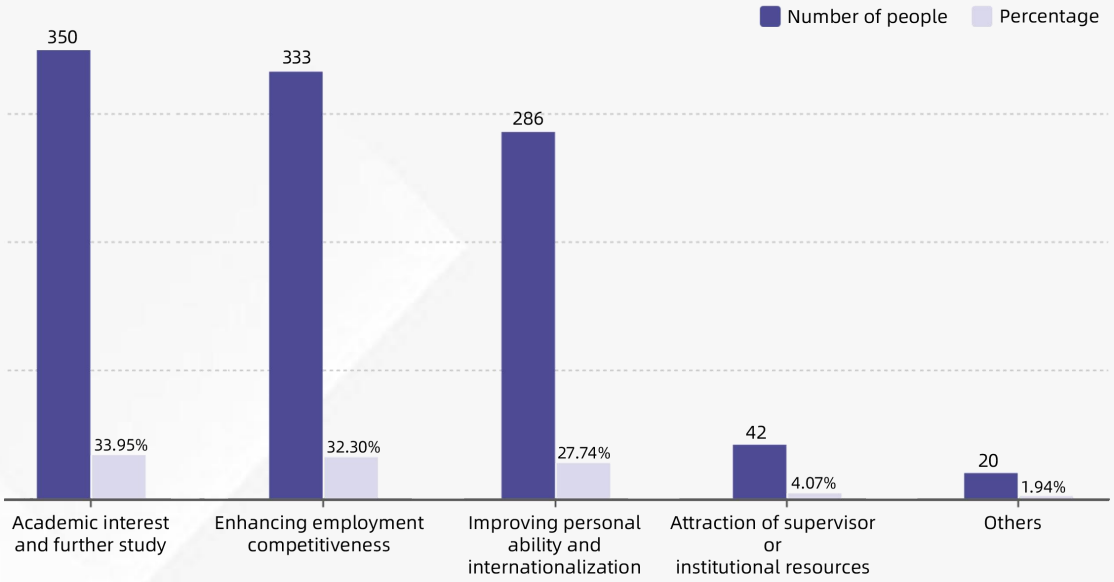
- **Low proportion of resource orientation:** "Attraction of tutor or institutional resources" only accounts for 4.07%, indicating that applicants are more focused on their own growth and goal achievement, rather than simply relying on external resources, and their decision-making is more rational and autonomous.

- **Academic orientation aligns with global scientific research development needs:** The applicant group led by academic interests is highly compatible with the talent needs of global universities for basic research and innovative breakthroughs, and such applicants are more likely to gain the favor of mentors and support for research funding.

- **Employment orientation highlights the talent gap in industries:** The demand to enhance employment competitiveness is directly related to the urgent need for high-end interdisciplinary talents in current global industrial upgrading (such as artificial intelligence, biomedicine, and digital economy), and a doctoral degree has become an important stepping stone to enter core technology and management positions.

- **Internationalization vision aligns with the global talent mobility trend:** The pursuit of enhancing personal capabilities and internationalization vision echoes the major trend of talent mobility in the context of globalization, and is also highly consistent with the "priority for international talent" introduction policy in the Asia-Pacific region.

Primary goals for applying to overseas PhD programs



*Data source: REAL PhD Team 2026 Questionnaire Survey (N = 1,015)

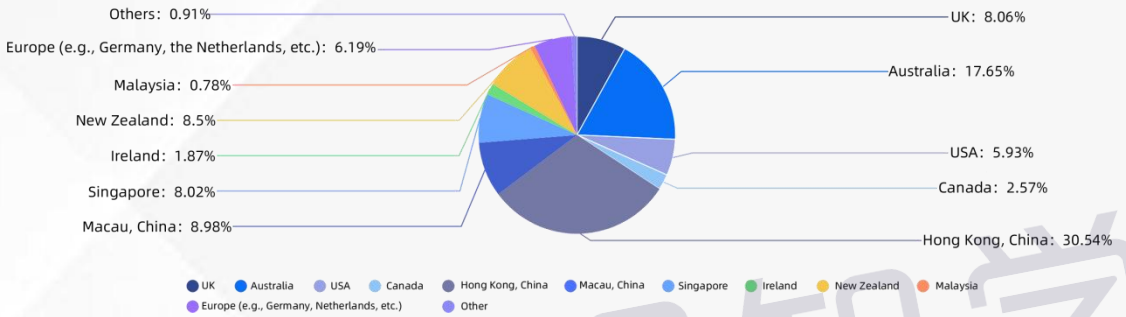
5.3.2 Application Research Areas and Intended Study Abroad Destinations: Reshaping of the Geographical Pattern of Doctoral Study Abroad and the Rise of Applied Disciplines

1) Regional trends: Asia-Pacific has become the core growth area, while the share of Europe and the Americas continues to contract

- **The Asia-Pacific region has witnessed a strong rise, with policy dividends emerging as the core driving force**: Hong Kong, Macau, Singapore, and Australia together account for over 65%, becoming the main regions for doctoral study abroad. This pattern stems from the Asia-Pacific region's continuous open attitude towards high-level talent, as well as the active introduction of talent recruitment policies, residency facilitation, entrepreneurship subsidies, tax incentives, etc. in various places. Meanwhile, natural advantages such as cultural proximity, convenient commuting, and controllable living costs (about 1/3 of those in Europe and the US) have further attracted doctoral applicants aiming for employment, settlement, and long-term development.
- **The attractiveness of traditional study-abroad destinations in Europe and**

the US continues to decline: The US and Canada account for a significantly lower proportion in this data. Considering the global study-abroad policy environment in recent years, countries such as the UK, US, and Canada have continuously tightened visa reviews for basic research doctoral students, with some majors facing issues such as strict scrutiny, extended processing periods, and fluctuating approval rates. Coupled with the uncertainty of the international scientific research cooperation environment, high thresholds for employment and cultural integration, the overall risk appetite of applicants has decreased.

Distribution of Intended Study Destinations



*Data source: REAL PhD Team 2026 Questionnaire Survey (N = 1,015)

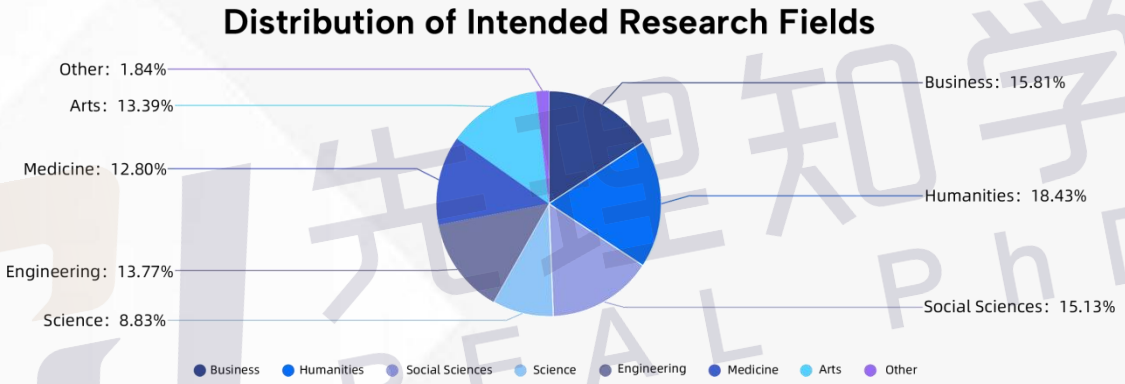
(2) Disciplinary Trends: Humanities Lead, and Interdisciplinary and Applied Disciplines Become the Mainstream Focus

- **Humanities, Social Sciences, and Business dominate , with significant employment-oriented characteristics**: The combined proportion of liberal arts, social sciences, and business is close to 50%, becoming the mainstream choice for doctoral applications. Behind this structural change is the shift of the doctoral cohort from pure academia to the industrial sector: Humanities, Social Sciences, and Business doctoral students have clear career paths in government, universities, consulting, finance, public affairs, international organizations, and other fields, highly matching the needs of the global and domestic high-end talent market.

- **Interdisciplinary fields have received dual preferential treatment from policies and scholarships:** Disciplines such as medicine and art have already approached the proportion of traditional engineering disciplines, reflecting the general trend of global scientific research towards interdisciplinary integration and innovative application transformation. Interdisciplinary directions such as biomedical Big data, digital art, artificial intelligence + healthcare, Carbon

neutrality policies, and intelligent education are not only key research areas supported by various countries but also more likely to receive support from top doctoral scholarships such as Hong Kong HKPFS, Australia IPRS, and Singapore A*STAR.

➢ **Competition in basic science is intensifying, and the difficulty of application continues to rise**: The lowest proportion of basic science is not due to a weakening of demand, but rather a dual increase in competition and thresholds. Globally, the number of scholarships for basic disciplines has contracted, and the level of funding has declined. Coupled with increased restrictions such as visa reviews, the number of admissions by supervisors, and laboratory resources, applicants for basic disciplines must strengthen the application scenarios, transformation value, and social significance in their research plans to adapt to global scientific research funding and policy orientation.



*Data source: REAL PhD Team 2026 Questionnaire Survey (N = 1,015)

(3) Service and Policy Trends: Orientation towards refined services and outcome transformation

➢ **Overseas study services are evolving from large-scale to full-chain refinement:** Doctoral applications are no longer just simple school submissions; the industry as a whole is shifting from the "batch application" model to full-chain customized services including research background enhancement, research plan customization, supervisor outreach, scholarship application, visa and settlement planning, driving service providers to upgrade towards specialization, in-depth development, and academicization.

➢ **Global doctoral policies are shifting towards the dual goals of "talent retention + achievement transformation":** Policy design in major study-abroad

destinations increasingly emphasizes attracting, retaining, and making good use of talent. For example, Hong Kong provides STEM doctoral students with a 3-year IANG job-seeking visa, Australia offers immigration points to doctoral students participating in industrialization projects, and Singapore provides financial support to research achievement transformation teams. The policy orientation is clear: interdisciplinary, applied disciplines, and industrialization-oriented research will continue to receive greater support, which will become a key dividend direction for doctoral applications in the coming years.

5.3.3 Considerations for Intended Regions and Institutions: The Triple Drivers of Funding, Academics, and Life

(1) Core decision-making logic: capital first, academics as the foundation, and life as the basis

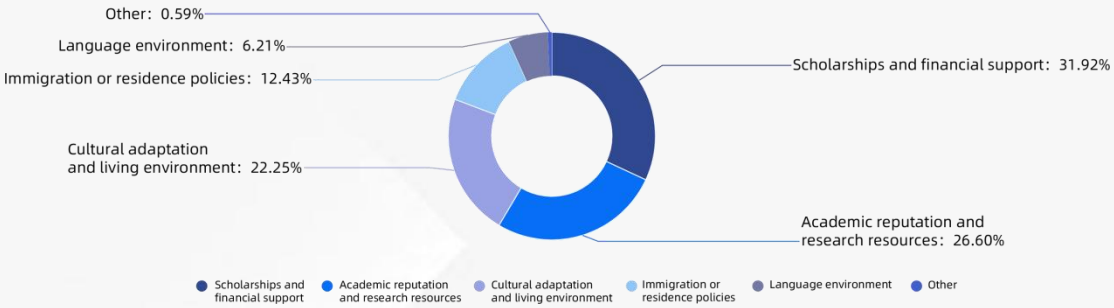
- **Financial support runs through whole-link decision-making**: In destination selection, scholarships and financial support rank first with a proportion of 31.92%; in institution selection, scholarships and funding opportunities follow closely behind tutor matching with a proportion of 26%. The doctoral program usually lasts 3-5 years, and the high tuition fees and living costs have significantly increased families' attention to financial support, making full-scholarship programs the core prerequisite for determining the feasibility of applications.
- **Academic pursuit is the essential core of doctoral applications**: In destination selection, academic reputation and research resources account for 26.60%; in institution selection, the match of the supervisor's research direction (27.30%) and world ranking/academic reputation (22.27%) together account for nearly 50%, highlighting the core characteristics of "academic orientation and supervisor-based" in doctoral applications.
- **Life adaptability and long-term development have become important pillars**: In destination selection, cultural adaptation and living environment account for 22.25%, and immigration/residency policies account for 12.43%; in institution selection, geographical location and living costs account for 8.76%, and graduate employment situation accounts for 10.77%, together constituting the

third driving force of "life + development". Applicants incorporate long-term plans such as settlement, employment, and permanent residency into their decision-making, which highly resonates with the trend of the Asia-Pacific region becoming a popular destination.

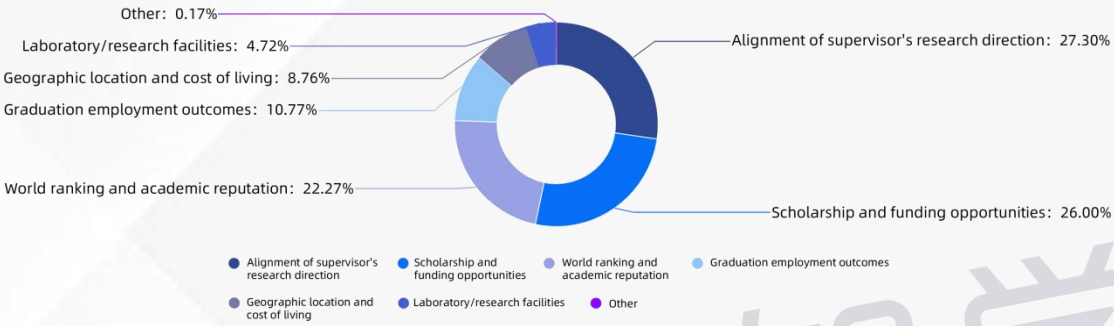
(2) Changes in Factor Weights and Underlying Causes

- **Financially Driven Rational Choice**: Against the backdrop of global inflation, the tightening of household budget constraints, high tuition fees, fierce competition for scholarships, high living costs, and uncertainties in visa and employment policies in European and American countries have prompted applicants to be more inclined to choose the Asia-Pacific region, which offers sufficient financial support and stable living conditions.
- **Underlying Support of Academic Logic:** Doctoral training centers around personalized research, so the match between students and supervisors has thus surpassed institutional rankings as the primary consideration; while the academic reputation of institutions provides crucial endorsement for subsequent academic and career development.
- **Amplifying Effect of Asia-Pacific Advantages**: Hong Kong, Macao, Singapore, and Australia have natural advantages in aspects such as cultural proximity, compatible lifestyles, and convenient Chinese language use. At the same time, combined with liberal immigration/residency policies and abundant scholarship resources, the comprehensive attractiveness of "capital + academics + life + policy" has been significantly enhanced.
- **Non-core status of language and hardware:** Language environment only accounts for 6.21% in destination selection, and laboratory/research facilities only account for 4.72% in institution selection, indicating that language barriers have weakened with the popularization of the academic lingua franca, and hardware facilities are more dependent on the academic resources of supervisors and institutions.

Distribution of Considerations When Choosing an Intended Study Destination



Distribution of Factors Valued When Choosing Target Universities



*Data source: REAL PhD Team 2026 Questionnaire Survey (N = 1,015)

5.3.4 Selection of Applied Major: Collaborative Decision-Making Based on Interests, Foundations, and Regional Resources

- **The rational shift from "academic ideal" to "professional reality", with employment orientation becoming the mainstream**: The proportion of 35.35% has for the first time exceeded academic interest, becoming the primary basis for doctoral applicants to choose their majors. This marks a structural transformation of doctoral education from "pure academic elite cultivation" to "high-end applied talent reserve", highly consistent with the urgent global demand for high-level talents in industrial upgrading.

- **Academic interest remains the fundamental underpinning:** The 31.11% proportion indicates that academic enthusiasm remains the core internal driving force supporting long-term scientific research during the doctoral stage. Especially in basic disciplines and cutting-edge interdisciplinary fields, interest remains the core consideration for supervisors when screening candidates and a necessary prerequisite for producing original research results.

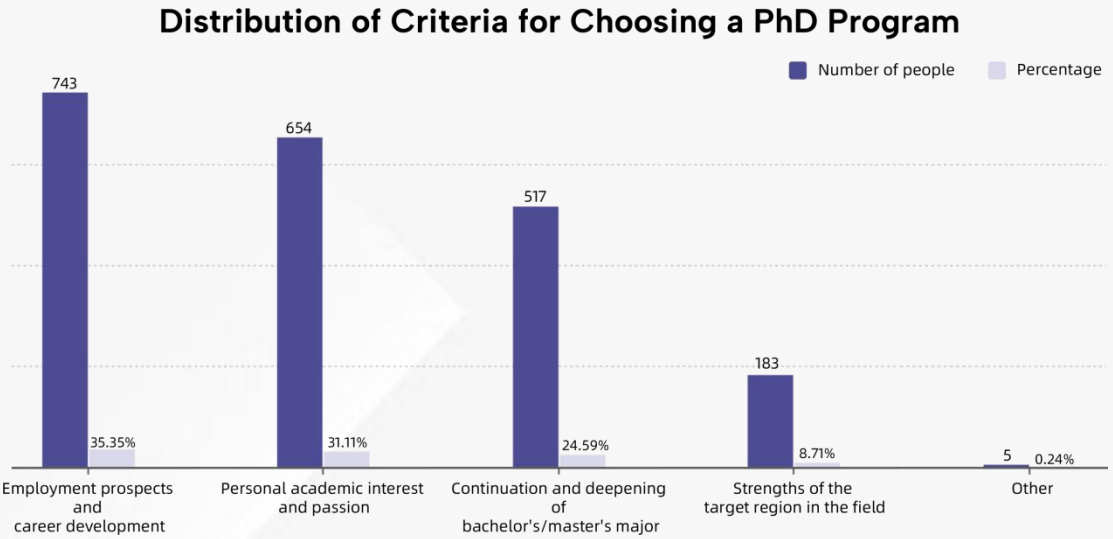
- **Competitiveness of Professional Continuity Guarantee Application**: Most

applicants (24.59%) still choose to delve deeper based on their undergraduate and postgraduate majors, which not only aligns with the objective law of academic accumulation but also minimizes the difficulty of cross-disciplinary applications to the greatest extent. It is a rational choice that balances "academic feasibility" and "application success rate".

- **Regional professional advantages have become the logic for differentiated selection:** The 8.71% proportion reflects the collaborative decision-making thinking of "professional + region". Applicants match the industrial advantages and policy preferences of the target region (such as the Hong Kong Talent List, Singapore's shortage of professional fields, and Australia's key supported disciplines) to achieve the triple binding of academic development, regional resources, and career development.

- **The shortage of high-end talent is driving a shift towards career orientation, and the scientific research evaluation system is gradually aligning with the job market.** As global technological competition intensifies, countries are regarding doctoral talent as a core strategic resource. Enterprises and governments have seen a surge in demand for doctoral candidates with the ability to solve complex problems, and high-paying positions and clear career paths are attracting applicants to lean towards applied and interdisciplinary majors. Universities and research institutions are placing increasing emphasis on candidates' "ability to translate research into practical applications" and "industry adaptability" during recruitment, further prompting applicants to consider both academic depth and career prospects when choosing their majors.

- **Economic pressure and long-term development anxiety prompt rational choices:** The long duration and high economic cost of a doctoral program make post-graduation employment returns a key consideration for both families and individuals. Meanwhile, with the increasing uncertainty in the global job market, applicants tend to choose majors with "stable employment prospects and high career ceilings" to reduce long-term development risks.



*Data source: REAL PhD Team 2026 Questionnaire Survey (N = 1,015)

5.4 Selection of Overseas Study Agencies: From Information Intermediaries to Strategic Partners

5.4.1 Selection Motivation: Driven by Information Asymmetry, Catalyzed by Service Preferences

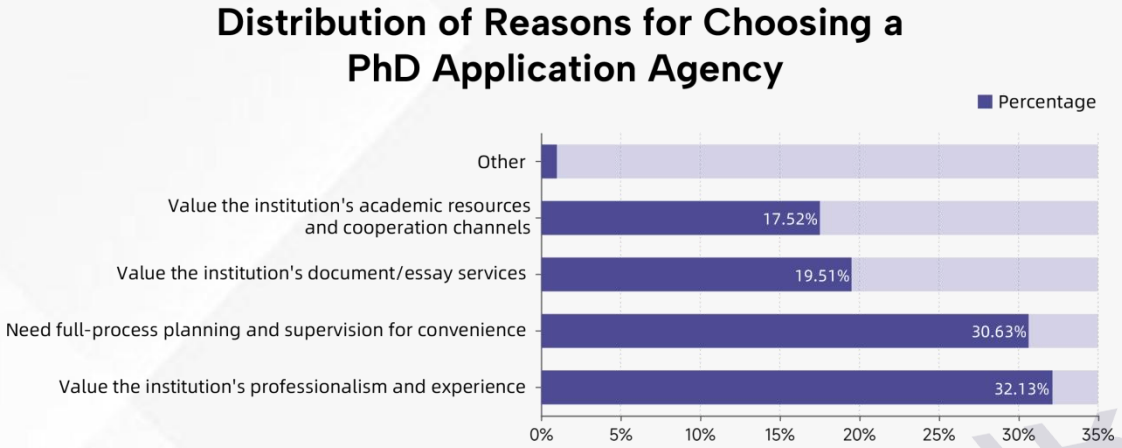
(1) Core Motivation: Professionalism and the need for hassle-free experience are the core logic behind institutional selection

- **Professional trust is the primary decision-making basis:** 32.13% of applicants cited "institutional expertise and experience" as the top reason. The high complexity and high risk of doctoral applications make applicants highly dependent on the institution's accumulation in policy interpretation, academic matching, and application processes, with professional reputation becoming the institution's core competitive edge.

- **Full-process planning and supervision have become a pain point of inelastic demand:** 30.63% of applicants pursue "worry-free service". The doctoral application process is long and involves multiple steps, and applicants hope to reduce time costs and decision-making risks through the full-process supervision of institutions, which highly resonates with the family background of "parents having no overseas experience and significant information gap".

- **Documents and academic resources are important factors for extra points:**

Document services (19.51%) and academic resources (17.52%) have similar proportions, indicating that applicants not only value the professionalism of application materials but also expect to enhance their chances of admission and scholarship success by leveraging the institution's tutor resources and cooperation channels.



*Data source: REAL PhD Team 2026 Questionnaire Survey (N = 1,015)

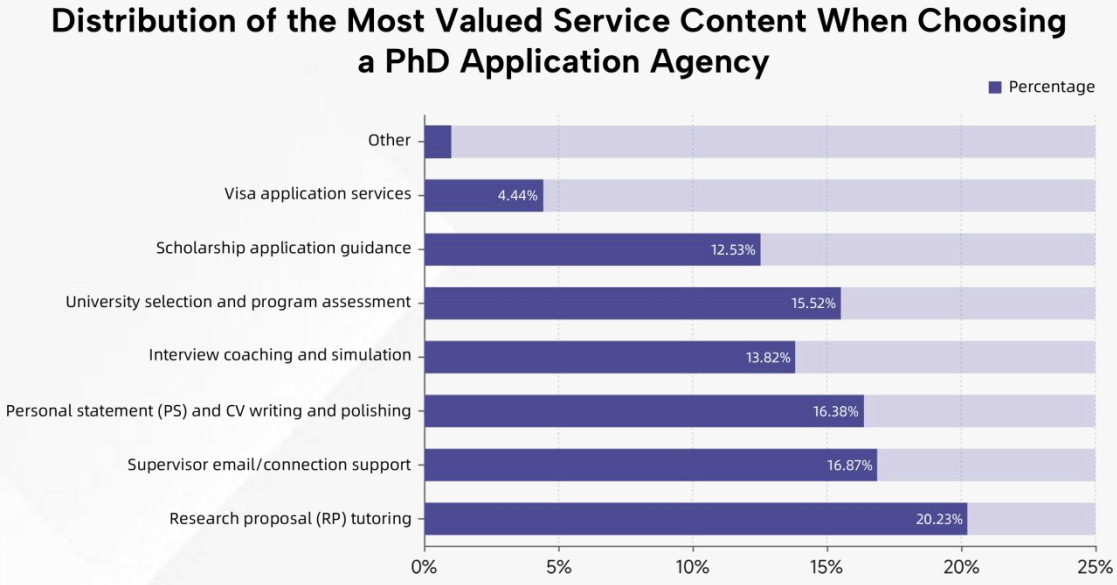
(2) Service Preferences: Academic core processes have become the high ground of institutional service value

➢ **Research Proposal (RP) tutoring is the most core service demand:** It ranks first with a proportion of 20.23%. RP is the "academic soul" of doctoral applications, directly determining the supervisor's judgment of the applicant's research potential. Its professional requirements are much higher than those of undergraduate or master's applications, making it the most dependent link for applicants on institutions.

➢ **Faculty outreach and document service are key supports**: Faculty outreach support (16.87%) and document writing optimization (16.38%) follow closely. Outreach is the core bridge connecting applicants with target faculty, while documents are the intuitive presentation of personal background and academic potential. Together, they form the key closed loop for a successful application.

➢ **The demand for whole-process services has become prominent**: Services such as school selection and positioning (15.52%), interview coaching (13.82%), and scholarship guidance (12.53%) have balanced proportions, indicating that applicants need a whole-link solution "from planning to enrollment" rather than fragmented

services for a single link.



*Data source: REAL PhD Team 2026 Questionnaire Survey (N = 1,015)

5.4.2 Service Demands: From Single-point Support to Whole-link Escort

(1) Core pain point: Scientific research and academic communication are the biggest obstacles to applying for a doctoral program

- **Insufficient research background is the primary source of anxiety**: 24.13% of applicants are most worried about "inadequate research background and achievements." This directly reflects the high requirements of doctoral applications for academic hard power—achievements such as papers, projects, and patents are the core basis for supervisors to judge candidates' potential and also the key to differentiating competitiveness.

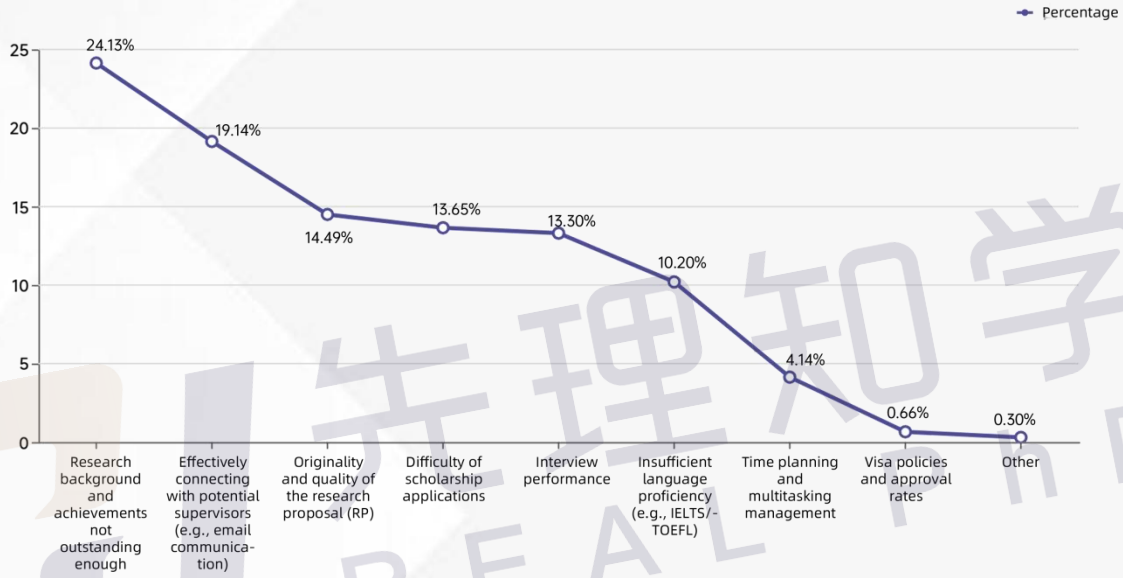
- **Networking with supervisors and the quality of the research proposal (RP) are the second major bottleneck**: "Effective networking with supervisors" (19.14%) and "Originality and quality of the RP" (14.49%) together account for over 33%, indicating that applicants have significant shortcomings in academic communication skills and research design capabilities, which is also the most vulnerable link in DIY applications.

- **Scholarships and interviews are key success or failure factors**: The difficulty of scholarship applications (13.65%) and interview performance (13.30%) account for similar proportions, indicating that applicants not only

focus on "whether they can be admitted" but also care more about "whether they can afford to study" and "whether they can pass the final assessment by the supervisor", with economic pressure and assessment pressure coexisting.

➢ **Language and Time Management are secondary pain points:** Insufficient language proficiency (10.20%) and time planning issues (4.14%) account for relatively low proportions, indicating that applicants are more focused on core academic abilities, and language and process-related issues can be resolved through standardized means.

Distribution of Users' Biggest Concerns During the Application Process



*Data source: REAL PhD Team 2026 Questionnaire Survey (N = 1,015)

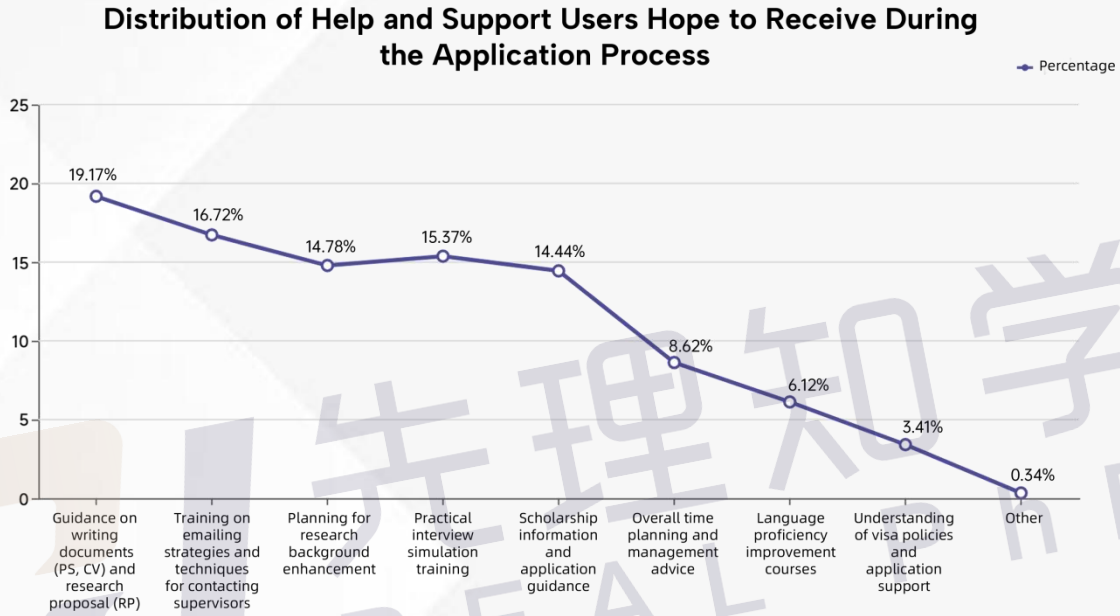
(2) Service Demand: Precise matching of pain points, and academic-oriented services have become an inelastic demand

➢ **Personal Statement/RP and networking guidance are the most core needs:** Personal Statement and RP writing guidance (19.17%) and networking strategy training (16.72%) rank in the top two positions, highly corresponding to the pain points of "RP quality" and "networking efficiency". Applicants urgently need professional guidance to enhance the professionalism of their academic materials and communication.

➢ **Research, interview, and scholarship services form a demand triangle:** Research background enhancement planning (14.78%), interview practice

simulation (15.37%), and scholarship application counseling (14.44%) have balanced proportions, covering the entire process of "pre-background accumulation – mid-application materials – post-assessment and funding", reflecting a strong demand for whole-link academic support.

➢ **Time and language services are basic supplementary services**: Overall time planning (8.62%) and language improvement courses (6.12%) have stable demand and are suitable as standardized supporting services to enhance the overall experience of applicants



*Data source: REAL PhD Team 2026 Questionnaire Survey (N = 1,015)

5.4.3 Deep-seated Causes and Insights from the Institutional Perspective

➢ **The high threshold of doctoral applications has driven up the demand for professional services:** Doctoral applications have extremely high requirements for academic fit, research potential, and material professionalism, with a low success rate for DIY, which provides room for differentiated competition in the study-abroad industry.

➢ **Information gap and time cost drive the "worry-free" service:** Most applicants (and their families) lack experience in overseas doctoral applications and are also faced with research and academic pressures. The whole-link planning and supervision of institutions can effectively fill the information gap and free up time and energy, becoming a core value point.

- **Academic service capabilities have become the core competitiveness of institutions:** Applicants' high level of attention to RP tutoring, networking support, and academic resources requires institutions to transform from "traditional study-abroad agencies" to "academic service institutions", build an academic tutor team composed of doctoral students/postdoctoral researchers, and deeply cultivate academic matching and research guidance capabilities.
- **Refined service stratification is the future direction**: Different applicants have varying needs – academically oriented individuals value RP and networking more, those sensitive to funding focus on scholarship guidance, and those with limited time require full-process supervision. Institutions can design stratified products accordingly to improve service precision and customer satisfaction.

5.4.4 Development Suggestions for Doctoral Application Institutions

- **Strengthen the core of academic services**: Form a professional academic tutor team, delve deeply into core aspects such as RP writing, tutor networking, and academic matching, and create a differentiated label for "academic services".
- **Create a full-process refined product:** Build a complete service chain around "school selection and positioning – RP tutoring – networking support – document optimization – interview simulation – scholarship guidance – visa processing" to meet the "worry-free" needs of applicants.
- **Establish a professional reputation and trust system**: Through methods such as sharing real cases, outputting academic real stuff, and leveraging customer testimonials, convey the institution's professionalism and build a trust barrier for applicants.
- **Explore the tiered service model:** Design basic, advanced, and premium service packages for applicants with different backgrounds (academically oriented, cost-sensitive, time-constrained) to improve customer reach and revenue efficiency.
- **Connecting with the resource advantages of the Asia-Pacific region**: In light of the trend of doctoral applicants clustering in Hong Kong, Macau, Singapore, and Australia, we will delve deeply into the resources of institutions

and supervisors in the Asia-Pacific region, provide targeted regional application and settlement employment services, and seize the market opportunity.

5.4.5 Insights for Institutions Applying for Doctoral Programs: Pain Points Are Opportunities, and Professional Services Build Core Barriers

- **Academic service capabilities are the foundation for an institution's survival:** Applicants' high dependence on research improvement, RP writing, and supervisor communication guidance requires institutions to assemble a team of doctoral/postdoctoral academic tutors and delve deeply into core competencies such as research design, academic expression, and supervisor communication.
- **End-to-end solutions are a competitive advantage**: Integrated services from research background planning → RP/essay writing → networking strategy → interview simulation → scholarship application can precisely address the core concerns of applicants and build a professional image of "academic companion" for institutions.
- **Tiered services meet differentiated needs**: Modular products can be designed to address different pain points. For those with weak research capabilities, the "Research Background Enhancement + RP Tutoring" package can be selected; for those with insufficient communication skills, the "Cold Email Strategy + Interview Simulation" training can be chosen; for those sensitive to funding, the "Scholarship Application Tutoring + Full Process Time Planning" can be opted for. This tiered model can not only improve the precision of services but also expand the customer coverage.
- **Data and case accumulation strengthen trust:** Institutions can convey their ability to "address core pain points" to applicants by showcasing real cases of scientific research improvement, success rates of networking, and scholarship admission data, thereby building a professional trust barrier.

Chapter 6: Strategies for Overseas Doctoral Applications

Important Note: The admission rates, case backgrounds, and application strategies mentioned below are based on statistical analysis of historical data and do not represent the probability of success for any individual application. PhD admission outcomes are affected by multiple uncontrollable factors, including the number of available places in a given year, supervisors' funding availability, and the level of competition among applicants. Historical data does not constitute any form of commitment or guarantee regarding future outcomes.

Doctoral study abroad applications need to follow **the core logic of "pre-planning, research as the core, material adaptation, and process closure loop"**, and the general process can be divided into **four major stages: pre-preparation, material preparation, application submission, and follow-up.** Pre-planning, research accumulation, and material refinement are the three core prerequisites for a successful application, which require early planning and targeted efforts based on one's own background and the requirements of the target institution to avoid blind applications.

6.1 Overview of the Overseas Doctoral Application Process

6.1.1 General Process: A Comprehensive Breakdown of the Entire Process from School Selection and Positioning to Enrollment and Registration

The general application process for doctoral study abroad has clear time nodes and core focuses, and needs to be advanced in accordance with the rhythm of "**early preparation – material refinement – standardized submission – follow-up and implementation**" . The stages are closely connected, and allocating sufficient time can effectively improve the success rate of applications and reduce the probability of errors.

(1) Preparatory Phase (12 – 18 months before application):

The core is to clarify the direction, accumulate strength, and lay a foundation for subsequent applications. It is necessary to clarify one's own research direction,

systematically sort out academic background and research experience, and form a clear academic context; conduct precise research on the research resources and admission requirements of target countries, institutions, and supervisors to ensure a high degree of match in research directions; prepare language test scores (TOEFL/IELTS), GRE/GMAT (required for some majors) in advance to avoid last-minute cramming; and actively accumulate research achievements, including published papers, project participation, academic competition awards, etc., to strengthen one's core competitiveness.

(2) Material Preparation (6–12 months before application):

The core is "precise adaptation and key emphasis", The core materials need to comprehensively cover academic ability and research potential, while being optimized specifically in combination with the differences of target countries. Core materials include personal statement (PS), research proposal (RP, the core for doctoral applications), 2–3 recommendation letters (preferably from academic referees), transcripts, academic degree certificates, language test scores, and research achievement certificates; Differentiated preparation needs to conform to the application characteristics of each country, for example, Germany requires early contact with supervisors to obtain invitations, the US requires highlighting research potential, and the United Kingdom requires strengthening the alignment between the research proposal and the supervisor's research direction.

(3) Application Submission (Before the Institution's Deadline):

The core is "standardization and timeliness" , to avoid missing opportunities due to minor mistakes. It is necessary to closely monitor the application deadlines of institutions (some institutions have rolling applications), plan the submission time reasonably; strictly submit materials through the institution's official website or application system as required, ensuring the materials are complete and in the correct format; pay the application fee as stipulated, and some institutions may offer fee waivers, so it is necessary to understand the relevant policies in advance.

(4) Subsequent process (1–6 months after submission):

The core is "proactive follow-up and timely response" , ensuring the smooth progress of the application process. Patiently wait for the preliminary review results from the institution, promptly pay attention to the institution's notifications, and

supplement relevant materials as required; carefully prepare for the interview session essential for the doctoral application, sort out relevant issues such as research experience and research plan in advance, and improve the interview pass rate; after receiving the admission offer (Offer), promptly confirm acceptance, simultaneously advance subsequent matters such as visa application and accommodation arrangement, and ensure smooth enrollment.

6.1.2 Core Nodes

The core competitiveness of doctoral applications is concentrated in research background and planning ability, with the four prerequisites being indispensable. Pre-planning is the foundation, research accumulation is the core, background enhancement is a bonus, and material refinement is the key. The combination of these four can significantly enhance the competitiveness of applications, especially suitable for applications to top-tier institutions.

- **Preparatory Planning:** The preparation period for doctoral applications is long. It is recommended that students in their senior years of undergraduate studies or the early stages of master's programs clarify their academic interests and identify their research directions. For students from ordinary institutions, it is advisable to start preparing 1–1.5 years in advance, while for those aiming at top-tier institutions, it is recommended to initiate the process 2 years ahead. Sufficient time should be reserved for approaching potential supervisors, accumulating research experience, preparing application materials, and applying for scholarships to avoid last-minute panic and ensure the orderly progress of each stage.

- **Research Accumulation**: Research background is the core competitiveness of doctoral applications. Applicants should actively participate in research group projects, strive for summer research opportunities, publish high-quality academic achievements (such as journal papers, conference papers, etc.), construct a complete academic narrative, and highlight the alignment between their own research potential and the research direction, which is also a core consideration factor for admission to top-tier institutions.

- **Background Enhancement**: Expand academic networks and accumulate international academic experience through overseas study visits, joint projects,

international academic conferences, etc.; actively seek recommendation letters from international mentors to enhance the recognition of applications; target and address personal weaknesses, such as insufficient research experience or low language scores, to achieve diversified background enhancement and strengthen application competitiveness.

- **Core of Application Materials**: Required materials must be complete and standardized. Among them, the Research Proposal (RP), as the core of a doctoral application, should clearly define the research topic, literature review, research methodology, time plan, and expected outcomes, and be highly aligned with the research interests of the target supervisor; the Personal Statement (PS) should highlight the academic growth trajectory and research potential, recommendation letters must be persuasive, and transcripts, research achievement certificates, etc., must be authentic and standardized, comprehensively demonstrating one's academic capabilities. Considering the policy orientations of various countries mentioned earlier, material preparation should focus on meeting the core requirements of the target country, laying the foundation for subsequent differentiated applications.

6.2 Application Guide for Mainstream Countries

Doctoral applications in mainstream study-abroad countries exhibit significant differential characteristics, with core differences concentrated in networking requirements, language standards, scholarship applications, process details, and key points to avoid pitfalls. These differential characteristics highly correspond to the policy orientations of mainstream study-abroad destinations mentioned in 2.3.2 above – application strategies for each country are formulated around its policy core (such as research priority in the US, tuition-free and position-based system in Germany, and connection with the Chinese mainland in Hong Kong, China), and it is necessary to formulate application strategies tailored to the policy characteristics of each country, adapt to one's own background and career plan, avoid a one-size-fits-all approach to applications, and improve the accuracy and success rate of applications.

6.2.1 US

US doctoral applications are based on"**research potential as the core and flexible adaptation as the principle**", where networking is not mandatory but proactive engagement is recommended. Language and standardized test requirements are relatively high, and scholarship applications need to be pursued simultaneously. Key issues such as misalignment in positioning and academic fabrication should be avoided. It is suitable for applicants with in-depth research capabilities, highly consistent with the policy orientation of the US, which emphasizes "research priority, diversified funding, and smooth retention" as mentioned earlier.

- **Networking Strategy:** Networking is not mandatory, but it is recommended to contact potential supervisors 3-6 months in advance, sending your resume, research experience, and preliminary research ideas, highlighting the alignment between your own research interests and the supervisor's research direction; proactively understand the supervisor's admission plan and scholarship quota to avoid blind applications; the response rate for networking at top-tier institutions is approximately 30%-40%, so it is necessary to write networking letters tailored to the specific situation, avoiding template-based approaches, and increasing the response rate *(Source: Association of American Universities (AAU))*.

- **Language Requirements:** Most institutions require TOEFL 90+ or IELTS 7.0+ (specific requirements are subject to the programs of each institution), while top institutions require TOEFL 100+ or IELTS 7.5+; some institutions may waive language test scores for applicants in science and engineering fields (proof of relevant research achievements is required); there is no unified GRE requirement, but top institutions recommend submitting GRE scores (320+), and applicants in science and engineering fields may additionally submit GRE Subject scores to further enhance their competitiveness *(Source: Educational Testing Service (ETS))*.

- **Scholarship Application:** It is recommended to submit the scholarship application simultaneously with the university application, with a focus on full scholarships in science and engineering; prepare detailed research plans and scholarship application essays to highlight your own research potential and academic value; you can also apply for the CSC government-sponsored scholarship, but you need to understand the annual policy requirements in advance and plan your application time reasonably *(Source: NSF, CSC)*.

- **Guide to Avoiding Pitfalls:** Avoid blindly aiming for top-tier institutions; instead, make a reasonable self-assessment based on your own research background. Pay attention to the authenticity and consistency of your research experience, and do not exaggerate or fabricate academic achievements. Prepare your language test scores in advance to avoid missing admission opportunities due to language requirements not being met. Closely monitor relevant professional policies to ensure that your application direction has no sensitive associations and meets visa review requirements. Choose your application direction in combination with your own career plan, and fully utilize the benefit of the OPT extension for STEM majors to 36 months.

6.2.2 United Kingdom

Doctoral applications in the United Kingdom are centered around "**networking as the key and research proposal as the core**", with no unified standardized test requirements, moderate language requirements, and a focus on avoiding issues such as templated networking and vague research proposals. They are suitable for applicants seeking efficient cultivation and diversified development, highly consistent with the policy orientation of the United Kingdom's "efficient cultivation, flexibility, and friendliness towards retention" mentioned earlier.

- **Core of networking:** Networking is an essential part of applying for a PhD in the United Kingdom, directly determining the success or failure of the application. It is recommended to contact the intended supervisor 6-8 months in advance, send your resume and research proposal (RP), and clearly inquire about the supervisor's willingness to recruit, research funding, and the match of research directions. Follow up promptly after the supervisor's response, refine the research proposal, and submit the formal application only after reaching a preliminary consensus on admission. Applications without supervisor support will most likely be rejected *(Source: UKRI)*.

- **Language Requirements**: Most programs require TOEFL 80+ or IELTS 6.5+ (with no individual band score below 6.0), while top-tier institutions require TOEFL 90+ or IELTS 7.0+ (with no individual band score below 6.5); there is no unified standardized test requirement (no GRE/GMAT required), but some doctoral programs in business and liberal arts may require submission, so it is necessary to confirm the specific requirements of the institution in advance

(Source: British Council).

- **Research Proposal (RP)**: As the core of the application, it should be written in line with the supervisor's research direction, with the word count controlled between 3,000 and 5,000 (specifically refer to the requirements of the institution and major), featuring clear logic and prominent key points, demonstrating one's independent thinking ability and research potential; guidance from supervisors or professional institutions can be sought to improve the RP, effectively enhancing the competitiveness of the application.

- **Guide to Avoiding Pitfalls**: Avoid using template-based prospecting letters; each letter to a supervisor should be tailored to highlight the alignment of research interests. Research proposals must not be plagiarized or overly general, but should include specific research ideas and feasible plans. Scholarship applications should be prepared in advance to avoid missing the application deadline. Make full use of the flexibility of the program duration (3-4 years), communicate with supervisors to determine the enrollment time based on your own circumstances, and after graduation, take full advantage of the 2-year PSW visa to gain work experience.

6.2.3 Singapore

Singapore's doctoral application is centered around **"top-tier institutions as the core and research innovation as the orientation**" , with relatively high requirements for language and research background. Scholarship applications need to be advanced simultaneously, focusing on avoiding issues such as incomplete materials and theoretical RP. It is suitable for applicants who are adaptable to both Chinese and English and are oriented towards cutting-edge research, highly consistent with the policy orientation of Singapore's "resource tilt, generous funding, and market-oriented retention" mentioned earlier.

- **University Positioning:** Prioritize focusing on top public universities such as the National University of Singapore (NUS) and Nanyang Technological University (NTU). These two universities have the most intense competition for doctoral applications and high admission thresholds. It is recommended to submit applications after having an excellent research background (with academic achievements and overseas research experience). You can

simultaneously apply to universities such as Singapore Management University and Singapore University of Technology and Design as backup options to increase the probability of admission *(Source: NUS, NTU)*.

- **Language Requirements:** Most majors require a TOEFL score of 90+ or an IELTS score of 7.0+. Some science and engineering programs may waive language test scores (proof of English-language research achievements or English-taught courses must be provided). Some majors require submission of GRE/GMAT scores. The core of the application process assesses the alignment between research background and research plan, and applicants to cutting-edge disciplines should emphasize their own research innovation *(Source: NUS, NTU)*.

- **Scholarship Application:** Prioritize applying for full scholarships from the target institutions, understand the scholarship application deadlines in advance (usually synchronized with the institution application), prepare targeted scholarship application documents, highlighting one's own academic potential and the cutting-edge nature of research directions; applicants accepting grants need to clarify their work commitments after graduation and make reasonable choices based on their own career plans *(Source: MOE, Agency for Science, Technology and Research, Singapore (A*STAR))*.

- **Guide to Avoiding Pitfalls:** Avoid overlooking the application deadline for university scholarships and missing the optimal application timing; research proposals should align with Singapore's research orientation (emphasizing application and innovation) to avoid purely theoretical expressions; pay attention to the notarization and certification of student pass application materials to prevent incomplete materials from affecting visa approval; understand in advance the requirements of the bilingual (Chinese and English) learning environment and prepare for adaptation; full-time doctoral students at public universities can legally take part-time jobs (with no working hour restrictions) and can reasonably utilize part-time opportunities to accumulate practical experience *(Source: ICA)*.

6.2.4 Germany

Doctoral applications in Germany are characterized by"**public institutions as the first**

choice and position-based system as the feature", with no mandatory language requirements and a flexible application process. They focus on avoiding issues such as insufficient financial proof and mismatches in the training model, catering to applicants seeking high cost-effectiveness and in-depth research, and are highly consistent with the policy orientation of Germany's "research freedom, tuition-free, and friendly retention" mentioned earlier.

- **University Selection**: Prioritize public universities (tuition-free), focusing on top science and engineering institutions such as the Technical University of Munich and RWTH Aachen University. These universities have abundant research resources, numerous position-based doctoral programs, and comprehensive benefits; private universities have higher tuition fees and are not recommended as a priority, unless there are specific research direction requirements or full scholarships available *(Source: DAAD)*.

- **Language Requirements**: There is no mandatory German language requirement. The vast majority of doctoral programs use English as the working language, and an IELTS score of 6.0 – 6.5 is sufficient to meet the basic requirements for most majors. Some programs do not require the submission of language certificates, as long as you can communicate smoothly with your supervisor. Mastering basic German can enhance your daily integration and job competitiveness, so it is recommended to learn basic German in advance.

- **Application Process:** Open for networking throughout the year, with no fixed application cycle, and enrollment available at any time; postdoctoral positions require application following the recruitment process (submission of resume, research plan, interview), while mentorship programs can directly communicate with the supervisor to confirm admission; applicants for CSC scholarships need to communicate with the supervisor in advance to confirm the institution's support, with a typical preparation period of 8 months to 1 year *(Source: German Research Foundation (DFG))*.

- **Pitfall Avoidance Guide**: Avoid overlooking the requirements for proof of funds, and prepare sufficient security deposits (not less than 12,000 euros per year) in advance to meet the visa application conditions; the competition for position-based doctoral programs is fierce, so it is necessary to highlight the match between one's own research capabilities and the position, and position-based doctoral students can enjoy statutory salaries and full social welfare; understand the differences in Germany's doctoral training models (mentorship

system, structured system, etc.) and make a reasonable choice based on one's own needs; pay attention to the visa application process, prepare relevant materials in advance, and avoid delaying enrollment; during the period of holding a student visa, one can legally work/intern for up to 6 months per year, and can reasonably plan the practice time *(Source: German Embassy in China)*.

6.2.5 Hong Kong, China

Doctoral applications in Hong Kong, China are characterized by "**geographical convenience as an advantage and connection with the Chinese mainland as a feature**", with low difficulty in networking, a clear application cycle, and a focus on avoiding issues such as neglecting the research value of the Chinese mainland and visa delays. They are suitable for applicants who consider both the development of the Chinese mainland and value convenience, highly consistent with the policy orientation of Hong Kong, China, which emphasizes "convenience, efficiency, connection with the Chinese mainland, and lenient retention" mentioned earlier.

- **Networking Strategy**: It is recommended to contact the intended supervisor 3–6 months in advance, sending your resume, research experience, and research plan, highlighting the alignment with the supervisor's research direction and your own academic strengths (such as mainland research experience and academic achievements). Most supervisors in Hong Kong institutions have mainland academic backgrounds, with low communication barriers and a relatively high response rate, so you can actively follow up based on the actual situation *(Source: HKU, CUHK, UGC)*.

- **Language Requirements**: Most majors require a TOEFL score of 80+ or an IELTS score of 6.5+ (with no individual band score below 6.0), and some institutions may waive language test scores (e.g., graduates with a master's degree from a 985/211 institution in Chinese Mainland, those with English-language research achievements, etc.); some majors require the submission of GRE/GMAT scores. The core of the application process focuses on research background and research plans. Applicants in humanities and social sciences need to highlight their academic accumulation and research capabilities. Specific requirements shall be subject to the major.

- **Time Planning**: The application cycle usually runs from September of each

year to March of the following year. It is recommended to prepare materials in advance and submit formal applications from October to December. Adopt an application strategy of "sprint + stability" to reasonably select target institutions; closely monitor relevant policy dividends and arrange application time reasonably in combination with your own plans *(Source: RGC)*.

- **Guide to Avoiding Pitfalls**: Avoid overlooking the value of research experience in the Chinese mainland, as Hong Kong institutions highly recognize the research capabilities of top mainland universities; research proposals should align with the research orientation of Hong Kong institutions (emphasizing international cooperation and applied research); pay attention to the time nodes for visa processing to avoid delays in enrollment due to visa issues, as the visa renewal process is straightforward and renewal matters can be reasonably planned; understand the employment policies for staying in Hong Kong in advance and plan your career development path in combination with talent introduction programs.

6.2.6 Japan, South Korea

PhD applications in Japan and South Korea are based on "**minority languages as the foundation, government scholarships as the core**" The selection of universities should focus on top universities and cooperative projects, and focus on avoiding problems such as language substandard and lagging scholarship applications. It is suitable for applicants with limited budgets, minority language foundation, and hope to develop in East Asia. It is highly consistent with the policy orientation of "policy orientation, precise funding, and retention adaptation" in Japan and South Korea mentioned earlier.

- **Language Preparation:** It is necessary to prepare small language proficiency scores in advance (Japanese N2 / Korean TOPIK Level 4 or above), and it is recommended to start learning 1–2 years in advance to avoid missing application opportunities due to language non-compliance; some English-taught programs may waive small language proficiency scores, but TOEFL / IELTS scores must be submitted (most require TOEFL 80+ and IELTS 6.5+), and specific requirements need to be confirmed with the institution in advance.

- **Scholarship Application:** Focus on applying for government special scholarships (such as Japan's JASSO and South Korea's Korean Government Scholarship Program). These scholarships have a high coverage rate and strong financial support, but the application requirements are relatively high. You need to prepare materials such as personal statements, recommendation letters, research plans, and language test scores in advance to improve the success rate of your application *(Source: NIIED, JASSO)*.

- **University Selection:** Prioritize top-tier universities (such as the University of Tokyo and Kyoto University in Japan, Seoul National University and Korea University in South Korea), which have abundant research resources and numerous scholarship opportunities; applicants can simultaneously apply for joint training programs of "Belt and Road" cooperation universities, which have lower entry requirements, controllable costs, and are suitable for applicants with limited budgets *(Source: MEST, CSC)*.

- **Pitfall Avoidance Guide:** Language test scores need to be prepared in advance and notarized and authenticated to ensure a smooth visa review; the application period for government special scholarships is relatively long, so time needs to be planned in advance; after graduation, one must find an employer sponsor to apply for a local work visa, so it is necessary to understand the local job market and policy requirements in advance.

6.3 Trends in Doctoral Application and Admission

6.3.1 United Kingdom

(1) Regional Trends: From "Clustering in London" to "Industry-Oriented"

At the doctoral stage, the compatibility between research resources and industrial ecosystem becomes crucial. Currently, when selecting a region, applicants tend to focus more on access to cutting-edge laboratories, partner enterprises, and the cost-effectiveness of living expenses.

- **London and South East England: A Convergence of Top Resources with Intense Competition.** This region is home to G5 universities such as Imperial

College London, UCL, and LSE, and is closely connected to the City of London and Tech City (e.g., Shoreditch). For doctoral students pursuing fields such as finance, artificial intelligence, and biomedicine that highly rely on top-notch facilities and interpersonal networks, this remains the top choice. However, the relatively high cost of living (with an average monthly living expense of approximately £1,200 – £1,500) and extremely high admission thresholds are causing some applicants to turn to other regions.

- **North-central England (Manchester, Leeds, Sheffield): Rising on the back of the "Northern Powerhouse", it offers outstanding cost-effectiveness.** This region is becoming a popular choice for doctoral students in science and engineering. Taking the graphene research at the University of Manchester and the advanced manufacturing at the University of Sheffield as examples, these disciplines have numerous collaborative projects with industry (such as the BBC, Siemens, and Rolls-Royce). Compared to London, the cost of living here is approximately 30% lower, yet the research value remains high.

- **Scotland (Edinburgh, Glasgow): An Innovation Hub for Artificial Intelligence and Traditional Disciplines.** The University of Edinburgh is an important European research base for artificial intelligence, and its School of Informatics is renowned worldwide. Tuition fees in Scotland are usually 10%-15% lower than in London, and its unique cultural atmosphere attracts a large number of doctoral students focusing on fields such as artificial intelligence ethics, renewable energy, and medicine.

- **Wales and Northern Ireland: Niche but Precise "Cost-Effective" Choices.** For students with limited budgets but a pursuit of specific research fields, Cardiff University's School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies, and Queen's University Belfast's School of Agriculture and Food Science and School of Medicine, Dentistry and Biomedical Sciences offer a lower cost of living and a focused research environment.

(2) Institutional Trends: Multi-dimensional evaluation replaces the "rank-only theory"

As the competition for doctoral applications intensifies, applicants' evaluations of institutions have become more comprehensive.

- **Universities that are "resource-rich" and have strong employment**

prospects continue to gain popularity. In addition to traditional academic reputation, students are increasingly concerned about the actual career paths of graduates. For example, Imperial College London topped the 2026 ranking in the Daily Mail, precisely because it ranked first in the UK in both core indicators of "high-skilled jobs" and "graduate salaries" (with an average starting salary of £37,000).

- **Universities that are "friendly to students from a non-985/211 university" but have outstanding professional strength are favored.** Universities like Newcastle University (Medicine), the University of Liverpool, etc., attract a large number of practical applicants due to their strong positions in certain academic fields and in-depth cooperation with industries (such as the sports science cooperation between the University of Sheffield and Premier League clubs).
- **Supervisor match has become a core decision-making factor.** The key to doctoral admission lies in supervisor match and the quality of research proposals. Students tend to choose institutions that have top scholars in their specific research fields, even if the overall ranking of the institution is not among the top.

(3) Professional Trends: Interdisciplinary and Industry Convergence Become the Mainstream

In recent years, doctoral applications in the United Kingdom have shown **the characteristics of "declining popularity in traditional humanities and social sciences, and a surge in technology-driven and interdisciplinary disciplines"**. However, in terms of total numbers, engineering and technology, computer science, medical-related disciplines, as well as social sciences and business management have consistently been the largest professional sectors in terms of the number of students at the doctoral level, maintaining a high base in each academic year, with the overall trend showing a slow increase or remaining stable at a high level.

Based on case data analysis, the proportions of each major category are as follows:

Professional Category	Percentage Share
Social Sciences and Management	49.6%

Engineering and Technology Major Category	21.7%
Arts and Humanities and Social Sciences	15.7%
Natural Sciences Category	7.8%
Life Sciences and Medicine Category	5.2%

➢ **Social Sciences Takes the Lead: Mentor-led System and Flexible Funding Channels**

1) Supervisor's Discretion and Self-Funding Channel: Doctoral applications in the United Kingdom are highly dependent on supervisor acceptance. Social science research often does not require expensive laboratory equipment, with the main costs being the supervisor's time and library resources. Therefore, supervisors have great autonomy in admitting students. As long as they approve the research plan, even students without scholarships (self-funded) can relatively easily obtain admission, which provides an entry ticket for a large number of international students.

2) Diverse sources of funding: Social science funding does not rely entirely on large-scale grants from the United Kingdom government. In addition to university scholarships, there are also numerous charitable foundations, trust funds (such as the Wellcome Trust's cross-funding of social science and medicine), and corporate sponsorships (such as business school doctoral students often being supported by financial institutions). Moreover, social science doctoral education is closely linked to master's education, and many students use pursuing a taught master's degree as a springboard to establish connections.

3) Broad career prospects: Social sciences (especially management and education) are closely aligned with the job market. Many applicants hope to obtain a doctoral degree to teach at universities or enhance their competitiveness in industries such as consulting, finance, and international organizations.

➢ **Engineering and Technology: Steady Growth Driven by Industry**

1) The prevalence of project-based doctoral programs: Different from social sciences, most engineering doctoral programs are project-based. After supervisors secure research projects, they recruit doctoral students to complete sub-projects. Such doctoral students usually come with their own funding (tuition fees and living expenses are covered by project funds), and the competition is extremely fierce, but it offers high cost-effectiveness for students.

2) The industrial sector is clearly segmented: In the United Kingdom, there is a significant talent shortage in high-tech manufacturing (new energy, aerospace, chip design), and many outstanding students choose to directly enter the industrial sector (starting with an annual salary of £30,000 – £40,000) rather than immediately pursue a doctoral degree. This results in the proportion of pure research-oriented talents in the applicant pool remaining relatively stable, but the total number is not as large as that in social sciences.

- **Humanities and Social Sciences: A Small but Sophisticated Academic Commitment**

1) Polarization of competition: Applicants for traditional majors in literature, history, philosophy, and art usually have a strong academic passion. However, due to the relatively narrow scope of employment (mainly in teaching positions, museums, and cultural institutions), the number of applicants is relatively stable and the base is not large.

2) Scholarships are scarce but concentrated: Although the overall proportion is not high, there are some very well-known specialized scholarships in the humanities and social sciences (such as sponsorships related to the BBC and the British Museum), and the competition for scholarships from the AHRC (Arts and Humanities Research Council) is extremely fierce. Students who can obtain funding are often the cream of the crop.

- **Natural Sciences and Life Medicine: Academic Elites Amidst the Funding Cold Wave**

1) High hard costs: The cost of training doctoral students in science, technology, engineering, and medicine is much higher than that in social sciences. For a doctoral student in chemistry or biomedical science, the annual cost of experimental consumables and equipment maintenance can be as high as tens of thousands of

pounds, and supervisors must have sufficient grants to recruit students.

2) Impact of Brexit and Full Scholarship Model: After the United Kingdom left the European Union, it lost some EU research funding support in the short term, and the tuition fees for EU students increased, which affected the expansion capacity of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) programs. Almost all STEM and medical doctoral programs require full funding support. A supervisor may only have 1–2 spots per year but will receive hundreds of applications, resulting in an extremely low admission rate.

3) New Opportunities in Interdisciplinary Fields: Although the proportion of pure natural sciences and pure medicine is low, interdisciplinary fields are on the rise. For example, bioinformatics (computer science + life science), environmental science (geography + chemistry + policy), neuroscience (psychology + medicine), etc. These fields often have the opportunity to apply for interdisciplinary funding and may become growth points in the next few years.

(4) Age trend: The diversification of application entities, with the trend of younger age slowing down

- **Applicants are still mainly fresh graduates, but the proportion of those who pursue a doctorate after working has increased.** Although the overall trend of younger age has slowed down, new characteristics have emerged at the doctoral stage: more and more applicants choose to return to campus after working for a period of time, with a clear awareness of industrial issues (for example, the number of people pursuing a DBA, or Doctor of Business Administration, has been steadily increasing, requiring years of management experience).

- **Chinese applicants continue to grow steadily and have clear goals.** Chinese students remain the largest source of international students in the United Kingdom, with the number of applications continuing to rise. These students are generally better prepared, more rational in their goals, and place greater emphasis on "the dual deepening of academic aspirations and career planning".

- **Applications from older candidates (21+) have increased in specific fields.** In urgently needed and scarce industries such as medicine and nursing, due to the huge demand both in the United Kingdom and internationally, many mature

students have been attracted back to apply.

6.3.2 Australia

(1) Scale Trend: Australia's international students exceed one million, with the higher education sector driving a significant expansion of the doctoral cohort

According to official PRISMS data, as of January—October 2025 (YTD Oct 2025), the total number of international students studying in Australia was 1,025,807. Among them, there were 537,657 international students in higher education, accounting for approximately 52.4% of all international students. This level covers master's and doctoral programs and is the core carrier for international doctoral students studying in Australia.Vertical comparison shows that the scale of international students in higher education has continued to recover after the pandemic: 353,034 in 2022 → 428,796 in 2023 → 488,841 in 2024 → 537,657 in 2025. This means that although the scale of doctoral students has not been separately disclosed, the international students in higher education, which includes them, expanded by approximately 52% between 2022 and 2025, and the doctoral student group must be nested within this significantly expanding structure.

(2) Student Source Trends: China and India Lead, with South Asia and Southeast Asia Constituting Important Segments

In terms of the structure of the source countries of international students, in 2025, Australia's international students will be highly concentrated in Asian countries, and this pattern also applies to the higher education system where the international doctoral student population is located. According to the national distribution map:

- China remains the largest source country, with a total of approximately 192,225 Chinese students (48,744 new students and 143,481 continuing students);
- India ranked second, with a total of approximately 140,871 people (31,197 new students and 109,674 enrolled students).
- Following it are Nepal (approximately 68,456), Vietnam (approximately 30,597), the Philippines (approximately 30,703), etc. in sequence.

Since doctoral education belongs to the higher education level, and international

doctoral students mainly come from countries with strong scientific research and higher education output capabilities, it can be clearly determined that the source structure of international doctoral students is highly concentrated in China and India, followed by South Asian and Southeast Asian countries.

(3) Professional Trends: Business and Social Sciences Lead in Overall Scale, while Engineering and Social Sciences Drive the Landscape of Doctoral Applications in a Dual-Engine Manner

Based on the 2024 student enrollment data from Australian public universities (Table A Providers), at the overall higher education student level, the distribution of majors shows a clearly concentrated structure: Management and Commerce (295,652 students) and Society and Culture (279,986 students) are the largest major fields; Health-related majors also have a relatively large scale (275,590 students);Engineering and Related Technologies (118,322 people), Information Technology (123,505 people), and Natural and Physical Sciences (148,137 people) constitute the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Basic Sciences sector; other majors such as Education (189,180 people), Creative Arts (79,795 people), etc., fall within the medium or small-scale range.

According to case data statistics, doctoral applications in Australia exhibit distinct centralization characteristics, particularly prominent in the two major fields of social sciences and management, as well as engineering and technology, which together account for as high as 66.6%, constituting the main body of doctoral education in Australia.

- **The "industry-driven" characteristics of engineering doctoral degrees: abundant opportunities and substantial funding**

Engineering and Technology accounts for 33.3%, and the driving force behind it is the solid industrial demand and substantial research funding.

1) Inelastic demand for mining and energy: As a major resource-exporting country, Australia has a consistently strong demand for high-end talent in fields such as mining engineering, oil and gas exploration, etc. Tutors in relevant engineering majors often have a large amount of horizontal project funding from the industrial sector (such as BHP, Rio Tinto), which can provide generous scholarships for doctoral students.

2) Characteristics of Environmental Engineering: In the face of global climate change and the unique local ecosystem (such as the protection of the Great Barrier Reef), Environmental Engineering, Renewable Energy, and Water Resources Management have become key development areas, attracting a large amount of special government funding.

3) Integration of industry, academia, and research: Engineering Doctorate programs are often tied to specific enterprises. During their studies, students may directly participate in solving the actual technical problems of enterprises, and graduates are highly competitive in the job market.

- **Characteristics of "Academic Migration" and "Area Studies" in Social Sciences and Management**

This sector accounts for as much as 33.3%, reflecting Australia's unique position as an immigrant country and an important node in the Asia-Pacific region.

1) The continuous popularity of business and management: Business majors such as accounting, finance, and management have long been the top choice for international students (including Chinese students) studying in Australia, and this trend extends to the doctoral level.

2) Policy and Regional Research Needs: The Australian government attaches great importance to political and economic research in the Asia-Pacific region. Majors such as Public Policy, International Relations, and Social Work receive stable government funding, aiming to cultivate experts who can understand Asia-Pacific affairs.

3) Interdisciplinary research is prevalent: An increasing number of studies in the field of social sciences have combined Data Analysis, urban planning, and sustainable development, further expanding the application base of this major category.

- **"Deepening" and "Characterization" of Humanities and Social Sciences**

The proportion of liberal arts and humanities and social sciences is 13.3%, with a relatively small scale, but it has a precise positioning and presents the characteristics of being "small but beautiful".

1) Relying on unique cultural resources: Humanities research in Australia often relies

on its colonial history, Aboriginal culture, and diverse immigrant cultures. Areas such as Aboriginal studies and cultural heritage conservation have strong regional uniqueness, attracting international scholars with a keen interest in them.

2) "Invisible Barriers" in Application Thresholds: Humanities and social science doctoral programs have extremely high requirements for English writing skills and cultural understanding, which naturally create a certain application threshold.

- **The "High Barriers" and "Resource Centralization" of Medicine and Natural Sciences**

Life Sciences and Medicine (10%) and Natural Sciences (10%) together account for 20%, and applications exhibit typical characteristics of "high threshold, high funding, and strong background".

1) The "elite screening system" in medicine: Australian medical education itself is extremely rigorous at the undergraduate level. For international students, applying for a Doctor of Medicine not only requires a strong research background but often also requires having clinical qualifications recognized locally in Australia.

2) Orientation of "basic research" in natural sciences: Although basic sciences such as mathematics, physics, and chemistry do not account for a high proportion overall, they remain strong in Australia's top "Group of Eight" universities. These fields usually rely on the support of national research funds (such as ARC), and their research directions are more inclined towards theoretical breakthroughs or applied basic research combined with engineering.

6.3.3 New Zealand

(1) Professional Trends: Structural Characteristics Dominated by Liberal Arts and Precise Strategies for Applications in Science, Engineering, and Medicine

In the doctoral applications in New Zealand, the proportion of each major category is as follows:

Professional Category	Percentage Share
Social Sciences and Management	70.9%

Engineering and Technology Major Category	9.1%
Arts and Humanities and Social Sciences	10.9%
Natural Sciences Category	3.6%
Life Sciences and Medicine Category	3.6%

- **Prominent structural characteristics of "humanities dominance, science and engineering niche"**

1) Areas of Absolute Advantage: The combined proportion of the broad categories of Social Sciences and Management (70.9%) and Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences (10.9%) reaches as high as 81.8%. This indicates that New Zealand's doctoral education system has extremely high inclusiveness and resource advantages in the field of humanities and social sciences.

2) Niche and Sophisticated Fields: The total proportion of the three major fields of science, technology, engineering, and medicine is only 18.2%, reflecting that New Zealand has a relatively small scale of doctoral training in hard science fields, characterized by "small but excellent" or "a large gap".

- **Deep Shaping of Academic Cultivation by Industrial Structure**

1) Service-driven economy: The economic pillars of New Zealand mainly include agriculture, tourism, education exports, and natural resource-based management (such as environmental protection and sustainable agricultural management). This directly gives rise to a large demand for research in social science fields such as business, tourism management, public policy, education, and sociology.

2) Limited demand in science and engineering fields: Compared with countries with large manufacturing or high-tech industrial clusters, New Zealand has a small proportion of high-end industries, resulting in limited domestic demand for top-level R&D positions in fields such as engineering and biomedicine, which in turn affects the enrollment scale and funding allocation of universities in these fields.

➢ **"Resource Scarcity" and "Local Protection" in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Medicine**

1) Funding and Supervisor Resources: Doctoral research in science, technology, engineering, and medicine (STEM) fields heavily relies on experimental equipment and consumables, resulting in substantial funding consumption. Due to the weak industrial foundation in this field in New Zealand and relatively limited sources of funding, the available funds are not abundant.

2) Invisible differences in application thresholds: New Zealand's polytechnic medical disciplines are small in scale, with limited supervisor funding that is prioritized for local students. For international students, applying for these programs means competing with local students for scarce funding, so "self-funding" has become a practical strategy.

(2) Implications and Positioning for International Students

➢ **The "Profit-making Period" for Humanities and Social Sciences Applicants:** For students applying for social sciences or humanities and arts, New Zealand is truly a "paradise". It has a wide range of majors, a large number of tutors, and research topics can more easily find local practical cases and data support (such as Maori cultural studies, Pacific regional development, ecosystem tourism management, etc.).

➢ **The "Precise Matching" Strategy for Science, Technology, Engineering, and Medicine Applicants :**

1) Applicants with strong funding dependence should exercise caution: If they must rely on a full scholarship to study abroad, it is extremely difficult to apply for a doctoral program in science, technology, engineering, or medicine in New Zealand.

2) Opportunities for self-funded/government-sponsored applicants: If students can clearly indicate self-funding (such as CSC government sponsorship) or bring their own corporate sponsorship, the success rate of cold emailing will significantly increase, as this can bypass the most headache-inducing funding issue for supervisors.

3) Focus on Advantageous Areas: New Zealand still has world-class strengths in

specific science and engineering fields, such as Earth Sciences (earthquakes, volcanoes), Environmental Science, Animal/Veterinary Science (related to agriculture), and Food Science. These fields may have more optimistic application opportunities than indicated by the data proportion.

6.3.4 Hong Kong, China (Taking the Statistical Data of the University of Hong Kong as an Example)

(1) Scale Trend: Stable scale, dominated by internationalization, with the proportion of non-local students continuously exceeding 80%

Overall, doctoral study in Hong Kong presents characteristics of stable scale, extremely high proportion of international students, and balanced rhythm of new enrollments and graduations. The doctoral stage in the Hong Kong higher education system is not a large-scale expansion project, but rather operates with a core model characterized by high selectivity, small scale, and high internationalization.

- **Enrollment Scale:** According to the statistics of student enrollment in the 2024/25 academic year, the total number of Research Postgraduate students is 4,480, accounting for 10.6% of the total 42,330 enrolled students in the university, and is a core component of the cultivation of high-end scientific research talents in Hong Kong's higher education institutions.
- **Student Source Structure:** The proportion of non-local students has reached 86.0%, significantly higher than that at the undergraduate level (29.6%) and taught postgraduate level (68.5%), indicating that Hong Kong's doctoral programs rely to a large extent on non-local students for support, and its doctoral training system itself is primarily positioned as "international doctoral study abroad".
- **Annual New Enrollment:** In the 2024/25 academic year, the number of newly enrolled research postgraduate students is 1,176, among whom the proportion of non-local students is as high as 88.8%, further indicating that the growth of Hong Kong's doctoral programs is almost entirely driven by non-local doctoral students.
- **Graduation Scale:** In the 2023/24 academic year, the number of research

postgraduate graduates was 741, with the proportion of non-local students among graduates standing at 77.6%. The graduation scale maintains a relatively stable proportional relationship with the enrollment and new intake scales, reflecting that doctoral training in Hong Kong continues to operate at a steady pace.

(2) Student Source Trend: Doctoral study in Hong Kong, China, is highly dependent on mainland Chinese students, accounting for over 90%.

Overall, the source structure of doctoral students studying in Hong Kong, China is highly concentrated in the Chinese mainland, showing characteristics of single dominance and marginalization of other regions. At the doctoral level, a multi-regional decentralized student source pattern has not been formed; instead, it remains highly bound to the mobility of postgraduate students from the Chinese mainland.

- **Student Source Structure:** At the research postgraduate level, the number of enrolled students from the Chinese mainland is 3,500, accounting for 90.9% of the total 3,851 research postgraduate students, significantly higher than that of any other region. This indicates that the main source of students for doctoral programs in Hong Kong, China, is almost entirely composed of students from the Chinese mainland.
- **Cross-level comparison:** At the undergraduate level, the proportion of students from Chinese Mainland is 65.2%; at the taught postgraduate level, it further increases to 94.2%; while at the research postgraduate level where doctoral students are located, the proportion remains stable at 90.9%. This indicates that from undergraduate to postgraduate to doctoral levels, mainland students have always been the most core and stable source for Hong Kong's higher education institutions.
- **Students from other regions**: Other Asian countries and regions account for 4.9%, European countries 1.9%, North American countries 1.2%, Australia and New Zealand only 0.2%, and other regions together 0.8%, forming a very obvious structural gap with students from the Chinese mainland.

(3) Professional distribution: Doctoral applications in Hong Kong, China are concentrated in social sciences and medicine, but core scientific research resources are tilted towards engineering and science.

- **From the perspective of the overall structure,** the distribution of doctoral programs in Hong Kong, China, shows a clear orientation towards scientific research and technology. Engineering, medicine, and science not only have the largest number of students but are also basically all concentrated in government-funded projects, reflecting that the cultivation of doctoral students in Hong Kong focuses on high-research-intensity disciplines in terms of resource allocation.

- **Professional Distribution:** In the 2024/25 academic year, the total number of research postgraduate students was 4,480. Among them, the engineering doctoral program had the largest scale, with 1,152 students enrolled (accounting for approximately 25.7%); the medical program had 1,071 students enrolled (accounting for approximately 23.9%); and the science program had 783 students enrolled (accounting for approximately 17.5%). These three major fields together accounted for more than 67% of the total doctoral scale, constituting the core disciplinary sectors of doctoral training in Hong Kong, China.

- **Second Echelon:** Social Sciences and Education form the second echelon, with 291 doctoral students in Social Sciences and 238 in Education, accounting for 6.5% and 5.3% of the total doctoral student population respectively.

- **Business School Scale:** There are 219 doctoral students in the fields of economics and business administration, accounting for less than 5%, which is in sharp contrast to the large scale at the taught postgraduate stage, indicating that the business school in the Hong Kong, China system is mainly focused on taught postgraduate programs.

- **In the application distribution of doctoral programs in Hong Kong, China** , the broad category of Social Sciences and Management accounts for 35.7%, both the broad categories of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences and Life Sciences and Medicine account for 21.4%, the broad category of Engineering and Technology accounts for 11.9%, and the broad category of Natural Sciences accounts for 9.5%. It can be seen that the professional distribution of doctoral applications in Hong Kong, China, exhibits the structural characteristics of "dominated by social sciences, equal emphasis on humanities and medicine, and limited scale of science and engineering". This distribution is closely related

to Hong Kong's industrial structure (developed finance, trade, and service industries), the research strength areas of universities (medicine, humanities, and social sciences), and the allocation of research funds.

- **Social Sciences and Management dominate:** This field leads by a wide margin with a 35.7% share, reflecting the strong research capabilities of Hong Kong's universities in areas such as business, economics, sociology, and management, given Hong Kong's status as an international financial, trade, and commercial center.
- **Humanities and Arts and Life Sciences are tied for the second echelon**: both accounting for 21.4%, tied for second place. This indicates that doctoral education in Hong Kong, China maintains a deep traditional advantage in the humanities, while Life Sciences and Medicine also benefit from sufficient medical research funding.
- **The proportion of the engineering and technology field is relatively low**: accounting for 11.9%, it is in the middle position. Although Hong Kong, China has strong international competitiveness in some engineering fields (such as electronic engineering and computer science), its scale is far smaller than that of social sciences, humanities, and life sciences in the overall structure of doctoral applications.
- **The application scale of the natural sciences category is the smallest:** accounting for only 9.5%, it has the lowest proportion among the five major disciplinary fields, which may be related to the lack of large-scale natural resource research scenarios in Hong Kong and the limited capacity of relevant basic research positions.

6.3.5 Macao, China

(1) Professional Trends: Concentration and Divergence under the Monopoly of "Big Social Sciences"

According to the application distribution data of doctoral programs in Macao, China, the broad category of Social Sciences and Management accounts for 65.4%, the broad category of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences accounts for 15.4%, the broad category of Engineering and Technology accounts for 7.7%, and both the

broad category of Natural Sciences and the broad category of Life Sciences and Medicine account for 3.8%. Among them, the combined proportion of "big social sciences" (Social Sciences and Management + Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences) is 80.8%.It can be seen that the application for doctoral programs in Macau presents the prominent characteristics of "dominated by social sciences, with multi-disciplinary embellishments", with the application pool highly concentrated in the fields of business, education, and humanities and arts, which directly reflects the current situation of Macau, as an education hub with distinct regional characteristics, where its academic resources are tilted towards local advantageous industries such as tourism, management, and culture.

- **The application pattern exhibits the unipolar characteristic of "absolute concentration" :** The broad category of Social Sciences and Management leads by a wide margin with a proportion as high as 65.4%, single-handedly propping up "half of the sky" of doctoral applications in Macau, far exceeding other categories.

- **The "big social sciences" field has established an absolute dominant position:** Combining social sciences and management (65.4%) with arts, literature, and humanities and social sciences (15.4%), the total proportion reaches as high as 80.8%. This means that more than 80% of doctoral applicants are concentrated in the fields of humanities, social sciences, and management, while the application scale of "hard sciences" such as engineering, natural sciences, and life sciences is relatively small.

- **The application distribution is highly consistent with the dominant disciplines of institutions:** This distribution characteristic is closely related to the disciplinary layout and dominant areas of Macao's higher education institutions. The dominant disciplines of Macao's higher education institutions are mainly concentrated in social science fields such as business, education, literature, art, communication, and tourism management, with large enrollment scales and abundant tutor resources. In contrast, fields such as engineering, natural science, and medicine involve high-tech laboratory equipment, resulting in limited doctoral program offerings and enrollment quotas.

(2) Implications for Applicants:

- **For students with a social science/humanities background (accounting for 80.8%) :** This is the "home ground" for doctoral applications in Macau. Although

there are numerous opportunities, internal competition is extremely fierce, making a solid research plan, high-level language proficiency, and alignment with the supervisor's research direction particularly important.

- **For students with science/technology/engineering/medicine (STEM) or medical backgrounds (approximately 15.3% in total):** Although their application proportion is small, this may instead mean relatively less competitive pressure in certain niche areas. However, the prerequisite is to precisely match the limited relevant doctoral supervisors and programs at Macau's higher education institutions.

6.3.6 Singapore (Based on NTU Official Data Analysis)

(1) Scale trend: A 65% surge over four years, with expansion led by full-time taught programs, and the proportion of doctoral students remaining stable at 20%

From the perspective of the overall scale of postgraduate students, NTU's postgraduate enrollment has been continuously expanding from AY2021－22 to AY2025－26, with the total number increasing from 9,513 to 15,729. This expansion is almost entirely driven by full-time postgraduate students, with the proportion of full-time students rising from approximately 72.8% to 86.5%, while the number of part-time postgraduate students has been continuously contracting. In the AY2025－26 academic year, the number of enrolled students in the Research category (research-based) was 3,478, of which approximately 93% were in doctoral programs, corresponding to a doctoral enrollment size of 3,236, accounting for approximately 20.6% of all postgraduate students at NTU. This data reflects that doctoral students are a research-based group with a stable size but a controlled proportion within NTU's postgraduate system, and their expansion pace is significantly slower than that of taught postgraduate students.

(2) Professional Trends: The "Strong Science and Engineering" Characteristics and Hierarchical Structure of NTU's Doctoral Training

From the perspective of the distribution of majors and schools in the scale of doctoral students, NTU's doctoral training is highly concentrated in fields related to science, engineering, and computing.

- **Core Segments:** There are 1,200 doctoral students in the School of Engineering (accounting for approximately 37.1%), 583 in the School of Science (accounting for approximately 18.0%), and 514 in the School of Computing and Data Science (accounting for approximately 15.9%). The three segments together cover approximately 71% of the total number of doctoral students, indicating that NTU's doctoral system is clearly concentrated in the fields of engineering, natural science, and computing in terms of disciplinary resource allocation.
- **Subsequent echelons:** School of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences (285 people), Graduate College Interdisciplinary Doctoral Program (264 people), School of Medicine (145 people), National Institute of Education (144 people), Nanyang Business School (72 people), etc.
- **Largest Doctoral Programs:** Doctor of Computational and Data Science (514 students), Doctor of Electrical and Electronic Engineering (429 students), Doctor of Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering (257 students), Doctor of Materials Science and Engineering (239 students), and Doctor of Mathematical and Physical Sciences (239 students).

(3) Gender pattern: Due to disciplinary differences, 74% of students in the School of Engineering are male, while 70% of students in the School of Humanities are female.

In terms of gender structure, among the number of NTU doctoral students in the AY2025—26 academic year, there were 2,078 males (accounting for approximately 64.2%) and 1,158 females (accounting for approximately 35.8%), with the proportion of males significantly higher than the approximately 55% level of males in the overall postgraduate population of the same year. This disparity is particularly evident among different schools: the proportion of males among doctoral students in the School of Engineering is close to 74%, and that in the School of Computing and Data Science exceeds 80%; in contrast, the proportion of females among doctoral students in the School of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences is approximately 70%, and the proportion of females among doctoral students in the School of Medicine is also slightly higher than that of males. Overall, the gender distribution differences at the doctoral level mainly stem from differences in disciplinary structure.

6.3.7 US

(1) Scale trend: Steady with an upward trend, the number of international doctoral students in the US continues to grow

Overall, the general trend of studying for a doctorate in the US can be summarized as follows: a slight increase in scale, stable structural position, and high concentration of training platforms. Against the backdrop of the recovery of the total number of international students and the differentiated adjustment at the undergraduate and master's levels, the doctoral level has not shown a significant decline but has continued to maintain a growth trend.

- **Scale Change:** According to the Open Doors International Student Census Tables, the number of international doctoral students enrolled in US higher education institutions was 149,618 in the 2023/24 academic year, rising to 153,418 in the 2024/25 academic year, an increase of 3,800 within a year, with a year-on-year growth of approximately 2.5%. Against the backdrop of the overall recovery and continuous growth of international students, the doctoral stage has maintained steady expansion.
- **Academic Hierarchical Structure:** In the 2024/25 academic year, the number of international undergraduate students increased by 4.2% year-on-year, while the total number of international postgraduate students decreased by 2.7% year-on-year. Despite a slight decline in the total number of postgraduate students, the number of doctoral students still increased, indicating that the adjustment at the postgraduate level mainly occurred at the master's level, and doctoral programs overall maintained stable operation.
- **Distribution of Institution Types:** Among international students in the US, 89.1% are enrolled in Doctoral Universities, while Master's Colleges and Universities account for only 6.0%. This distribution indicates that the US international student system itself operates with Doctoral Universities at its core, and doctoral programs possess strong stability.

(2) Professional Trends: From "Quantitative Expansion" to "High-Education Orientation" – Structural Differentiation of Chinese Students Studying in the US and the Resilience of the Doctoral Pathway

- **Changes in the student source structure:** In the 2024/25 academic year, the total number of Chinese students decreased by 4.1% year-on-year, but this decline was not evenly distributed, mainly concentrated in the undergraduate stage. The number of Chinese undergraduates decreased by 10.2% compared to the previous academic year, the largest decline among all levels; in contrast, the number of students at the postgraduate stage only decreased by 2.1%. This indicates that, against the backdrop of the overall decline in the size of Chinese students, the demand to continue pursuing postgraduate and doctoral degrees in the US is significantly stronger than that at the undergraduate stage.

- **At the institutional level:** 89.1% of Chinese students are enrolled in Doctoral Universities, far higher than other types of institutions. This means that Chinese students pursuing doctoral degrees in the US do not disperse into different types of universities but continue to concentrate in the research university system centered on doctoral training and scientific research. Overall, Chinese student enrollment is shifting from "quantity expansion" to "highly educated, research-oriented".

(3) Professional Trends: STEM dominates, with US international doctoral training highly concentrated in engineering and computer science

- **Professional Structure:** In the 2024/25 academic year, the major with the largest number of international students was Mathematics and Computer Science (305,377 students, accounting for 25.9%), followed by Engineering (217,016 students, accounting for 18.4%), with the combined total of the two already exceeding 44% of all international students. At the postgraduate level, STEM majors accounted for 64%, significantly higher than the 43% at the undergraduate level. Since all doctoral students belong to the postgraduate system, this data directly reflects the concentration trend in major selection at the doctoral level.

- **Trends of Change:** The number of students in Mathematics and Computer Science majors increased by 8.7% year-on-year, Engineering majors by 3.3%, and Physics and Life Sciences by 7.8%, all maintaining positive growth trends. This indicates that the expansion of US doctoral programs mainly occurs in academic fields with strong research orientation and direct relevance to technological innovation and basic research.

6.3.8 Canada

(1) Scale trend: System expansion, doctoral stability

Overall, the scale of doctoral study in Canada shows the trend characteristics of "system expansion and doctoral stability". Against the backdrop of the rapid growth of international student numbers and significant changes at the undergraduate and college levels, the doctoral stage has not fluctuated significantly with scale fluctuations.

- **Overall trend:** According to Statistics Canada, the total number of students enrolled in public colleges and universities in Canada reached 2.3 million in the 2023/2024 academic year, representing a year-on-year increase of 5.8%, which is the most significant annual growth since the pandemic.
- **Growth of International Students:** The number of enrolled international students increased by 103,953 year-on-year (+22.2%). Among them, the number of international students within the university system increased by 21,345, a year-on-year growth of 8.1%. Since doctoral degrees in Canada are only awarded by universities, the continuous growth of the international student population at the university level means that the potential pool of students at the doctoral stage continues to expand.
- **Doctoral graduation scale:** During the period from 2014 to 2023, the number of doctoral graduates in Canada has always remained at a low but stable level, without any significant decline.

(2) Student Source Trend: The enthusiasm for Chinese students studying in Canada has cooled, and the doctoral admission channel has entered the stage of "high threshold, stable scale".

Overall, the IRCC nationality data reflects that the overall flow of Chinese students studying in Canada has cooled down, while the doctoral stage is more characterized by relative stability within the overall contraction.

- **Trends in Chinese Student Enrollment:** According to IRCC data, the number of Chinese holders of study permits was at a high level before 2019. After 2020, affected by the pandemic and restricted cross-border mobility, the number of Chinese study permits coming into effect showed a significant decline. In 2025 (as of November), the number of Chinese study permits coming into effect was

approximately 46,375, significantly lower than the pre-pandemic annual peak, indicating that the overall scale of Chinese students studying in Canada has entered a contraction phase.

- **Characteristics of the Doctoral Pathway:** Against this backdrop, the trend of Chinese students entering the doctoral pathway in Canada is more characterized by structural retention rather than scale expansion. As part of long-term study permits, doctoral study permits' applications and approvals highly depend on research background, supervisor resources, and the carrying capacity of the university system. With the overall decline in the number of Chinese study permits, the proportion of students able to enter the doctoral stage has relatively increased, but the absolute scale has not grown synchronously, indicating that Chinese doctoral students studying in Canada are shifting from a stage of "quantitative growth" to a stage of "high threshold, stable scale".

(3) Professional Trends: Doctoral training in Canada is highly concentrated in engineering and computer science

- **Professional Trends:** According to data from Statistics Canada, in the 2023/2024 academic year, the majors with the most significant growth among international students within the university system include mathematics, computer and information science, as well as engineering and engineering technology. Among them, mathematics, computer and information science increased by 11.6% year-on-year (+4,305 people), and engineering and engineering technology increased by 1.8% year-on-year (+1,731 people), both maintaining a positive growth trend.

- **Focus of Doctoral Training:** Since doctoral degrees in Canada are only awarded by universities, the above-mentioned professional changes directly reflect the disciplinary focus at the doctoral level. In contrast, although business and administrative management have experienced rapid overall growth, their growth has mainly been concentrated in colleges and teaching-based programs, and has not become the main source of the expansion of doctoral training scale. Overall, the trends in doctoral programs in Canada are characterized by a clear orientation towards science and engineering, high disciplinary concentration, and a stable pace of change.

(4) Gender Pattern: Engineering and Computing are male-dominated, while Education and Health are female-dominated

Overall, the gender structure of doctoral students in Canada shows distinct disciplinary differentiation characteristics: women dominate the overall student system, but men still predominate in STEM fields, especially in engineering and computer science, where doctoral students are most concentrated.

- **Overall gender structure:** In the 2023/2024 academic year, among all enrolled students, females accounted for approximately 54%, and males approximately 43%.
- **STEM Fields:** Among the total number of students enrolled in STEM fields, males account for approximately 60%. In the fields of engineering and engineering technology, males account for over 75%; in the fields of mathematics, computer science, and information science, males account for approximately 70%. These two areas are precisely the most concentrated core disciplines in Canada's doctoral training.
- **Non-STEM fields:** In areas such as health, education, social and behavioral sciences, arts, and humanities, the number of women is significantly higher than that of men. For example, in health-related majors, there are 183,576 women and 50,292 men; in the education field, there are 75,657 women and 22,893 men.

6.4 Doctoral Application and Admission Status

6.4.1 United Kingdom (Taking the official report of the University of Oxford as an example)

Based on the data from the Graduate Admissions Statistics released by the University of Oxford for the 2023—24 admissions cycle, it is possible to analyze the characteristics of graduate research degree programs (Graduate Research Degrees, including doctoral and other research-based degrees).

In this round of applications, the Graduate Research category received a total of 11,726 applications, accounting for 31.1% of the total number of graduate applications. However, based on the final admission results, the proportion of the

Graduate Research category in the final number of admitted students is significantly lower than its application proportion, reflecting that research-based programs face significantly higher screening intensity at the admission stage than taught programs.

(1) Professional Structure:

Graduate Research projects are mainly distributed across four major directions: social sciences, humanities, mathematical, physical, and life sciences (MPLS), and medical sciences, with significant differences in admission rates among different directions.

- **Mathematics, Physics, and Life Sciences Direction:** The overall admission rate is relatively low among major academic fields. This field receives a high volume of applications, while the number of available research-oriented places is limited, indicating a strong emphasis on the continuity of research background, research capability, and alignment with supervisors' research interests.
- **Medical Science Direction:** The overall admission rate is approximately in the medium range, with greater emphasis placed on research training experience, experimental skills, and fit with specific research projects.
- **Humanities and Social Sciences:** The overall admission rate is relatively high in numerical terms. However, in the actual admission process, considerable weight is still placed on the subjective evaluation of research proposal quality, academic writing ability, and research potential.

(2) Gender Structure:

During the 2023 — 24 admissions cycle, among the finally admitted graduate students, the number of female admits was 3,508 (accounting for 52.4%), and the number of male admits was 3,192 (accounting for 47.6%), with no obvious gender imbalance overall.

6.4.2 US

Overall, PhD admissions in the United States show several stable characteristics. First, the overall PhD admission rate has remained low over the long term; Second, there are significant differences in doctoral admission rates among different

disciplines, with education and health-related fields being relatively more lenient, while fields such as science, technology, computer science, and social sciences facing the most intense competition; Third, the doctoral admission rate is not positively correlated with the scale of applications, and fields with more applicants often face stronger screening pressure.

(1) Overall acceptance rate:

Based on the 2024 data released by the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS), US universities received a total of approximately 899,141 applications for doctoral programs, with approximately 168,015 ultimately accepted, resulting in an overall doctoral acceptance rate of approximately 19%. Compared to master's and other graduate programs, the acceptance rate for doctoral programs is significantly lower, reflecting the fundamental characteristics of high selectivity and limited enrollment.

(2) Subject distribution:

- **Fields with High Acceptance Rates:** Doctoral programs in Education have the highest acceptance rate, approximately 45%; Health Sciences is around 38%; and Public Administration and Services is about 24%.
- **Fields with Low Admission Rates:** The PhD admission rate for Social and Behavioral Sciences is among the lowest across PhD programs. PhD admission rates are also relatively low in Biological and Agricultural Sciences, Mathematics and Computer Science, and Business. The admission rate for Engineering PhD programs is in the lower-middle range.

(3) Application Volume Analysis:

The fields with the highest number of doctoral applications in the US are mainly concentrated in biological and agricultural sciences, social and behavioral sciences, and engineering disciplines. Although the application volume in these fields is large, the doctoral admission rate has not increased in tandem with the rising number of applications, indicating that doctoral programs in these areas are subject to multiple constraints such as research resources, supervisor capacity, and funding support, presenting the typical structural characteristics of "high application volume, low admission rate".

(4) Institution Type:

In 2024, the overall application acceptance rate of public universities was higher than that of private universities. However, at the doctoral level, regardless of whether in the public or private university system, the admission rate of doctoral programs was significantly lower than that of master's and other graduate programs. Moreover, in most professional fields, the doctoral admission rate was usually only half or even lower than that of the corresponding master's programs.

6.4.3 Canada (Based on Data Analysis from the University of Toronto)

Overall, PhD admissions at the University of Toronto display a highly structured pattern: a large applicant pool, strict control at the admission stage, and a stable and predictable level of enrolment. PhD admission rates have long been significantly lower than the typical levels seen in taught postgraduate programmes, indicating that PhD admissions in Canada are not expansion-oriented, but are primarily constrained by research resources and supervisors' capacity.

Based on the official data from the <Doctoral Admission & Enrolment Statistics> published by the University of Toronto, it is possible to analyze the characteristics of Canadian doctoral programs in terms of application scale, admission rate, final enrollment rate, and student source structure.

(1) Application and Enrollment Scale:

During the five academic years from 2019 to 2024, the number of applications for the doctoral program at the University of Toronto has consistently remained at a relatively high level, but the fluctuation range of the number of admitted and finally enrolled students is significantly smaller than that of the number of applicants, indicating that the number of doctoral admission spots is strictly constrained by the capacity of supervisors, research resources, and funding conditions.

(2) Admission Rate and Enrollment Rate:

Over the past five years, admission rates for PhD programs have generally remained relatively low. In contrast, the final enrollment rate (Yield Rate) of the doctoral program has long remained at a relatively high level, with the overall range approximately 59% – 67%, reflecting that doctoral admissions at top Canadian universities have strong certainty and binding nature.

(3) Gender Structure:

Among doctoral students in the 2023/24 academic year, females accounted for 52.3% (3,293 people), males accounted for 46.6% (2,937 people), and the overall situation was relatively balanced.

(4) Nationality Structure:

Among the doctoral students enrolled in the 2023/24 academic year, Canadian citizens and permanent residents accounted for 63.01% (3,967 people), while international students accounted for 36.99% (2,329 people). After receiving offers, international doctoral students have a relatively strong willingness to actually enroll, and doctoral programs still maintain high attractiveness at the international level.

6.5 Doctoral admission rates by region

6.5.1 United Kingdom

- **Admission Trends:** According to the latest data from HESA, in the 2024/25 academic year, affected by visa policies, the number of international students enrolling in taught postgraduate (PGT) programs decreased by 10%, while the number of research postgraduate (PGR) students increased by 11% against the trend. This indicates that while tightening the admission criteria for master's programs, universities in the United Kingdom are still actively expanding their pool of high-level research talent.
- **Admission Rate of Elite Universities:** According to the "2024/25 Graduate Admissions Report" released by the University of Cambridge, the total number of doctoral applications was 14,891, with 1,644 finally admitted. Among them, the admission rate for Doctor of Clinical Medicine was the lowest.
- **Admission Background Characteristics:** Admission data shows that 53% of cases have a non-211 university undergraduate background, 10.4% have a non-211 university master's background, about 3% have no master's background, and 66% have received RP tutoring. From the data, it can be seen that: the doctoral admission review in the United Kingdom does not discriminate against the origin of the first degree; in the case of a disadvantaged undergraduate background, it can be hedged through a master's background or a strong

research background. The competitiveness of a non-211 university master's background will significantly decline. "Direct doctoral admission" is extremely difficult in the United Kingdom, and the vast majority still need a master's degree as a stepping stone. An RP with rigorous academic logic and matching the supervisor's research direction is a crucial variable in admission.

6.5.2 Australia

- **Admission Trends:** Data from the Australian Department of Education for October 2025 shows that the number of international student enrollments in the higher education sector increased by 10% year-on-year. Although the overall approval rate for student visas has declined, the government announced that it will increase the international student admission quota (NPL) to 295,000 in 2026.
- **Admission Rate of Elite Universities:** The PhD admission rates of Australia's Group of Eight (Go8) universities are relatively stable. Due to the implementation of the quota system, universities tend to admit "high-quality applicants" with a high GPA (3.8+) and clear research outputs.
- **Admission Background Characteristics:** Among cases of obtaining admission to a doctoral program in Australia, 55% have a non-211 university undergraduate background, 10% have a non-211 university master's background, approximately 1.7% have no master's background, and 48.3% have received RP tutoring. Combining Data Analysis:
  - Having a master's background is more advantageous for applying to a doctoral program in Australia.
  - Completing good background enhancement during the master's program can minimize the impact of undergraduate background.
  - RP quality is a favorable factor for obtaining an offer and even a scholarship.

6.5.3 New Zealand

- **Admission Trends:** According to the Education New Zealand (ENZ) report in December 2025, the number of international students in universities increased by 15% from January to August 2025, reaching a total of 36,045. China remains the largest source market (accounting for 35%).
- **Admission Rate of Elite Universities:** The PhD admission rate in New Zealand is relatively high. Its greatest competitive advantage lies in the policy of "international students enjoying domestic tuition fees".
- **Admission Background Characteristics:** Among cases of obtaining admission to a doctoral program in New Zealand, 78.2% have a non-211 university undergraduate background, 30.9% have a non-211 university master's background, approximately 1.8% have no master's background, and 72.7% have received RP tutoring. Based on admission data, applying for a doctoral program in New Zealand can be said to be one of the most inclusive regions globally:
  - Students from non-985/211 backgrounds have a high admission rate, indicating that New Zealand institutions highly recognize Chinese mainland institutions and are not overly restrictive with their list requirements.
  - Even if the master's institution has a non-985/211 background, there is still a relatively high admission rate, indicating that as long as one has excellent academic performance, the door to New Zealand remains open.
  - New Zealand has a small number of tutors and limited enrollment quotas, and they determine whether students are "manageable" through RP.

6.5.4 Hong Kong, China

- **Admission Trends:** In the 2024/25 and 2025/26 academic years, the number of UGC-funded doctoral places in Hong Kong will remain stable at 7,200. The government is vigorously attracting top global non-local students through the HKPFS Scholarship (with the number of places increased to 400).
- **Admission Rate of Elite Universities:** The doctoral admission rate of the top three universities in Hong Kong (HKU, CUHK, HKUST) is approximately 10% – 12%.
- **Admission Background Characteristics:** Based on admission data, 38% of the cases have a non-211 university undergraduate background, 9.5% have a

non-211 university master's background, approximately 4.8% have no master's background, and 52.4% have published in good journals. It can be seen that:

- Hong Kong, China, tends to prefer applicants with both undergraduate and postgraduate degrees from 985/211 institutions or overseas undergraduate degrees. If the applicant has a non-985/211 undergraduate background, their postgraduate background must be strong.
- Hong Kong, China has limited spots and fierce competition for scholarships, and having publications makes it relatively easier to get on the supervisor's consideration list.

6.5.5 Macao, China

- **Admission Trends:** According to the official announcement from the University of Macau, the number of graduate applications has hit new highs year after year, with the number of applicants in 2024/25 exceeding 35,000.
- **Admission Rate of Elite Universities:** The University of Macau plans to admit approximately 1,500 postgraduate students (including master's and doctoral students) annually, and its overall admission rate is not high.
- **Admission Background Characteristics:** Based on admission data, 50% of the cases have a background of non-211 university undergraduate, 19.2% have a background of non-211 university master's, approximately 11.5% have no master's background, and 69.2% have received RP tutoring. It can be seen that:
  - Direct doctoral opportunities in Macao, China are relatively higher compared to other countries and regions, making it a great choice for outstanding undergraduates.
  - Macao, China has a relatively high recognition of non-211 universities on the Chinese mainland, but it should be noted that the University of Macau tends to prefer applicants with a "double first-class" background.
  - Universities in Macao, China have a relatively small research volume, and supervisors pay more attention to whether students can independently complete their doctoral dissertations. The quality of the RP is crucial.

6.5.6 Ireland

- **Admission Trends:** The HEA November 2025 report shows that Irish doctoral graduates have extremely strong employment competitiveness after graduation, with an employment rate as high as 80.2%.
- **Admission rate of prestigious schools:** ICT and pharmaceutical fields have relatively high admission rates, with emphasis placed on the alignment between master's-level training and industry—academia—research collaboration.

6.5.7 Malaysia

- **Admission Trends:** In 2024/25, the government will vigorously attract talent in STEM fields by establishing a dedicated AI institute.
- **Admission Rate of Elite Universities:** Public institutions, such as UM and UPM, have relatively high admission rates, but their GPA requirements have been rising year by year.

6.5.8 Singapore

- **Admission Trends:** Registration data for the 2024/25 academic year at the National University of Singapore (NUS) shows that there are 4,353 enrolled doctoral students, of whom approximately 40% are non-local students.
- **Admission rate of elite schools:** The admission rate is extremely low.

6.5.9 US

- **Admission Trends:** The CGS 2025 Flash Survey shows that the acceptance rate of admission offers by international doctoral students has remained stable or is on an upward trend. Despite facing visa barriers and cost-of-living challenges, top research universities (R1) still receive more than 70% of international doctoral applications worldwide.
- **Admission Rate of Elite Universities:** The average PhD admission rate in STEM fields at Top 30 U.S. universities is low. In strategic disciplines such as AI

and quantum computing, the admission rate is usually below 5%. Competition at R1 universities is far more intense than at other types of institutions.

6.5.10 Canada

- **Admission Trends:** Despite the Canadian government implementing a total quota for international student visas, the doctoral level is not subject to the quota. The 2025–26 budget report of the University of Toronto clearly states that the number of doctoral students is planned to increase from 8,079 in 2024 to 8,084 in 2025, and is expected to grow steadily over the next five years.
- **Admission rate of prestigious universities:** Taking the University of Toronto as an example, competition among doctoral applicants remains fierce, with the application–to–admission ratio for popular STEM disciplines approximately 16:1.

6.5.11 Europe

- **Admission Trends:** The Wissenschaft Weltoffen 2025 report released by DAAD shows that in the winter semester of 2024/25, the number of international students in Germany reached 402,000 (a new historical high), among whom doctoral students accounted for 28%.
- **Admission rate of elite universities:** Germany adopts the "post system", and the admission rate completely depends on the research funding of specific supervisors.

6.6 Doctoral Application and Admission Cases

6.6.1 United Kingdom

Case 1:

Representative Institution: University of Oxford – Clinical Medicine/Engineering

Admission Case Profile: Bachelor's and master's degrees from top domestic universities, with academic performance ranking among the top of the major, high-level language test scores, multiple publications in professional journals, and several years of overseas laboratory research collaboration experience.

Analysis: The number of graduate applications for the 2023-24 academic year at the University of Oxford is approximately 37,000, of which research degrees account for only 31% *(Source: University of Oxford Official Admissions Bulletin 2023/24)*.

Key Success Factors: The core of this student's success lies not in a high GPA, but in Research Proposal (RP). Their research direction highly overlaps with the ongoing ERC-funded project of the supervisor, and they demonstrated proficient pre-operational skills with specific experimental equipment at Oxford (such as the multiphase flow test rig) during the interview.

Case 2:

Representative Institution: University College London (UCL) – Education

Profile: Bachelor's and master's degrees from high-quality domestic universities, with excellent academic averages, advanced-level language test scores, and several years of frontline teaching-related research experience.

Analysis: The UCL Institute of Education (IOE) has long ranked first in the world, and its admissions in 2025 will place greater emphasis on the social impact of research results on policy or practice.

Key Success Factors: An RP (Research Plan) with a highly critical social perspective, accompanied by published chapters of educational monographs.

Case 3:

Representative Institution: King's College London (KCL) – Psychiatry

Profile: Master's degree in Clinical Medicine from a top domestic university, with outstanding academic performance, high-level language test scores meeting the requirements, and multiple high-impact academic papers published as first author.

Analysis: IoPPN at KCL is globally top-notch in psychology and neuroscience, placing extreme emphasis on clinical data processing capabilities.

Key Success Factor: Co-applied for a joint training project with the supervisor one

year in advance.

Case 4:

Representative Institution: University of Manchester – Materials Science

Profile: Bachelor's degree from a top domestic university, with outstanding academic performance, a patent in the field of graphene-related research, and language test scores meeting institutional requirements.

Analysis: The University of Manchester will continue to strengthen its leading position as the "Home of Graphene" in 2025, providing special scholarship channels for applicants with early patents.

Key Success Factors: Entered a national laboratory during undergraduate studies and possesses experimental skills for independently operating complex transmission electron microscopes.

Case 5:

Representative Institution: University of Southampton – Optoelectronics

Profile: First-class bachelor's degree from a UK university, with excellent academic performance and awards in mathematical modelling competitions.

Analysis: The Optoelectronics Research Centre (ORC) in Southampton is the birthplace of optical fiber and has extremely high requirements for mathematical proficiency.

Key Success Factors: The undergraduate graduation project topic is highly consistent with the ongoing research on photonic crystal fibers by the supervisor.

Overview: Based on the summary of internal admission data, the most typical case profile for applying to the United Kingdom is as follows:

Background Dimension	Typical Characteristics
Educational Pathway	Non-211/985 undergraduate + prestigious master's degree; or top-tier double-first-class universities Bachelor + Master

Master's Grades	Average score of 75+ (Distinction) for Australian master's programs; Merit or above for UK master's programs
Bachelor's Grades	Non-211/985: 80+ / 211: 78+ (flexible standards)
Publications	For applications to Group of Eight universities: One international conference or journal paper is recommended. For other universities: No publications required
RP Quality	Highly aligned with supervisor's research direction
Key Focus in Emailing (Supervisor Contact)	Clearly state self-funding status or plan to apply for CSC scholarships, which greatly increases response rates

6.6.2 Australia

Case 1:

Representative Institution: The University of Melbourne – Education/Science

Profile: First-class honours bachelor's degree from an Australian university, with excellent academic performance and language test scores meeting the institution's application requirements.

Analysis: According to the official statement in 2025, the University of Melbourne has an extremely early deadline (October 31) for reviewing scholarships for research projects *(Source: University of Melbourne 2025 Admissions Guide)*.

Key Success Factor: "Scholarship Suitability". The applicant brought their own high-quality RTP scholarship application essay, demonstrating strong academic self-motivation.

Case 2:

Representative Institution: The University of Melbourne – Building Information Modeling (BIM)

Profile: Background of study at a top domestic university, with excellent academic performance, language test scores meeting the application requirements of prestigious universities, and several years of frontline professional experience in the architecture industry.

Analysis: The School of Architecture at the University of Melbourne tends to admit applicants with insights into industry pain points.

Key Success Factors: RP proposed a computational model to reduce the cost of complex irregular-shaped buildings.

Case 3:

Representative Institution: University of New South Wales (UNSW Sydney) – Business School (Management & Governance)

Profile: Bachelor's degree from a top domestic university and master's degree from a well-known overseas institution, with outstanding academic performance, high scores in business-related standardised tests, and two years of research experience at a leading financial institution.

Analysis: UNSW Business School will adopt a "two-step" admission strategy from 2025 to 2026. Most applicants will first enter the Master of Pre-Doctoral Business Studies (MPDBS) program for one year of intensive research training, and those with excellent performance will be directly promoted to the PhD program. For applicants with high GMAT scores and practical experience in large enterprises, the school places greater emphasis on their ability to transform business pain points into academic research topics.

Key Success Factors: Initiating networking first to obtain the initial review invitation from the supervisor; a high GMAT score demonstrates the foundation in quantitative analysis, and experience at large enterprises provides real research cases.

Case 4:

Representative Institution: Monash University – Pharmaceutical Sciences

Profile: Master's degree in Pharmacy from a UK university, with excellent academic

performance and a high-quality academic paper published as sole first author.

Analysis: Monash Pharmacy has consistently ranked first in the world for years, with extremely strict requirements for the fundamentals of pharmacokinetics.

Key Success Factor: Accurately answered questions about the chemical mechanism of the new drug delivery system during the interview.

Case 5:

Representative Institution: The University of Queensland (UQ) – Mining Engineering

Profile: Background in a sector-specialised domestic university, with good academic average scores and one year of internship experience related to mining areas in Australia.

Analysis: Australia is rich in mining resources, and has an extremely high admission rate for international students with local internship experience.

Key Success Factors: Having accumulated local professional qualifications in Australia.

Case 6:

Representative Institution: The University of Western Australia (UWA) – Deep Sea Oil and Gas Exploration

Profile: Background in a relevant engineering discipline from a domestic university, with excellent academic performance and language test scores meeting the application requirements.

Analysis: The University of Western Australia has a close partnership with oil and gas giants and tends to recruit students with strong engineering computing capabilities.

Key Success Factors: Proficiency in multiphase flow simulation software.

Overview: Based on the summary of internal admission data, the most typical case profile of applicants to Australia is as follows:

Background Dimension	Typical Characteristics

Educational Pathway	Non-211/985 undergraduate + prestigious master's degree; or Double First-Class undergraduate + prestigious master's degree
Master's Grades	Australian master's: 75+ (Distinction) / UK master's: Merit or above
Bachelor's Grades	Non-211/985: 80+ / 211: 78+ (relatively flexible)
Publications	For applying to Group of Eight (Go8): 1 international conference or journal paper recommended; for non-Go8 universities: publications not required
RP Quality	Must align with the supervisor's research direction
Key Focus in Emailing (Supervisor Contact)	Clearly state "able to self-fund" or "will apply for CSC" — supervisor response rate increases significantly

6.6.3 New Zealand

Case 1:

Representative Institution: University of Auckland – Agriculture/Environmental Science

Profile: Master's degree from a high-quality domestic university, with good academic performance and one SCI-indexed academic paper published.

Analysis: Among international students at the University of Auckland in 2024, Chinese students have the highest proportion (6,371), and doctoral admissions are relatively diverse *(Source: University of Auckland 2024 Key Statistics page)*.

Key Success Factors: "Pragmatism". The research project addressed the actual pain points in local agricultural waste treatment in New Zealand and received indirect

support from relevant projects of the Environment Agency.

Case 2:

Representative Institution: The University of Auckland – Urban Planning

Profile: Integrated bachelor's and master's degree background from a UK institution, with academic performance assessed at an excellent level and high-level language test scores.

Analysis: As the largest city in New Zealand, the planning department of this school has the most abundant resources.

Key Success Factors: RP represents the algorithmic model of local traffic congestion in Auckland.

Case 3:

Representative Institution: The University of Waikato – Law

Profile: Master of Laws degree from a top domestic university, with good academic performance and high-level language test scores.

Analysis: The University of Auckland Law School is renowned for its research on indigenous rights and is interested in comparative law topics.

Key Success Factors: RP conducts research on the ethnic minority cultural protection law.

Case 4:

Representative Institution: Auckland University of Technology (AUT) – Sports Performance

Profile: Master's degree from a high-quality domestic university, with professional experience in strength and conditioning coaching for a professional sports team, and language test scores meeting the application requirements.

Analysis: AUT ranks first in New Zealand in sports performance analysis.

Key Success Factors: Possessing the original physiological monitoring data of professional athletes.

Overview: Based on internal admission data, the most typical case profile of applicants to New Zealand is as follows:

Background Dimension	Typical Characteristics
Educational Pathway	Non-211/985 undergraduate + prestigious master's degree (GPA 85+); or Double First-Class undergraduate + prestigious master's degree (Merit)
Master's Grades	Non-211/985: 85+ / UK & Australian Master's programs: Merit or above
Bachelor's Grades	Non-211/985: 80—85+
Publications	Prior academic publications are recommended
RP Quality	Must be logically rigorous, well-supported by literature and highly feasible
Key Focus in Emailing (Supervisor Contact)	Confirm supervisor vacancies at an early stage. Supervisors in New Zealand hold substantial decision-making power

6.6.4 Hong Kong, China

Case 1:

Representative Institution: The University of Hong Kong (HKU) – Business/Law

Profile: Bachelor's degree from a top domestic university, with outstanding academic performance and advanced-level language test scores.

Analysis: HKU's 2024 report shows that the number of mainland Chinese students at the postgraduate level increased significantly *(Source: the HKU Annual Report 2024)*.

Key Success Factors: "Standardized Score Dominance". In an environment where all applicants are from 985 institutions, an IELTS score of 8.0 and an outstanding GPA are the only bargaining chips to pass the first-round Committee screening.

Case 2:

Representative Institution: City University of Hong Kong (CityU) – Energy and Environment

Profile: Background of study at a top domestic university, with excellent academic performance, language test scores meeting the application requirements, and R&D experience related to solar cell materials.

Analysis: Hong Kong City University has made significant investments in the field of clean energy.

Key Success Factor: Demonstrated experimental data on photoelectric conversion efficiency superior to the mentor's existing materials during the interview.

Case 3:

Representative Institution: The Hong Kong Polytechnic University (PolyU) – School of Hotel and Tourism Management (SHTM)

Profile: Background of study at a well-known overseas institution specialising in hotel management, with excellent academic performance and management trainee experience at a high-end star-rated hotel.

Analysis: SHTM ranks among the top three in the world and highly values industry endorsements.

Key Success Factor: The recommendation letter comes from an executive of an international hotel giant.

Case 4:

Representative Institution: The Education University of Hong Kong (EdUHK) – Psychology

Profile: Background of study at a high-quality domestic institution, with good academic performance and language test scores meeting the application requirements.

Analysis: The Hong Kong Institute of Education focuses on research in child psychology and special education.

Key Success Factors: RP's intervention program targeting social disorders in autistic children is highly comprehensive.

Case 5:

Representative Institution: Hong Kong Baptist University (HKBU) – Communication

Profile: Master's degree in Media and Communication from a well-known domestic institution, with outstanding academic performance and advanced-level language test scores.

Analysis: The School of Communication at Hong Kong Baptist University is Asia's top institution, emphasizing the consideration of New Media ethics.

Key Success Factors: RP delved deeply into the impact of AI-generated content on the authenticity of news.

Overview: Based on the summary of internal admission data, the most typical case profile of applicants to Hong Kong, China is as follows:

Background Dimension	Typical Characteristics
Educational Pathway	Double First-Class undergraduate + QS100 master's degree; or Non-211/985 undergraduate + QS50 master's degree
Master's Grades	UK system: Distinction / Hong Kong: 3.6/4.0+
Bachelor's Grades	Double First-Class: 82+ / Non-211/985: 87+
Publications	Preferably have good journal publications
RP Quality	Must be highly aligned with the supervisor's research direction
Timing for Emailing (Supervisor Contact)	Initiate email contact from July to September

6.6.5 Macao, China

Case 1:

Representative Institution: University of Macau – Chinese Medicine/Microelectronics

Profile: Master's degree from a domestic institution, with academic performance at a good level.

Analysis: Doctoral applications at the University of Macau usually require IELTS 6.0 or CET-6 450 points *(Source: University of Macau 2026 Admissions Prospectus PDF)*.

Key Success Factors: "Regional Resource Binding". The case has fully leveraged Macau's positioning as a "bridgehead" for traditional Chinese medicine to go global, and RP has extremely high potential for government funding.

Case 2:

Representative Institution: University of Macau – Portuguese Studies

Profile: Bachelor's degree in a Portuguese-related major from a domestic institution, with language test scores meeting the application requirements of prestigious universities and overseas study experience in Portugal.

Analysis: As a China-Portugal platform, this direction has received strong support from the government.

Key Success Factors: Native-level Portuguese proficiency and profound cultural understanding.

Case 3:

Representative Institution: University of Macau – Finance

Profile: Background of study at a top domestic university, with excellent academic performance, language test scores meeting the application requirements, and project experience related to fintech.

Analysis: The School of Finance at the University of Macau tends to focus on digital finance research in 2025.

Key Success Factors: Possess cross-disciplinary capabilities in programming and financial modeling.

Case 4:

Representative Institution: Macau University of Science and Technology – Chinese Medicine

Profile: Master's degree in Traditional Chinese Medicine from a high-quality domestic institution, with excellent academic performance and papers published in core professional journals.

Analysis: The State Key Laboratory of Quality Research in Chinese Medicine at the University of Macau has strong capabilities.

Key Success Factors: Possess solid experimental skills in traditional Chinese medicine ingredient analysis.

Case 5:

Representative Institution: City University of Macau – Cultural Industry

Profile: Master's degree in an art-related major from a high-quality domestic institution, with good academic performance and language test scores meeting the institution's application requirements.

Analysis: The Doctorate in Cultural Industries at the University of Macau is one of its advantageous disciplines, emphasizing the background of the integration of Chinese and Western cultures.

Key Success Factors: RP focuses on a case study of Macau's transformation from gambling culture to non-gambling culture.

Overview: Based on the summary of internal admission data, the most typical case profile of applicants to Macau, China is as follows:

Background Dimension	Typical Characteristics
Educational Pathway	Direct PhD application: 985/211 undergraduate with 87+; Master's to PhD application: Non-211/985 undergraduate + Non-211/985 master's (both 85+)
Master's Grades	Non-211/985 master's: 85+ / UK or Australian master's: Merit or above

Bachelor's Grades	Non-211/985: 83-88+ (varies depending on institution ranking)
Publications	Publications recommended
RP Quality	Must be logically rigorous, with solid literature foundation, and aligned with supervisor's research direction
Key Focus in Emailing (Supervisor Contact)	Contact potential supervisors in advance

6.6.6 Ireland

Case 1:

Representative Institution: Trinity College Dublin – Biomedical

Profile: Bachelor's degree in a medical-related major from a domestic institution, with relevant research experience.

Analysis: TCD enrolls approximately 1,740 doctoral students annually, with international students accounting for as high as 24% *(Source: Trinity College Dublin (TCD) Official Annual Report 2024/25)*.

Key Success Factor: "Mutual Trust Among Mentors". Through the joint recommendation of European professors and leveraging the background of Ireland's biopharmaceutical industry cluster, we successfully secured full funding from the school.

Case 2:

Representative Institution: University College Dublin (UCD) – Agricultural Science

Profile: Background of study at a top domestic university, with excellent academic performance, language test scores meeting the requirements, and laboratory work experience related to food science.

Analysis: UCD leads Europe in the field of agricultural technology.

Key Success Factors: RP demonstrates the potential of blockchain applications in food traceability.

Case 3:

Representative Institution: University College Cork (UCC) – Microbiology

Profile: Master's degree in Medicine from a top domestic university, with excellent academic performance and high-level language test scores.

Analysis: UCC's APC Microbiome Ireland is the world's leading microbiome research center.

Key Success Factors: The RP topic selection precisely aligns with the ongoing probiotic research direction of the center.

6.6.7 Malaysia

Case 1:

Representative Institution: University of Malaya (Universiti Malaya) – Economics and Management

Profile: Master's degree background, with several years of relevant industry experience and generally good academic performance during study.

Analysis: The UM Doctoral Program places extreme emphasis on business background, with admission criteria requiring a CGPA of no less than 3.0/4.0 *(Source: University of Malaya PhD Handbook 2025–2026)*.

Key Success Factors: "Empirical Experience". Applicants have transformed years of industry data into research samples, and this scarcity compensates for the lack of academic paper output.

Case 2:

Representative Institution: National University of Malaysia (UKM) – Law

Profile: Background in Law from a high-quality domestic institution, with good

academic performance and language test scores meeting the application requirements.

Analysis: The school's law program leads the way in Malaysia and supports comparative legal research between China and Malaysia.

Key Success Factors: The RP topic selection has practical economic, trade, and legal significance.

Case 3:

Representative Institution: Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) – Environmental Science

Profile: Bachelor's degree in Environmental Engineering from a domestic institution, with good academic performance and language test scores meeting the application requirements.

Analysis: USM fully supports the United Nations SDGs goals.

Key Success Factors: Carbon sink research on mangrove conservation aligns with local government planning.

Case 4:

Representative Institution: Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM) – Management

Profile: Background of study at a domestic undergraduate institution, with excellent academic performance, university teaching experience, and extensive accumulation of management-related case studies.

Analysis: UUM is the pioneer of the School of Management, emphasizing academic rigor.

Key Success Factors: Solid capabilities in questionnaire surveys and statistical modeling.

Case 5:

Representative Institution: Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) – Food Science

Profile: Master's degree in a food-related major from a domestic institution, with excellent academic performance and practical experience in quality management in the food industry.

Analysis: UPM is relatively authoritative in the fields of agriculture, forestry, and

food.

Key Success Factors: The research plan on tropical fruit processing technology has commercial value.

6.6.8 Singapore

Case 1:

Representative Institution: National University of Singapore (NUS) – Engineering/Systems Science

Profile: Background of study at a well-known domestic university, with excellent academic performance and multiple corporate research internship experiences.

Analysis: The number of research students admitted by NUS in 2024/25 is extremely small (Grand Total 4,839, only one-third of the number of coursework students)*(Source: NUS Graduate Statistics 2024/25)*.

Key Success Factor: "Technical Hardcore Level". During the interview, this student completed three rounds of complex on-site algorithm coding, demonstrating strong engineering implementation capabilities.

Case 2:

Representative Institution: National University of Singapore (NUS) – Public Policy

Profile: Several years of government-related work experience, a background from a well-known domestic university, excellent academic performance, and outstanding foreign language ability.

Analysis: The LKYSPP places great emphasis on policy sensitivity.

Key Success Factors: Unique insights into Asian energy security policies.

Case 3:

Representative Institution: Nanyang Technological University (NTU) – Environmental Engineering

Profile: Master's degree in Environmental Engineering from a well-known domestic

university, with excellent academic performance, outstanding foreign language proficiency, and experience independently publishing professional academic papers.

Analysis: The School of the Environment at NTU offers generous funding, with extremely high admission requirements.

Key Success Factors: Demonstrated an innovative cost optimization model for membrane treatment technology.

Case 4:

Representative Institution: Singapore Management University (SMU) – Data Science

Profile: Overseas financial industry work experience, excellent academic performance during study, and outstanding standardised test scores.

Analysis: SMU values the cross-application of business and data.

Key Success Factors: Master practical algorithm capabilities in the field of financial risk control.

6.6.9 US

The CGS 2025 survey shows that R1 universities (top research institutions) received more than 70% of international doctoral applications, with STEM acceptance rates remaining stable but having extremely high thresholds.

Case 1:

Representative Institution: Harvard University – Economics

Profile: Background from a high-quality overseas undergraduate institution, with exceptionally outstanding academic performance, top scores in the national postgraduate entrance examination, and strong recommendation letters from several leading scholars in the field.

Analysis: Harvard's Graduate School of Arts and Sciences (GSAS) had a low PhD admission rate in 2025 *(Source: Harvard 2025 PhD Admissions Brief)*. The admission rate for Harvard Business School's (HBS) PhD programme, Class of 2025, was even lower, and 37% of students were international students *(Source: Harvard Business School 2025 Doctoral Student Profile)*.

Key Success Factor: "Academic Circle Effect". The mentor's recommendation letter directly attests to the applicant's independent modeling ability when dealing with large-scale datasets, and this "academic trust" surpasses any standardized test scores.

Case 2:

Representative Institution: Carnegie Mellon University (CMU) – Human-Computer Interaction (HCI)

Profile: Bachelor's degree from a top domestic university, with excellent academic performance, outstanding language ability, high-quality open-source project outcomes, and strong technical accumulation.

Analysis: Admission weightings for CMU's CS majors: Research output > GPA > TOEFL.

Key Success Factors: The extensive influence of open-source projects demonstrates their independent development and research capabilities.

Case 3:

Representative Institution: Northwestern University – Materials Science and Engineering

Profile: Bachelor's degree from a top domestic university, with excellent academic performance, outstanding language ability, and recommendation letters from several senior scholars.

Analysis: The Department of Materials has been ranked among the top three in the United States for many consecutive years, and the Holistic Review is extremely rigorous.

Key Success Factors: The recommendation letter comes from an alumnus of the school (a domestic heavyweight), establishing a strong trust endorsement.

Case 4:

Representative Institution: Duke University – Genomics

Profile: Master's degree from a well-known domestic university, with excellent academic performance, good language proficiency, and multiple academic outputs on bioinformatics-related algorithms.

Analysis: Duke School of Medicine prefers interdisciplinary talents with a cross-background in bioinformatics.

Key Success Factors: The built-in algorithmic tool has resolved an efficiency bottleneck in genome sequencing.

Case 5:

Representative Institution: Johns Hopkins University (JHU) – Public Health

Profile: Master's degree in Public Health from a high-quality overseas institution, with excellent academic performance, outstanding standardised test scores, and frontline overseas volunteer experience in pandemic prevention and control.

Analysis: JHU highly values applicants' actual social contributions and field research capabilities.

Key Success Factors: The accumulation of real frontline epidemiological data impressed the interviewers.

Case 6:

Representative Institution: The University of Chicago – Economics

Profile: Master's degree from a well-known domestic university of finance and economics, with excellent academic performance, strong quantitative ability, and participation in national-level finance-related research projects.

Analysis: The Economics Department of the University of Chicago, known as the "Nobel Cradle," has an almost obsessive requirement for mathematical logic.

Key Success Factors: The deduction of complex macro models during the interview demonstrated excellent intuition.

6.6.10 Canada

Case 1:

Representative Institution: University of Toronto – Computer Science

Profile: Bachelor's degree from a domestic institution and master's degree from a

well-known overseas institution, with good academic performance.

Analysis: In the 2024-25 academic year, the student population at Duoda first exceeded 100,000, with doctoral students accounting for 24% of the total. Its long-term plan projects that graduate enrollments will increase by 9.5% over the next five years.

Key Success Factors: "Proximity Principle". The applicant had participated in a research project led by a University of Toronto professor as a Research Assistant during their master's program. Canadian elite universities highly prefer applicants who have already had academic outputs in the country.

Case 2:

Representative Institution: University of Waterloo – Cybersecurity

Profile: Background of study at a well-known domestic university, with excellent academic performance, good language ability, and repeated achievements in cybersecurity-related competitions.

Analysis: The University of Waterloo has a close partnership with the Communications Security Establishment (CSE) of Canada and values practical experience.

Key Success Factor: Submitted a in-depth report on blockchain vulnerability mining.

Case 3:

Representative Institution: McMaster University – Nuclear Engineering

Profile: Background of study at a well-known domestic university, with excellent academic performance and internship experience in a nuclear power-related position.

Analysis: McMaster University has the only university research reactor in Canada and places great emphasis on safety awareness and operational background.

Key Success Factors: Passed the background check and demonstrated strong experimental operation specifications.

Case 4:

Representative Institution: University of Montreal (Université de Montréal) – Artificial

Intelligence (Mila)

Profile: Bachelor's degree in a computer-related major from a top domestic university, with excellent academic performance and participation in paper publication at a top international academic conference.

Analysis: Mila is a global AI hub, with a competition ratio exceeding 20:1

Key Success Factor: Obtained preliminary recognition from members of the Yoshua Bengio team.

Case 5:

Representative Institution: University of Victoria – Marine Science

Profile: Background of study at a high-quality domestic university, with good academic performance, language ability meeting the requirements, and professional diving-related qualifications.

Analysis: The school's marine resource research has significant geographical advantages.

Key Success Factors: Demonstrated practical experience in underwater sensor deployment.

Case 6:

Representative Institution: The University of Western Ontario – Sports Management

Profile: Master's degree from a domestic sports-specialised institution, with outstanding language ability and experience participating in the preparation of major sports events.

Analysis: Xida's sports science ranking is very high, and it highly values management experience in major sports events.

Key Success Factors: The Research Plan (RP) focuses on the sustainable legacy development of major sports events.

6.6.11 Europe

Case 1:

Representative Institution: ETH Zurich – Robotics/Architecture

Portrait: During overseas master's study, published a paper at a top international academic conference.

Analysis: Analysis: ETH had a relatively low PhD admission rate in 2025. As a public university, it offers extremely low tuition fees, but its selection process is highly rigorous *(Source: ETH 2026 Admissions Analysis Report)*.

Key Success Factor: "Job Fit". Most ETH doctoral students are recruited through job positions, and this student precisely matched the specific technical stack of "underwater robot dynamics" required by the laboratory.

Case 2:

Representative Institution: Technical University of Munich (TUM, Germany) – Power Systems

Profile: Background in a relevant major from a top domestic university, with excellent academic performance, outstanding language ability, and two years of professional experience in a well-known electrical industry company.

Analysis: German engineering doctoral programs tend to recruit international students with industrial internship experience.

Key Success Factors: While meeting the requirements of bg, having relevant work experience in German enterprises.

Case 3:

Representative Institution: École Polytechnique (France) – Applied Mathematics

Profile: Background in Mathematics from a top domestic university, with outstanding academic performance and excellent language ability.

Analysis: French elite schools highly value mathematical modeling intuition.

Key Success Factor: Solved a complex stochastic process deduction on the spot during the interview.

Case 4:

Representative Institution: Delft University of Technology (TU Delft, Netherlands) –

Wind Energy Engineering

Profile: Master's degree from a top domestic university, with excellent academic performance, good language ability, and ongoing research projects highly aligned with the target programme.

Analysis: Delft is the European hub in the wind energy sector.

Element: Demonstrated the latest algorithm for wind turbine blade optimization during the interview.

Case 5:

Representative Institution: KTH Royal Institute of Technology (Sweden) – Wireless Communications (6G)

Profile: R&D professional background in a leading domestic communications company, with excellent academic performance and language test scores meeting the requirements.

Analysis: KTH is deeply tied to Ericsson.

Key Success Factors: Having a core patent background.

Case 6:

Representative Institution: University of Helsinki (Finland) – Evolutionary Biology

Profile: Background from a high-quality domestic university, with excellent academic performance and fieldwork experience related to the professional field.

Analysis: Nordic doctors do not charge tuition fees and place greater emphasis on academic independence.

Key Success Factors: The RP topic selection is highly innovative.

6.7 Doctoral Application Strategy Recommendations

6.7.1 United Kingdom

(1) Policy Direction:

According to the visa guidelines for the 2025/26 academic year, the United Kingdom will continue to maintain the 3-year Graduate Route visa for doctoral graduates, but this requires applicants to maintain extremely high attendance and research progress records during their studies at the university *(Source: UK Gov: Student Visa Official Guidance)*.

(2) Strategic Recommendations:

- **"Secure a position" and initiate contact one year in advance:** Doctoral positions at G5 institutions often have their intended candidates basically determined during the first round of applications in December.
- **Strengthen ATAS Review Preparation:** For applicants in the STEM fields, ATAS review has become extremely strict. It is recommended to avoid using overly sensitive military or dual-use technology terms when writing research summaries *(Source: UK Gov: ATAS Guidance)*.
- **Core Strategy:** RP (Research Proposal) is the lifeline. Tutors in the United Kingdom strongly dislike vague generalizations. Your RP must be detailed to: what to do in the first year, how to collect data in the second year, and how to build models in the third year.
- **Hardcore Indicator:** Among G5 admittees, the proportion of those with a first-class honors degree (or a GPA of 88+ from a domestic 985/211 university) is extremely high. If your GPA is insufficient, it is recommended to have more than 2 publications in core journals.
- **Pitfall Avoidance Guide:** Do not send mass emails. Tutors in the United Kingdom value "Fit", and a customized prospecting letter far outperforms a hundred mass emails.

6.7.2 Australia

(1) Policy Direction:

Starting from 2026, Australia will implement the "traffic light" visa processing model. Applications for institutions in the "green light zone" (where the utilization rate of enrollment quotas is less than 80%) will receive the fastest approval *(Source: Australia Immi: Subclass 500 Updates 2026)*.

(2) Policy Recommendations:

- **GS Replaces GTE Review:** The new "Genuine Student (GS)" requirement has replaced GTE. The application letter must logically explain the direct connection between the chosen course and future career plans, rather than simply indicating immigration intent *(Source: IDP: Australia Visa Rules 2026)*.
- **Unrestricted working hours**: During their doctoral studies, there are no restrictions on working hours, which is a significant advantage for clients with family relocation needs.
- **Timeline:** 10 months in advance. Australia has two intake seasons in February and July, and the corresponding scholarship rounds generally close in August and April of the previous year.
- **Core Strategy:** GPA is the primary competitiveness . The Australian RTP Scholarship is an extremely rigorous scoring system. If the GPA, after conversion, fails to reach 3.8/4.0 or an equivalent first-class degree, it is extremely difficult to obtain a full scholarship.
- **Soft background**: Emphasizethe number of published papers. In the Australian review system, the weight of a first-author SCI paper is very clear.
- **Guide to Avoiding Pitfalls:** Initiate networking first, obtain the supervisor's "Expression of Interest" letter, and then proceed with the subsequent formal online application process after the EOI submission is approved.

6.7.3 New Zealand

(1) Policy Direction:

In 2026, New Zealand will continue to implement the "Domestic Fees" policy for doctoral students. Taking the University of Auckland as an example, the annual tuition fee for a doctoral degree is only about 8,847.60 NZD, but students are required to reside within New Zealand *(Source: University of Auckland: Doctoral Fees 2026)*.

(2) Policy Recommendations:

- **Emphasize the feasibility of "implementation"** : In the application, demonstrate a plan for utilizing local research resources in New Zealand.

Mentors tend to prefer admitting students with high resilience who can stay on campus stably to participate in experiments.

- **Timeline:** Rolling applications at any time.
- **Core Strategy:** New Zealand is very pragmatic. Mentors hope to see that you can independently manage projects, and it is recommended to attach a detailed feasibility report in the prospecting letter to prove that your project can be implemented under the New Zealand environment or resources.
- **Background Requirements:** IELTS requirements are usually 6.5 – 7.0, and the requirements for direct doctoral admission for undergraduates are slightly more lenient than those in Australia, but a strong motivation for independent research is required.

6.7.4 Hong Kong, China

(1) Policy Direction:

The 2026/27 HKPFS (PhD Fellowship Scheme) competition remains fierce. In addition to the monthly stipend, awardees will also receive an additional HK$40,000 cash prize provided by universities such as HKU *(Source: HKU: HKPFS 2026/27 Admission Guidance)*.

(2) Policy Recommendations:

- **Concurrent Application:** Both the initial RGC application and the university's full application must be completed by December 1 *(Source: UGC: HKPFS Apply 2026)*.
- **Core Strategy:** Hardware Background "Rolled" to the Extreme. 90% of the top three admitted students in Hong Kong are from 985 universities or prestigious overseas institutions. If you want to apply for HKPFS, your GPA must be close to full marks, and you must have provincial-level or higher awards or top-tier journal papers.
- **Soft background:** Preference for the "high-output" type. IELTS 7.0 is a hard requirement, and some majors even start to require GRE/GMAT.

6.7.5 Macao, China

(1) Policy Direction:

Macao's institutions of higher learning are strengthening scientific research collaboration with the Hengqin Guangdong–Macao In–Depth Cooperation Zone.

(2) Policy Recommendations:

- **Aligned with the Greater Bay Area Policy**: If the research topic involves big health, modern finance, or high–tech, the likelihood of admission will increase significantly.
- **Core Strategy:** IELTS 6.0/6.5 or CET–6 450+ is eligible to apply. The University of Macau (UM) is very friendly to mainland recommended students (exempted students). If you are eligible for recommended admission, applying to UM will be highly competitive.
- **Soft Background:** In the past two years, the University of Macau has highly valued the background of "National Key Laboratory". If your research direction is in microelectronics, traditional Chinese medicine, or smart cities, you will have a significant advantage in applying.

6.7.6 Ireland

(1) Policy Direction:

In 2026 GOI–IES Scholarship Program will open 60 full scholarship positions, including a €10,000 stipend and full tuition waiver *(Source: HEA: GOI–IES 2026 Call Document)*.

(2) Policy Recommendations:

- **Seize the March Deadline:** The application deadline for Ireland scholarships is usually in mid–March, and you must first obtain an offer from an institution before applying for the government scholarship.
- **Core Strategy:** Industry–University–Research Collaboration. Many doctoral programs in Ireland are sponsored by enterprises (funded by SFI). If your research can be linked to technology companies in Dublin (Google/Intel/Pfizer),

the admission rate and scholarship probability will double.

- **Background Requirements:** IELTS 6.5+, average score 85+, emphasis on internationalization vision and cross-cultural collaboration skills.

6.7.7 Malaysia

(1) Policy Direction:

The 2026-2036 Education Blueprint emphasizes the integration of AI and digital tools. The number of Chinese students has exceeded 33,000 *(Source: MIDA: Education Services Statistics 2026)*.

(2) Strategic Recommendations:

- **Core Strategy:** Friendly to Interdisciplinary Applications . If you want to switch from science and engineering to management or education, Malaysia is an excellent springboard.
- **Background Requirements:** An average score of 80+ and an IELTS score of around 6.0 are sufficient, but in recent years, the requirements for high-quality paper publications have been increasing. It is recommended to highlight the "regional significance" of the research (such as its impact on Southeast Asian economies) in the RP.

6.7.8 Singapore

(1) Policy Direction:

Application deadlines for admission in August 2026 mostly fall between November and December 2025 *(Source: NTU: PhD Admission Criteria 2026)*.

(2) Strategic Recommendations:

- **Prepare a Video Essay:** Universities such as NTU now require the submission of short video presentations. This assesses not only academic

knowledge but also oral English and logical expression skills.

- **Core Strategy:** Combining Academic and Industrial Pursuits. Singaporean universities highly value "practical application scenarios." If you have experience in senior algorithm positions at large companies (such as Tencent, Huawei, Shopee), applying for a PhD in AI or engineering at NTU/NUS is extremely advantageous.
- **Hardcore Indicators:** A GPA of 3.8/4.0 or 90/100 is the standard. Interviews are very hardcore, usually involving multiple rounds of Technical Fundamental, directly assessing algorithmic deduction or coding ability.

6.7.9 US

(1) Policy Direction:

A 2026 report from the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) in the US indicated that due to federal budget cuts, stipends for doctoral students at some public universities have been reduced, further increasing the difficulty of competing for full scholarships *(Source: CGS: 2026 Federal Policy Agenda)*.

(2) Policy Recommendations:

- **Diverse Funding Channels:** In addition to applying for school fellowships, one should actively seek special fund support from the NSF or industry associations.
- **"Cultural Fit" in Interviews:** US high school professors highly value applicants' contributions to the laboratory team culture. It is recommended to clearly mention in the SOP how to participate in interdisciplinary collaboration.
- **Core Strategy:** Holistic Review (Comprehensive Review). A GPA of 3.8+ is the ticket, but what determines admission is your research match degree. The US tends to admit doctoral students with "potential", so your statement of purpose (SOP) should tell a good story about your research logic and long-term motivation.
- **Soft Background:** Internships at top-tier companies or summer research at prestigious overseas universities are highly advantageous.

- **Guide to Avoiding Pitfalls:** Don't blindly trust the GRE. Many R1 universities have made it optional, but if your background is average, a GRE score of 330+ is still a remedial measure.

6.7.10 Canada

(1) Policy Direction:

Great news: Starting from January 1, 2026, **master's and doctoral students are exempt from the Federal Learning (FL) license cap (Cap Exemption)**, and do not need to submit a provincial attestation letter (PAL). Doctoral applications can also enjoy a 14-day expedited approval channel *(Source: Canada.ca: 2026 International Student Cap Allocations)*.

(2) Policy Recommendations:

- **Strategy Core: First secure a supervisor,** then obtain admission. Most Gabor applications must obtain the supervisor's "Initial Interest" before online application. It is recommended to complete targeted supervisor outreach between September and October.
- **Soft Background:** Preference for "Research-based Master". If you are a direct Ph.D. applicant, your undergraduate research experience must cover a complete research cycle.
- **Guide to Avoiding Pitfalls**: Pay attention to the tuition waiver policy. Some provinces (such as Ontario) have special tuition fee reductions for doctoral students, so be sure to clarify the composition of Funding before applying.

6.7.11 Europe

(1) Policy Direction:

The DAAD 2026 Scholarship in Germany places greater emphasis on the alignment between the research proposal and the expertise of the German supervisor, and the degree completion time must be within the past 6 years *(Source: DAAD: Scholarship*

Database 2026).

(2) Policy Recommendations:

- **Pay attention to the dynamic update of the "position system" :** Check the Vacancy page of the institution daily, as European doctoral admissions are essentially "talent recruitment".
- **Core Strategy:** Treat applying for a PhD as "job hunting" . You don't need to wait for the application season, but instead keep an eye on the Vacancies/Positions on the school's official website every day.
- **Background Requirements**: Place extreme emphasis on **the suitability of the master's thesis topic**. For example, German supervisors do not care how high your TOEFL score is (as long as it is sufficient), but rather what models you used in your master's thesis and what experimental equipment you are familiar with (such as the Siemens protocol mentioned earlier). Many European continental institutions also tend to favor candidates with domestic or overseas educational experience.
- **Hardcore Indicator:** Many European universities and colleges mandate that applicants must hold a master's degree to apply for a PhD.

Chapter 7: Guide to Overseas Ph.D. Application Experience

Important Note: The admission rates, case backgrounds, and application strategies mentioned below are based on statistical analysis of historical data and do not represent the probability of success for any individual application. PhD admission outcomes are affected by multiple uncontrollable factors, including the number of available places in a given year, supervisors' funding availability, and the level of competition among applicants. Historical data does not constitute any form of commitment or guarantee regarding future outcomes.

7.1 Breakdown of Overseas Ph.D. Application Processes by Region

7.1.1 United Kingdom

(1) School System and Enrollment Time

The doctoral program in the United Kingdom typically lasts 3–4 years on a full-time basis. Most regions implement year-round rolling admissions, but scholarship applications have clear deadlines. The main entry time is from September to October each year (autumn entry), and some programs offer an entry option in January (spring entry).

(2) Academic Qualification Requirements

- Educational Background: Applicants are usually required to hold a master's degree (Merit or Distinction level) in a relevant discipline, or a bachelor's degree with a 2:1 honors classification (Upper Second Class) or above; some top universities (such as Cambridge) require a first-class honors degree (First Class) or high 2:1.
- Proof of research ability: You need to submit your master's thesis grade or proof of an independent research project. Some institutions accept a 2:2 grade but require relevant work experience.

(3) Language proficiency requirements

➢ IELTS: The overall score is usually required to be 6.5 – 7.5, with each individual component not less than 6.0 (specific requirements vary by major).

➢ TOEFL iBT: The total score requirement is generally 90–100 points or above

➢ Language exemption criteria: Degree holders from English-speaking countries or those who have completed their degrees in English-speaking countries may apply for exemption

(4) Application Process and Key Points in Time

➢ 12–15 months ago (summer before enrollment):

- Begin researching potential mentors and projects
- Prepare for language exams
- Preliminary conceptualization of the research plan

➢ 10–12 months ago (autumn before enrollment):

- Determine the list of target institutions
- Contact potential supervisors (prospecting)
- Write a Research Proposal

➢ 8–10 months ago (winter before enrollment):

- Submit an early project application
- Apply for major scholarships (such as UKRI)

➢ Deadline for Key Scholarships:

Durham University: February 6, 2026 (online application and material submission must be completed before this date)

Queen Mary University of London: January 28, 2026 (including scholarship application)

Imperial College London: Some programs are for November 3, 2025 (for January/February 2026 entry)

(5) List of Application Materials

1. Academic transcripts and degree certificates (certified translation required)
2. Research Proposal (usually 2000–3000 words)
3. Personal Statement
4. Academic CV
5. Two to three academic recommendation letters
6. Proof of English Language Proficiency
7. Writing Sample (required for some majors)
8. Proof of funds or scholarship application materials

(6) Application Method

Applications are submitted online through the official application portals of each university, with application fees typically ranging from £50 to £100. Some programs (such as Oxbridge) require preliminary approval from a supervisor before a formal application can be made.

7.1.2 Ireland

(1) School System and Enrollment Time

The doctoral program in Ireland typically lasts 3–5 years on a full-time basis, with a dual intake system: two admission opportunities each year in March and September. Taking the University of Galway as an example, the application deadline for the March 2026 intake is December 31, 2025, and the deadline for the September intake is May 1, 2026.

(2) Academic Qualification Requirements

- Educational Requirements: Must hold a master's degree in a relevant discipline, with a grade of 2:1 Honours (Second Class Honours, Grade 1) or equivalent; candidates with a background in Research Masters are preferred
- Academic Requirements: Undergraduate programs typically require a 2:1

Honours Degree (Trinity College Dublin standard), while doctoral applicants generally need to hold a master's degree

- Direct admission: Holders of a first-class honors degree at the undergraduate level can directly apply for a doctoral program on the basis of demonstrating strong research capabilities.

(3) Language proficiency requirements

- IELTS: Overall score 6.5 – 7.0, with no individual band score below 6.0 (Trinity College Dublin requirement)
- TOEFL: Internet-based test score of 88-100 or above
- Exemption Conditions: Holders of degrees from English-speaking countries are eligible for exemption, and recent graduates from *Chinese-Foreign Cooperation in Running Schools* cooperative universities (such as XJTLU, UNNC) may also apply for exemption

(4) Application Process

PhD applications in Ireland emphasize research fit, and the process is relatively flexible:

1. Determine the research direction: clarify research interests and career goals
2. Contacting potential supervisors for rapport-building: It is essential to communicate with potential supervisors in advance and obtain their approval, which is the key to a successful application.
3. Prepare a research plan: Write a detailed research proposal, including research questions, methodology, and literature review
4. Submit applications online: Submit through each university's application system (such as Trinity's online system, University of Galway's CRM system)
5. Interview and Assessment: Applicants who pass the initial screening are required to participate in an interview (usually online)
6. Admission and Scholarship Application: Apply for relevant funding after receiving admission
7. Application Deadline:

Government of Ireland International Education Scholarship (GOI-IES): Applications

open on January 29, 2026, with the deadline to be confirmed (usually March – April in previous years)

University of Galway Hardiman Scholarship: Deadline February 6, 2026

Maynooth University John & Pat Hume Doctoral Awards: Application deadline is April 17, 2025 (for the 2025/26 academic year)

(5) List of Application Materials

1. Undergraduate and master's transcripts and degree certificates
2. Research Proposal
3. Personal Statement/Motivation Letter
4. Curriculum Vitae (CV)
5. Two academic recommendation letters
6. Proof of English Language Proficiency
7. Copy of passport
8. Mentor Recognition Certificate (required by some schools)

(6) Scholarships and Financial Aid

- GOI–IES: 60 places per year, open to non–EU students, offering €10,000 living expenses + full tuition fee waiver
- Hardiman PhD Scholarships: Offered by the University of Galway, with € 25,000 annual living expenses + full tuition waiver, for a 4–year program

7.1.3 Australia

(1) School System and Enrollment Time

The duration of a doctoral program in Australia is typically 3 – 4 years of full – time study (extendable up to a maximum of 6 years), with the academic year usually starting in February and ending in November, and a vacation period from June to July. Although most programs operate on a year – round application acceptance system, scholarship applications have strict rounds.

(2) Academic Qualification Requirements

Educational background: Must hold a Master by Research degree or an Honours Bachelor's degree (Honours Class IIA or higher, i.e., above 75%); some courses accept outstanding coursework master's degree holders but require proof of research ability (e.g., thesis accounting for more than 25% of credits)

Research Readiness: Research papers, dissertations, or research project certificates need to be submitted

Direct Assessment: Universities such as UNSW provide the HDR Self-Assessment Tool for applicants to pre-assess their eligibility

(3) Language proficiency requirements

IELTS: Overall score 6.5 – 7.0, with no individual band score below 6.0 (the Faculty of Law at the University of Sydney requires an overall score of 7.0 and individual band scores of 6.0)

TOEFL iBT: Total score 79-100, with minimum requirements for individual sections

PTE Academic: Overall Score 58-65

(4) Application Process and Timeline

The application for a doctoral degree in Australia follows the "find a supervisor first" model:

1. Finding a supervisor (10-12 months before enrollment): Browse the supervisor's research interests, and send a research proposal and CV for supervisor prospecting
2. Prepare materials (8-10 months before enrollment): transcripts, research plans, language test scores, etc.
3. Official Application (6-8 months before enrollment): Submit an online application through the university's official website, with the scholarship application proceeding concurrently with the admission application
4. Waiting for Results: The review period is usually 6-12 weeks
5. Visa Application: After receiving an offer, apply for a Subclass 500 student visa, providing COE, financial proof, and OSHC insurance

Key Dates for Scholarships (Taking the University of Melbourne as an Example):

Round 1: Deadline is October 31, 2025 (results to be announced in December)

Round 2: Deadline January 31, 2026 (results announced in March)

Round 3: Due on May 15, 2026 (results to be announced in July)

Australian National University:

Round 1: August 31, 2024 (for admission in 2025, the corresponding date in 2026 should be referred to)

Round 2: April 15, 2025 (subject to reference of the corresponding date in 2026)

(5) List of Application Materials

1. Undergraduate and master's transcripts, degree certificates
2. Research Proposal (usually a 300–500 word overview)
3. Academic Curriculum Vitae (CV), including research experience and publication records
4. Proof of English Language Proficiency
5. Two academic recommendation letters
6. Supervisor Endorsement
7. Sample of thesis or research project (if any)
8. Copy of passport

(6) Scholarships and Financial Aid

- Research Training Program (RTP): Government-funded, including tuition fee waiver + approximately AUD $38,500 living expenses per year
- University of Melbourne Graduate Research Scholarship: Covers full tuition fees + living expenses of $39,500 per year + relocation allowance of $2,000 – $3,000 + Overseas Student Health Cover *(Source: PhD Study in Australia 2026)*.

7.1.4 New Zealand

(1) School System and Enrollment Time

The doctoral program in New Zealand typically lasts 3–4 years on a full-time basis, with the academic year starting in February and ending in November, and June–July being the vacation months. The main intake times are February (First Semester) and July (Second Semester).

(2) Academic Qualification Requirements

- Educational Background: Must hold a research-based master's degree (Master's degree with significant research component, i.e., thesis accounting for more than 25%) or an honors bachelor's degree (Second Class, First Division or above, equivalent to B+ or 75%)
- Research Experience: Must complete a thesis/research project equivalent to one year of full-time study
- Grade Requirement: The minimum grade requirement is Second Class First Division (B+ or 75%)

(3) Language proficiency requirements

- IELTS: Overall score 6.5 – 7.0, with no individual band score below 6.0 (AUT requirement)
- TOEFL iBT, PTE Academic, Cambridge English, etc. are also widely accepted
- Exemption Conditions: Holders of degrees from English-speaking countries may be exempted

(4) Application Process and Timeline

Step 1: Confirm eligibility (12–18 months before enrollment)

- Check if your academic qualifications meet the standards for a research master's degree or an honors bachelor's degree

Step 2: Find a Mentor (Key Step)

- Browse the profiles of tutors from universities such as the University of Waikato and contact potential tutors
- A formal application can only be submitted after receiving a written invitation (Invitation to Apply) from the supervisor

Step 3: Prepare materials

- Research Proposal
- Transcript, Degree Certificate
- Contact information for two academic referees
- CV and Publication Record

Step 4: Online Application

- Submit through the official school system (e.g., University of Auckland, AUT, etc.)
- Submit at least 3 months before the expected start date (AUT requirement: for February intake, the research plan must be submitted by December 15 of the previous year)

(5) List of Application Materials

1. Academic Transcript and Degree Certificate (to be certified)
2. Research Proposal
3. Statement of Intent for Personal Research
4. Curriculum Vitae (CV)
5. Detailed contact information of two academic referees (the referees will be contacted by the school)
6. Proof of English Language Proficiency
7. Copy of passport
8. Proof of funds or intention to apply for a scholarship

(6) Tuition Fees and Scholarships

➢ Tuition fees: International doctoral students typically pay the same tuition fees as local students, approximately NZD $6,000 – 9,000 per year (depending on the major)

➢ Scholarships: Universities offer Doctoral Scholarships, which usually include tuition fee waiver + an annual living allowance of NZD $25,000 – 30,000 *(Source: The Ultimate Guide to Studying in New Zealand 2026).*

7.1.5 Singapore

(1) School System and Enrollment Time

The doctoral program in Singapore typically has a 4-year full-time duration (some programs range from 3 to 5 years), with the main intake in August (autumn) each year, and some programs offering intake in January (spring).

(2) Academic Qualification Requirements

- Educational Background: Must hold a Bachelor's degree (Honours degree, at least Upper Second Class) or a Master's degree in a relevant field; some programs accept outstanding undergraduate graduates to apply directly
- Academic Achievements: NTU Business School requires excellent undergraduate academic performance and outstanding research potential

(3) Language proficiency requirements

- IELTS: Overall score 6.5 – 7.0 (Individual requirements vary by major)
- TOEFL iBT: Usually requires a score of 100 or above
- Exemption: Holders of degrees from English-speaking countries are exempt

(4) Application Process and Key Dates (Taking NTU as an Example)

Application Rounds and Deadlines (Admission in August 2026):

- NTU Research Scholarship: November 3, 2025 – January 31, 2026
- Nanyang President's Graduate Scholarship (NPGS): November 3, 2025 – December 31, 2025 (Recommended Application)
- Self-financed or externally funded: By January 31, 2026

Trial Process:

- Application review usually starts in January
- Interview Notice: Between February and May
- Admission results: Announced between February and May
- Student Pass Application: Initiated after Admission

(5) List of Application Materials

1. Undergraduate and master's transcripts and degree certificates
2. Research Proposal
3. Personal Statement
4. Curriculum Vitae (CV)
5. Two academic recommendation letters (submitted directly by the recommenders)
6. Proof of English Language Proficiency
7. GRE/GMAT scores (required by some business schools)
8. Copy of passport

(6) Scholarship

- NTU Research Scholarship: Covers full tuition fees + monthly living allowance of SGD $2,700 – 3,200 (increased after passing QE)
- NPGS: Higher Allowance + Conference Travel Support

7.1.6 Hong Kong, China

(1) School System and Enrollment Time

The doctoral program in Hong Kong typically lasts 3–4 years on a full-time basis (4 years for direct entry from undergraduate and 3 years for entry with a master's degree). The main intake is in September (autumn), and some programs offer entry in January (spring).

(2) Academic Qualification Requirements

- Educational Background: Must hold a master's degree from an accredited university; or a first-class honors bachelor's degree (direct entry to doctoral program from undergraduate)
- Grade Requirements: Undergraduate grades typically must reach 3.0/4.0 or

above, or an equivalent level

- Special Requirements: Some majors require GRE/GMAT (e.g., the doctoral program at CUHKSZ)

(3) Language proficiency requirements

- IELTS: Overall score 6.5 – 7.0, with no individual band score below 5.5 – 6.0 (the School of Law at City University may require 7.0)
- TOEFL iBT: Usually requires a score of 79–100
- Exemption: Holders of degrees taught in English are exempt

(4) Application Process and Key Dates

Application Channel:

1. Hong Kong PhD Fellowship Scheme (HKPFS): Established by the Research Grants Council (RGC), it is open to outstanding students worldwide
2. Apply directly to universities: Apply through each university's online system

HKPFS 2026/27 Key Dates:

- First-round application (RGC system): closes at 12:00 noon on December 1, 2025 (Hong Kong time)
- Complete Application (University System): Submit by 11:59 PM on December 1, 2025, to the selected university
- Interview: December 2025 – March 2026
- Results Announcement: March – May 2026

Direct application deadlines for each university (for September 2026 entry):

- Lingnan University：
- Main Round: November 1, 2025 – January 16, 2026
- 1st Clearing Round: January 17 – April 30, 2026 (subject to availability)
- 2nd Clearing Round: May 1 – August 31, 2026 (for entry in January 2027)
- City University of Hong Kong (CityUHK): Usually synchronized with HKPFS,

i.e., the deadline is December 1

- HKMU (Hong Kong Metropolitan University):
- 2026 Fall Enrollment (Full-time): November 1, 2025 – March 31, 2026

(5) List of Application Materials

1. Undergraduate and master's transcripts, degree certificates (certification required)
2. Research Proposal
3. Personal Statement/Motivation Letter
4. Curriculum Vitae (CV)
5. Two to three academic recommendation letters
6. Proof of English Language Proficiency
7. GRE/GMAT scores (required for some majors)
8. Writing Sample (for some humanities and social sciences majors)
9. HKPFS Reference Number (if applicable)

(6) Scholarship

➢ HKPFS: Provides an annual subsidy of HK$340,800 (approx. US$43,690) + HK$14,200 for conference travel expenses, with a maximum funding period of 3 years

➢ University Postgraduate Scholarships: For example, Lingnan offers HK$19,280 per month (to be increased to HK$19,660 after candidate confirmation)

7.1.7 Macao, China

(1) School System and Enrollment Time

The doctoral program in Macau usually lasts 4 years for full-time study (some programs range from 3 to 6 years). Universities such as the University of Macau mainly offer admission in August (fall), and some programs have spring admission.

(2) Academic Qualification Requirements

- Educational Background: Must hold a master's degree or an equivalent qualification recognized by the university; for direct doctoral programs from undergraduate, must hold a bachelor's degree with excellent academic performance and demonstrate strong research capabilities
- Special Channel: MUST (Macau University of Science and Technology) 2026/27 New Direct PhD Channel for Undergraduates, Open to Outstanding Fresh Graduates from the World's Top 200 Universities.

(3) Language proficiency requirements

- IELTS: Overall score of 6.0 or above, with no individual band score below 5.5 (required by the School of Business, University of Macau)
- TOEFL: 550 or above for paper-based test, 80 or above for internet-based test
- CET-4 and CET-6: Some programs accept CET-6 scores (e.g., City University of Macau)

(4) Application Process and Key Dates

University of Macau 2026/27 Application Timeline:

- Application Open: Open
- Application Deadline: March 13, 2026 (Second Round)
- Scholarship Deadline: Application deadline for UM PhD Scholarship and Teaching Assistant positions is January 15, 2026
- School Start Date: August 2026

Macau University of Science and Technology (MUST) 2026/27:

- The undergraduate direct doctoral program covers majors such as Earth and Planetary Sciences, Artificial Intelligence, Tourism Management, and Law

(5) List of Application Materials

1. ID card/passport and proof of residence
2. Recent color photo

3. Undergraduate and master's graduation certificates, degree certificates, and transcripts

4. Electronic Registration Record of Academic Credentials (for Mainland graduates) or Academic Credential Certification (for overseas graduates) issued by the Ministry of Education

5. Certificate of Enrollment (Fresh Graduate)

6. Proof of English Proficiency

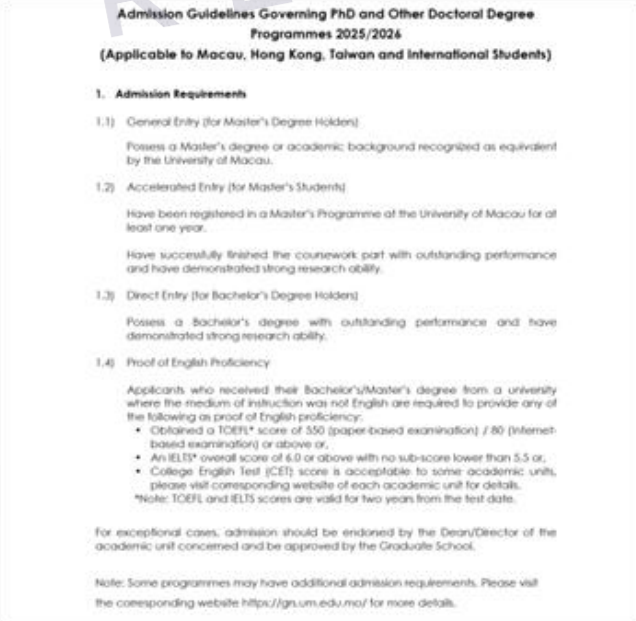
7. Email addresses of two recommenders (one must be an academic recommender)

8. Research Proposal (within 15 pages or less than 1MB)

9. Personal Academic Resume

(6) Scholarship

- UM PhD Scholarship: MOP 20,000 per month, up to 4 years
- UM PhD Teaching Research Assistant: Monthly allowance starting from MOP 12,500 or equivalent to the average tuition fee
- MUST Scholarships: Depending on the project, usually include tuition waiver + living allowance



Admission Guidelines Governing PhD and Other Doctoral Degree Programmes 2025/2026

(Applicable to Macau, Hong Kong, Taiwan and International Students)

1. Admission Requirements

1.1) General Entry (for Master's Degree Holders)

Possess a Master's degree or academic background recognized as equivalent by the University of Macau.

1.2) Accelerated Entry (for Master's Students)

Have been registered in a Master's Programme at the University of Macau for at least one year.

Have successfully finished the coursework part with outstanding performance and have demonstrated strong research ability.

1.3) Direct Entry (for Bachelor's Degree Holders)

Possess a Bachelor's degree with outstanding performance and have demonstrated strong research ability.

1.4) Proof of English Proficiency

Applicants who received their Bachelor's/Master's degree from a university where the medium of instruction was not English are required to provide any of the following as proof of English proficiency:

- Obtained a TOEFL* score of 550 (paper-based examination) / 80 (Internet-based examination) or above or,
- An IELTS* overall score of 6.0 or above with no sub-score lower than 5.5 or,
- College English Test (CET) score is acceptable to some academic units, please visit corresponding website of each academic unit for details.

*Note: TOEFL and IELTS scores are valid for two years from the test date.

For exceptional cases, admission should be endorsed by the Dean/Director of the academic unit concerned and be approved by the Graduate School.

Note: Some programmes may have additional admission requirements. Please visit the corresponding website https://grs.um.edu.mo/ for more details.

7.1.8 Chinese-Foreign Cooperation in Running Schools

(1) Project Types and Characteristics

Chinese-Foreign Cooperation in Running Schools are mainly divided into two categories :

1. Chinese-Foreign Cooperation in Running Schools cooperative universities with independent legal person status: such as The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shenzhen, New York University Shanghai, Duke Kunshan University, Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University, etc.
2. Joint training programs of non-independent legal entities: awarding dual degrees or single degrees through cooperation between Chinese and foreign universities

(2) Academic System and Enrollment Time

It is usually 4 years of full-time study (direct PhD from undergraduate) or 3-4 years (starting from master's degree). Taking CUHK-Shenzhen as an example, the application period for admission in 2026 is from November 1, 2025, to April 15, 2026.

(3) Academic Qualification Requirements (Taking CUHK-Shenzhen as an example)

- Educational Requirements: Hold a bachelor's degree from an accredited university with a grade no lower than "B" (GPA 3.0/4.0 or 80/100); or hold a master's degree
- Standardized Tests: GRE General or GMAT scores (for some programs) are required to be submitted
- Academic Potential: Must demonstrate the ability to engage in high-level research

(4) Language Proficiency Requirements

- IELTS: Overall score 6.5 – 7.0 (e.g., XJTLU requires 6.5 with a minimum of 6.0 in each component; some programs require 7.0)
- TOEFL iBT: Usually requires 80-100 points
- Waiver Conditions: Those who have completed a degree in an English-

speaking country may be eligible for a waiver (XJTLU waives the requirement for graduates from specific *Chinese-Foreign Cooperation in Running Schools* cooperative universities).

(5) Application Process and Key Dates

Taking CUHK-Shenzhen's 2026 admission as an example:

- Application Open: November 1, 2025
- Application Deadline: April 15, 2026
- Tuition fee: RMB 140,000/year
- Funding: Tuition waiver + Teaching Assistant stipend (up to RMB 10,000 per month, pre-tax)

Take Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University (XJTLU) as an example:

- Application Method: Applications are accepted throughout the year, but scholarship positions are on a first-come, first-served basis
- Degree Award: Doctoral degree awarded by the University of Liverpool, United Kingdom
- Tuition fee: RMB 99,000/year (fully self-funded), scholarships can cover 50%-100% of tuition fees
- Features: Provides opportunities for short-term research visits to the University of Liverpool in the United Kingdom

(6) Chinese Government Scholarship (China Studies Program)

- Funding items: tuition fees, living expenses, international travel expenses
- Application Deadline: February 28, 2026
- Applicants: Currently enrolled doctoral students (joint training) at foreign universities or those applying for a Chinese doctoral degree
- Partner Institutions: Including 18 top universities such as Sun Yat-sen University

(7) List of Application Materials

1. Bachelor's/Master's degree certificates, graduation certificates, and

certified copies

2. Official Transcript and Verification Report
3. English Language Proficiency (IELTS/TOEFL/GMAT/GRE)
4. Contact information of at least two referees
5. Personal Statement
6. Curriculum Vitae (CV)
7. Writing Sample (recommended to provide)
8. Other supporting materials (publication records, award certificates, etc.)

7.2 Application Strategy Recommendations for Each Region

(1) Application Time Planning Recommendations

1. 12–18 months in advance: Determine the research direction, prepare for language exams, and screen target supervisors
2. 6–12 months in advance: Complete networking, write a research plan, and prepare application materials
3. 3–6 months in advance: submit applications, prepare for interviews, and apply for scholarships

(2) Networking Strategy

- Commonwealth countries (United Kingdom, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand): Networking is crucial. It is recommended to contact the supervisor 2–3 months before the formal application, attaching a research plan and CV.
- Hong Kong, China and Singapore: HKPFS and NPGS applicants are required to complete communication with their supervisors before the deadline
- Chinese-Foreign Cooperation in Running Schools: Tutor matching is relatively flexible, but pre-communication can improve the success rate

(3) Key Points of Scholarship Application

- Round awareness: Most scholarships (UKRI, ANU, Melbourne, HKPFS) have clear application rounds, with the first round having a higher success rate
- Automatic Review: Most scholarships in Australia do not require a separate application and are automatically reviewed along with the admission application
- External Funding: Actively apply for external funding such as CSC (China), government scholarships (e.g., GOI–IES), etc.

7.3 Overview of Application Timelines by Region

7.3.1 United Kingdom

(1) Overview of Application Timeline

Doctoral applications in the United Kingdom are mainly divided into autumn entry (September/October) and spring entry (January), with autumn being the mainstream admission season. Timeline for autumn entry in 2026 (September 2026 Entry):

Time Node	Application Items	Remarks
September – November 2025	Application Open Period	Most universities are open for applications, and it is recommended to submit as early as possible
December 2025 – February 2026	application peak period	Scholarship application deadlines are usually earlier
March – June 2026	Main Deadline	Application for Closing Most Courses
June – August 2026	Supplementary Enrollment Phase	Only available for under-subscribed courses, limited spots

Key Deadline:

- University of Oxford/University of Cambridge: Graduate applications typically close between December 2025 and March 2026, varying by program
- University of Edinburgh: The application deadline for September 2026 entry is May 29, 2026; for January 2027 entry, it is September 30, 2026
- University of Manchester: The application deadline for internal scholarships is January 19, 2026; the application deadline for self-funded applications is June 30, 2026
- Imperial College London President's PhD Scholarship: Round 1 on November 3, 2025, Round 2 on January 12, 2026, Round 3 on March 2, 2026

(2) Important Reminder

- Rolling Admission Mechanism: Most doctoral programs in the United Kingdom adopt Rolling Admission. It is recommended to submit applications by November – December 2025 to compete for scholarships.
- Scholarship deadline: The application deadline for most scholarships is 2 to 3 months earlier than that for the course application.
- Visa reservation time: After obtaining the CAS, at least 3 weeks of visa processing time must be reserved.

(3) Application Timeline for Fall 2026 Enrollment:

June – August 2025: Determine objectives and prepare materials

- Determine the research direction, target institutions, and supervisors: Based on academic background and future research interests, determine the research direction, and search for corresponding institutions and supervisors, with a focus on the supervisors' research achievements and recent projects;
- Language Exams: Prepare for language exams according to the application requirements of the target institution/major. It is recommended to achieve an IELTS score of 6.5+ (higher scores are required for liberal arts majors);
- Application materials preparation: Bachelor's and Master's graduation certificates, degree certificates, transcripts, award certificates, academic papers, etc.;

September – November 2025: Preparation for networking

- Reaching out to potential supervisors: Based on the target supervisor, write a prospecting letter to inquire about the admission plan and express the intention to apply; PS: Reaching out to potential supervisors is a continuous task, and it can still be continued after January of the following year to seek application opportunities;
- Write a research plan: Based on the research direction, further define the research topic, write an outline for the research plan, and make detailed revisions according to the research direction of the supervisor with whom you have communicated;
- Prepare documentation: Personal Statement (PS), Curriculum Vitae (CV), Recommendation Letter (RL), and other application materials required by the school, and prepare to submit them;

December 2025 to January 2026: Official Application and Scholarship Application

- Submit Application: Submit applications to institutions based on the responses from the preliminary contact;
- Scholarship Application: The application deadlines for scholarships at most UK institutions are around January. The CSC scholarship application opens on March 10 and closes on April 1, and students need to prepare and submit scholarship application materials as required within the specified time frame;

February – May 2026: Waiting for Results and Interview Preparation

- Interview Preparation: After submitting your application, prepare for the interview in advance, review your professional knowledge, and once you receive the interview notice, you can prepare your PPT and conduct mock interviews in advance; language expression, logic, mastery of professional knowledge, future planning, etc., may all affect the interview outcome;
- Wait for results: Patiently wait for the application results. Generally, institutions will issue admission notices one after another from February to May. During this period, maintain communication with the institution's admissions office or supervisor to stay informed of the application progress in a timely manner. If you receive multiple offers, compare the advantages, scholarship opportunities, etc. of different institutions before making a final decision;

June to September 2026 : Visa Application and Pre-departure Preparation

- Visa Application: After receiving the admission notice, prepare the materials

required for the visa application, such as a passport, admission letter, financial proof, visa application form, photo, etc., and then proceed with the student visa application;

- Pre-departure Preparation: Make all necessary preparations for studying in the United Kingdom.

7.3.2 Ireland

(1) Overview of the Application Timeline

Doctoral applications in Ireland usually have two intake batches: March intake and September intake. Taking Trinity College Dublin as an example:

Enrollment Batch	Application Deadline	Scholarship Application Deadline
Enroll in March 2026	December 31, 2025	December 31, 2025
Enroll in September 2026	May 1, 2026	January 15, 2026 (Economics and other majors)

Specific professional differences:

- Business School Doctoral Program: Applications are open until June 30, 2026, but scholarship applications must be submitted by March 31, 2026
- PhD in Economics: Application deadline is April 1, 2026, and scholarship consideration deadline is January 15, 2026
- Doctor of Social Work and Social Policy: March intake deadline is December 31, 2025; September intake deadline is May 1, 2026

(2) Application Key Points

- Contact with potential supervisor: Before applying, you must contact potential supervisors, obtain preliminary consent, and then submit your

application.

- Research Proposal: A detailed research proposal (approximately 2 pages of A4 paper) must be submitted
- Academic Requirements: Usually requires a 2:1 Honours Degree + Excellent Master's Degree

(3) Application Time Planning:

January – March 2025: Determine research direction and target institutions

- During this phase, the refinement of the research area should be completed, and top institutions in Ireland (such as Trinity College Dublin, University College Dublin, etc.) and matching supervisors should be identified.

April – June 2025: Contacting supervisors (networking) and writing research proposals (RP)

- This is the core of the application. It is necessary to thoroughly study the target supervisor's recent papers, write a highly relevant and innovative research plan (RP), and proactively send a prospecting email. The quality of the RP directly determines whether the supervisor is willing to accept you.

July – September 2025: Prepare application materials and submit online application

- Improve your CV and personal statement (PS), and contact referees to obtain recommendation letters. Doctoral applications in Ireland are usually on a rolling basis, but popular programs and scholarships (such as IRC scholarships) have specific deadlines, with the vast majority falling between October and December 2025. 3 At this stage, all application materials must be submitted online.

October 2025 – March 2026: Interviews and Waiting for Results

- If you pass the initial screening, you will receive an interview notice from the supervisor or committee. The interview will focus on assessing the feasibility of your research plan and your academic potential. Meanwhile, the results of the scholarship application will also be announced at this stage.

April – June 2026: Receive Offer and Process Visa

- After receiving the admission notice, confirm acceptance of the offer and start preparing for pre-departure matters such as visa materials, medical

examinations, and booking air tickets.

7.3.3 Australia

(1) Overview of Application Timeline

Australia operates on a three-semester system (February, July, November). Doctoral applications are open year-round, but sufficient time must be reserved to process scholarships and visas. For research degrees, it is necessary to contact supervisors in advance and submit a research plan.

Key point in time in 2026:

Enrollment Batch	Application Open	Application Deadline	Course start time	Scholarship Deadline
February 2026 (S1)	July 2025	October – November 2025	February 17–27, 2026	August – September 2025
July 2026 (S2)	February 2026	March – May 2026	July 27, 2026	March – April 2026
November 2026 (S3)	July 2026	August – September 2026	October – November 2026	Depending on the project

(2) Deadline for key universities:

- Australian National University (ANU):

Enrollment in February: December 15, 2025

Enrollment in July: May 15, 2026

- University of Melbourne:

February Enrollment: November 30, 2025

Enrollment in July: March 31, 2026

- University of Sydney:

Enrollment in February: December 1, 2025

Enrollment in July: May 15, 2026

- Monash University:

Enrollment in February: December 1, 2025

Enrollment in July: May 1, 2026

(3) Application Time Planning:

March – June 2025: Determine the direction and institutions

➢ Define the research direction: Combine your own academic background and interests to focus on a specific research area.

➢ Screen target universities and supervisors: Check the official websites of Australian universities (such as the Group of Eight G8), and look for supervisors whose research interests align with yours. Focus on reading the supervisor's recent published papers to understand their research trends.

➢ Prepare basic materials: Start organizing basic documents such as personal academic curriculum vitae (CV), transcripts, degree certificates, etc.

July – September 2025: Initiate networking and language preparation

➢ Write and send prospecting emails: This is a crucial step towards a successful application. Based on a deep understanding of the supervisor's research, write personalized and high-quality prospecting emails to express a strong desire to join their research group. It is recommended to cast a wide net while focusing on following up with supervisors who respond positively.

➢ Take a language test, such as IELTS or TOEFL, and ensure that your score meets the minimum requirements of your target institution. It is recommended to complete the test before this stage to allow time for retaking it.

October – December 2025: Write research plans and refine application materials

➢ Write a Research Proposal (RP): Refine your research proposal based on the supervisor's feedback. The RP is the core material for assessing your research potential and must be logically rigorous and clearly targeted.

- Prepare recommendation letters: Contact your undergraduate or graduate supervisor or professor, communicate in advance, and invite them to write a recommendation letter for you.
- Prepare a Personal Statement: Elaborate on your academic background, research interests, motivation for application, and future plans.

January – April 2026: Submit application and wait for results

- Online Application Submission: After the application system of the target institution opens, submit all materials in a timely manner. The application deadline for admission in July (26Fall) is usually from April to May 2026, but some popular programs or scholarships may have earlier deadlines. Be sure to refer to the official website for accurate information.
- Prepare for the interview: Some institutions or supervisors may arrange online interviews to assess your research capabilities and communication skills.
- Applying for Scholarships: The Australian government and various universities offer a variety of scholarships (such as the Australia Government Research Training Program – RTP), whose application deadlines are usually earlier than or coincide with the project application deadlines, requiring special attention *(Source: Key Intake Dates for Study in Australia 2026)*.

7.3.4 New Zealand

(1) Overview of the Application Timeline

PhD programs in New Zealand are open for application throughout the year, with the main intake months being February and July. PhD tuition fees are the same as those for local students (approximately NZ$7,000 – 9,000 per year), offering high cost–effectiveness. Applicants need to contact their supervisors in advance and prepare a detailed research plan.

Key point in time in 2026:

Enrollment Batch	Application Proposal	Officially Closed	Result Notification	Scholarship Deadline

	Submission			
Enroll in February 2026	August – September 2025	October – December 2025	November – December 2025	September 1, 2025
Enroll in July 2026	January – February 2026	March – May 2026	April – May 2026	March 1, 2026

(2) Information on key institutions:

- University of Auckland: Rolling admissions, it is recommended to apply 6 months in advance
- University of Otago:
- Scholarship review rounds: March 1, June 1, September 1, November 1
- Doctoral applications are open year-round, but a complete application must be submitted 4–6 weeks before the scholarship review.
- Victoria University of Wellington: February intake closes in November 2025, July intake closes in May 2026

(3) Application Time Planning:

Phase 1: Preparatory Work (March – August 2025)

- Determine the research direction
- Screen target institutions and supervisors
- Enhance research background (GPA recommended 3.0+)
- Prepare for a language test (IELTS 6.5/6.0 or equivalent)

Phase 2: Establishing Contact with Advisors (June – October 2025)

- New Zealand PhD applications must first obtain the supervisor's intention
- Prime Time to Email Mentors: 10 AM on Tuesday
- Cite at least 3 papers by the target supervisor from the past 3 years

Phase 3 : Application Sprint (September 2025 – January 2026)

- Write a Research Plan (RP)
- Prepare application materials (transcripts, recommendation letters, CV, etc.)
- Submit the online application (after receiving a positive response from the supervisor)

Phase 4: Interviews and Admissions (November 2025 – March 2026)

- Prepare for an interview
- Wait for the offer (about 6–8 weeks)
- Confirm the offer within 6 weeks

Phase 5: Visa and Enrollment (March – September 2026)

- Apply for a visa
- Confirm the enrollment date

7.3.5 Singapore

(1) Overview of the Application Timeline

PhD programs in Singapore typically admit students once a year in August, with a relatively long application cycle (from November of the previous year to January of the current year). NUS and NTU are the main choices, with fierce competition, generous scholarships but early deadlines. Key points in time for 2026:

Institution	Enrollment Time	Application Open	Application Deadline	Scholarship Deadline
National University of Singapore (NUS)	August 2026	November 2025	January 15, 2026	Synchronize with the application
Nanyang Technological University (NTU)	August 2026	November 3, 2025	January 31, 2026	January 31, 2026

Singapore Management University (SMU)	August 2026	November 17, 2025	March 19, 2026	Depending on the project

(2) Information on key institutions:

Nanyang Technological University (NTU):

- Application period: November 3, 2025 – January 31, 2026
- Nanyang President's Graduate Scholarship (NPGS): Deadline December 31, 2025
- Interview: December 2025 – January 2026
- Result: February – May 2026

National University of Singapore (NUS):

- Deadline for international students enrolling in August: January 15, 2026 (for some programs)
- Research projects require contacting the supervisor in advance and determining the research topic

Singapore Management University (SMU):

- Enrollment in August: Open on August 1 of the previous year, closes on January 31 of the current year
- January enrollment: opens on February 1 of the same year and closes on June 30

7.3.6 Hong Kong, China

(1) Overview of the Application Timeline

Most doctoral programs in Hong Kong admit students in September, and applicants can receive full funding through the HKPFS (Hong Kong PhD Fellowship Scheme). The application process is divided into the Main Round and the Clearing Round, with the Main Round being the most competitive but offering the most scholarship opportunities. Key points in time for 2026:

Time Node	Application Items	Remarks
September – November 2025	Preparation Phase	Identify a supervisor, write an RP, and prepare language test scores
December 1, 2025	HKPFS and Main Wheel Application Deadline	All eight schools have a unified deadline, with the most scholarship opportunities
December 2025 – February 2026	Interview Stage	Each institution arranges interviews for shortlisted candidates
March 31, 2026	Liquidation Round Application Deadline	Only applicable to understaffed projects, with very few scholarships
February – May 2026	Results Announcement	HKPFS results are usually announced in March–April

(1) The application time for the eight schools is unified:

- The University of Hong Kong (HKU): Main round on December 1, 2025, Liquidation round on March 31, 2026
- The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK): Consistent with the above
- Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST): Same as above
- The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, City University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong Baptist University, Lingnan University, and The Education University of Hong Kong: all follow the RGC unified schedule
- Scholarship Amount: HKPFS provides HK$340,800 per annum (approximately US$43,700) + HK$14,200 conference allowance

(2) Information on Key Universities

- The University of Hong Kong (HKU): Highest QS Ranking, Strong in Medicine, Architecture, Law, and Business
- The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK): Strong Research Capabilities in Humanities, Social Sciences, and Business
- Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST): Leading in Science, Engineering, and Computer Science
- The Hong Kong Polytechnic University: Outstanding in Design, Hotel Management, and Engineering
- City University of Hong Kong: Renowned for Creative Media, Law, and Business
- Hong Kong Baptist University: School of Communication Asia's Top
- Lingnan University: excels in humanities disciplines such as philosophy and sociology
- The Education University of Hong Kong: Asia's Number One in the Field of Education
- Language Requirements: Usually IELTS 6.5 (no individual band score below 6.0), TOEFL 80–90; some business majors require GMAT/GRE

(3) Application Timeline Planning

March – June 2025: Determine the direction and screen mentors

- Refine research directions: Determine specific research topics based on undergraduate and graduate backgrounds
- Screen target mentors: Check the official websites of the eight universities and read at least 5 papers by mentors in the past 5 years
- Language Exam Preparation: IELTS 7.0 or TOEFL 100+ is recommended, as HKPFS is highly competitive and requires high scores
- Academic background enhancement: If you have published papers or participated in research projects, supplement them at this stage

July – September 2025: Networking and Research Proposal Writing

- Initiate networking: Start sending networking emails from July, with the

prime period from August to September

- Write a Research Plan (RP): 3000–5000 words, which should demonstrate innovation and feasibility
- Prepare recommendation letters: Contact 2–3 professors who are familiar with your academic abilities
- Notarized translation of materials: Transcripts, degree certificates, etc., in both Chinese and English versions

October – December 2025: Online Application Submission and Scholarship Application

- Online application system opening: Usually opens in early October
- HKPFS Application Deadline: 12:00 noon, December 1, 2025 (Hong Kong Time)
- Submit the main wheel application: Be sure to complete it 3 – 5 days before the deadline to avoid network congestion
- Scholarship materials: Additional submission of HKPFS personal statement, research plan abstract, etc. is required

January – March 2026: Interviews and Waiting for Results

- Interview Preparation: Review RP content, prepare PPT (10 – 15 minutes), and conduct mock interviews
- Formal Interview: Conducted from January to February, in the form of video interview or on-site interview
- Waiting for results: HKPFS results are usually announced at the end of March, followed by the issuance of university offers
- Select an offer: If you receive multiple admissions, compare the supervisors, research directions, and scholarship situations

April – August 2026: Visa and Pre-departure Preparation

- Confirm the offer and pay the fee: Confirm acceptance and pay the deposit within 4–6 weeks

- Apply for a student visa: Apply to the Hong Kong Immigration Department, with a processing time of 4–6 weeks
- Accommodation Arrangement: Apply for school dormitory or rent a house off-campus
- Pre-trip preparations: Apply for a permit to enter Hong Kong and Macao, purchase insurance, and prepare daily necessities

(Source: Research Grants Council (RGC); Graduate School, The University of Hong Kong; Graduate School, The Chinese University of Hong Kong; Graduate School, The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology; Graduate School, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University; Graduate School, City University of Hong Kong)

7.3.7 Macao, China

(1) Overview of the Application Timeline

The University of Macau (UM) and Macau University of Science and Technology (MUST) are the primary choices, with two intakes per year (August and January). The doctoral program typically lasts 3–4 years, and some majors offer Chinese-language instruction options. Tuition fees are cost-effective, and the scholarship coverage rate is high. Key points in time for 2026:

Enrollment Batch	Application Open	Application Deadline	Scholarship Deadline	Results Announcement
Enroll in August 2026	October 2025	February 28, 2026	January 15, 2026	March – May 2026
Enroll in January 2027	June 2026	August 31, 2026	Not applicable	September – October 2026

(1) Key Information:

University of Macau (UM):

- Application Deadline for Doctoral Scholarship/Teaching and Research Assistantship: January 15, 2026 (Only applicable for admission in the first semester)
- Newly added majors: Smart Grid, Artificial Intelligence and Education, Pharmaceutical Science, etc.
- Application fee: MOP$500 (approx. USD$62)

Macau University of Science and Technology (MUST):

- Applications for the 2026/2027 academic year doctoral program are now open
- New undergraduate direct doctoral program launched, targeting outstanding undergraduates from the world's top 200 universities
- Provide bilingual Chinese–English teaching options

(2) Application Key Points

- Contacting the supervisor: It is highly recommended to contact the supervisor before applying, and then submit the application after obtaining preliminary approval.
- Language Requirements: IELTS 6.0 or TOEFL 80 (some majors taught in Chinese may be exempted)
- Academic Requirements: Master's degree, with a recommended GPA of 3.0+/4.0 or equivalent
- Scholarship Type:
- University of Macau PhD Scholarship: MOP$20,000 per month, up to 4 years
- Teaching Assistant (TA) Allowance: MOP$12,500 – 14,000 per month
- Macau University of Science and Technology Full Scholarship: Covers Tuition + Living Allowance

(3) Application Timeline Planning

March – July 2025: Preliminary Preparation and Direction Determination

- Determine the research area: Combine with the development directions of Macau's industries (such as traditional Chinese medicine, gaming and tourism management, microelectronics, etc.)
- Screening target institutions: University of Macau (comprehensive research-oriented) vs. Macau University of Science and Technology (application-oriented)
- Language Exams: Prepare for IELTS/TOEFL, with a target score of 6.5/90+
- Academic Background Enhancement: Participate in research projects, publish papers, and attend academic conferences

August – October 2025: Networking and Material Preparation

- Contacting Advisors: Starting from August, send prospecting emails with CV and preliminary research interests attached
- Write a research plan: 2000-3000 words, which must align with the supervisor's research direction
- Prepare application materials: undergraduate and graduate transcripts, degree certificates, recommendation letters (2), CV, and PS
- Understand scholarship policies: Read in detail the application requirements for various types of scholarships

October 2025 – January 2026: Online application submission and scholarship application

- Online Application System Opening: The University of Macau usually opens in mid-October
- Scholarship application deadline: January 15, 2026 (applicable only to August intake)
- Complete online application submission: Ensure all materials are complete and pay the application fee
- Follow up on the application status: Regularly log in to the system to check the progress and supplement materials

February – May 2026: Interviews and Admissions

- Interview Notice: Interview invitations will be received from February to March

- Prepare for the interview: review the content of RP, understand the characteristics of Macau institutions, and prepare self-introductions in both Chinese and English
- Waiting for results: Offers will be issued successively from April to May
- Comparative Selection: Consider scholarship amount, supervisor compatibility, and research direction

June – August 2026: Visa and Enrollment Preparation

- Confirm acceptance of offer: Pay tuition deposit
- Apply for a student visa: Apply for a "Special Permission to Stay" from the Macau Public Security Police Force
- Accommodation Arrangement: Apply for on-campus dormitories (limited availability, apply early) or rent off-campus housing
- Pre-trip preparations: Apply for a permit to enter Hong Kong and Macau and Macau visa, and understand the cost of living in Macau

(Source: Graduate School, University of Macau; Graduate School, Macau University of Science and Technology; Higher Education Support Office, Macao; University of Macau PhD Scholarship Information)

7.3.8 Chinese-Foreign Cooperation in Running Schools

(1) Overview of the Application Timeline

Chinese-Foreign Cooperation in Running Schools at the doctoral level approved by the Ministry of Education allow students to obtain a foreign doctoral degree (certifiable by the Service Center for Chinese Scholars Abroad) without going abroad. The program duration is 3-6 years, mostly for on-the-job study with a concentrated teaching model. It is suitable for on-the-job personnel to upgrade their academic qualifications while balancing work and study. The main project enrollment time in 2026:

Project Name	Chinese Institution	Foreign Institution	Application Deadline	School Start Time

Doctor of Agricultural Economics and Management	China Agricultural University	US Cornell University	March 31, 2026	September 2026
Doctor of Public Administration	Tsinghua University	Georgetown University, US	January 15, 2026	August 2026
Doctor of Management	Xi'an Jiaotong University	SKEMA Business School, France	May 31, 2026	September 2026
Doctor of Engineering	Shanghai Jiao Tong University	University of Michigan, US	April 30, 2026	September 2026
Doctor of Innovation Management	University of Chinese Academy of Sciences	Tilburg University, Netherlands	February 28, 2026	September 2026

(1) Teaching Mode:

- Intensive teaching: 1–2 weeks of intensive teaching per month, or 1 month of intensive teaching per quarter
- Teaching during winter and summer vacations: Intensive learning during the winter and summer breaks of universities
- Online–offline combination: Some courses are completed online, while core courses are taught offline

(2) Application Key Points

- Project qualification verification: You must log in to the Ministry of Education's supervision platform for Chinese–Foreign Cooperation in Running Schools to verify whether the project is on the latest approved list
- Degree Certification: After graduation, students will be awarded a doctoral

degree certificate from the foreign institution, which, upon certification by the Overseas Study Service Center of the Ministry of Education, is equivalent in validity to overseas study.

➢ Application Requirements: Usually requires a master's degree + 5 years or more of work experience; management programs require management experience

➢ Tuition fees range from RMB 200,000 to 600,000, payable on an annual basis

Popular Project Types:

- Management DBA: Doctor of Business Administration, suitable for corporate executives
- Education Doctorate (EdD): Doctor of Education, suitable for university teachers and education administrators
- Engineering Doctorate (EngD): A doctorate in engineering, suitable for practitioners in the field of engineering and technology

(3) Application Timeline Planning

March – June 2025: Project Screening and Eligibility Assessment

➢ Query the Ministry of Education's list: Log in to the regulatory platform to verify the project's legitimacy and validity period

➢ Evaluate your own qualifications: Compare with project requirements (years of work experience, management experience, academic background)

➢ Compare multiple programs: Consider the ranking of foreign institutions, professional strength, teaching location, and tuition fees

➢ Contact the Admissions Office: Inquire about specific application requirements, curriculum, and graduation requirements

July – September 2025: Material Preparation and Pre-review

➢ Prepare application materials: master's degree certificate, transcript, work certificate, recommendation letters (2–3), personal statement

➢ Write a research plan: Determine the research direction based on actual work and demonstrate its application value

- Language Preparation: Some programs require IELTS 6.0/TOEFL 80, or passing the in-school English test

Attend the information session: Most programs hold online/offline admission information sessions to learn detailed information

October 2025 – March 2026: Formal Application and Assessment

- Submit online or paper application: Application methods vary for different programs, so pay attention to the differences in deadlines
- Take the entrance exam: including written test (English + professional foundation) and interview
- Comprehensive Assessment: The institution evaluates candidates comprehensively based on their academic background, work experience, and interview performance
- Waiting for admission notice: Results are usually available in 4-6 weeks

April – August 2026: Admission Confirmation and Enrollment Preparation

- Confirm acceptance of admission: Pay the first installment or full amount of tuition fees
- Sign a training agreement: clarify the learning method, graduation requirements, and degree conferral conditions
- Complete enrollment procedures: submit educational credential verification reports, medical examination reports, etc.
- Preparatory work before starting: Read preparatory materials, form study groups, and prepare research tools

From September 2026: On-the-job learning and research

- Complete the course study: Earn the required credits as per the training program
- Conduct doctoral dissertation research: select topics in combination with work practice and regularly report progress
- Participation in academic activities: international exchanges, academic conferences, and enterprise research
- Thesis Defense and Graduation: Obtain the foreign doctoral degree after

passing the defense.

(Source: Ministry of Education Chinese-Foreign Cooperation in Running Schools Regulatory Information Platform; China Agricultural University Sino-U.S. Cooperative Programme; School of Public Policy and Management, Tsinghua University; School of Management, Xi'an Jiaotong University; University of Michigan—Shanghai Jiao Tong University Joint Institute; Sino-Danish College, University of Chinese Academy of Sciences)

7.3.9 Comparison Table of Application Times by Region

To facilitate internal institutional planning, a time comparison table for admission applications in 2026 has been specially formulated:

Region	Earliest opening	Main Wheel Cutoff	Liquidation Round Deadline	Scholarship Deadline	Visa Preparation Period
United Kingdom	September 2025	January – March 2026	June – July 2026	January – March 2026	3 months before the start of school
Ireland	September 2025	December 2025/May 2026	Scroll	January 2026/6 months in advance	3 months before the start of school
Australia	Annual	November 2025/May 2026	August – September 2026	4–6 months in advance	3 months before the start of school
New Zealand	Annual	October – December 2025 / March – May 2026	Scroll	March/June/September/November	2–3 months before the start of school
Singapore	November	January	March 2026	January 2026	2–3 months before

	2025	15–31, 2026			the start of school
Hong Kong	September 1, 2025	December 1, 2025	March 31, 2026	December 1, 2025	3 months before the start of school
Macau	August 2025	January 2, 2026 / March 13, 2026	July 31, 2026	January 15, 2026	2 months before the start of school
Sino– foreign cooperation	October 2025	March – June 2026	Visual Project	Visual Project	No visa required

Special Recommendation:

1. Hong Kong's HKPFS and Singapore's NPGS are the most generous doctoral scholarships in Asia, but their deadlines are extremely early (December 2025), so they need to be prepared for first
2. For G5 universities in the United Kingdom and TCD/UCD in Ireland, it is necessary to contact the supervisor in advance, and it is recommended to reserve a 3–6 month period for networking
3. Applications for Australia and New Zealand can be submitted throughout the year, but scholarship reviews have fixed time points that cannot be missed.
4. Sino–foreign cooperative programs are suitable for working professionals, but it is necessary to pay attention to the latest list approved by the Ministry of Education to avoid enrolling in unregistered programs

7.4 Suggestions for Overseas Doctoral Applications

7.4.1 Precise Networking Strategy: The Core Step in Establishing Academic Connections

(1) Preparatory work for networking: Screening of target professors and background research

The core of networking is to establish an academic connection between the applicant and the supervisor, with the prerequisite of accurately screening supervisors and conducting in-depth research to avoid ineffective communication.

Professors without admission rights should be prioritized for exclusion: Affiliated Professor (affiliated professor, without independent admission rights) and Emeritus Professor (emeritus professor, not admitting students) are directly excluded.

Recommendation on the priority of networking: Senior Lecturer (Commonwealth institutions, combining research and teaching, with strong willingness to recruit) > Assistant Professor (young scholars, with sufficient recruitment quota, focusing on the applicant's potential) > Professor (academic authority, rich in resources but with limited quota and fierce competition) > Associate Professor (with a steady recruitment pace).

Core Dimensions of Tutor Screening:

① Enrollment quota (confirmed through the official website, laboratory homepage, admission announcement, and feedback from senior students);

② Research direction matching (avoid blind networking across fields);

③ Research funding (confirmed through fund projects and paper funding annotations to ensure scientific research and scholarships).

Key points for academic research: Intensively read the supervisor's top journal core papers in the past three years (prioritize submitted/to appear results, aligning with the latest directions); sort out the research context and identify the points of fit between one's own research experience and the supervisor's research topics; distinguish the focus of different academic ranks – senior professors emphasize academic alignment, while young professors emphasize research potential.

(2) Core Guide to Writing Networking Letters

Core Principles: Emphasize academic nature, de-emphasize utilitarianism, and take academic discussion as the entry point. The core content must include three points:

① Sincere academic admiration (based on research and understanding, not empty or vague);

② Research matching elaboration (combined with the supervisor's thesis/project, demonstrating "understanding of the research");

③ Future research ideas (1–2 preliminary ideas in relevant directions, demonstrating capabilities).

Key Points to Avoid Pitfalls: Do not directly ask about scholarships (mention it tactfully after the supervisor shows interest); do not pile up GPA and language scores (reflect them in the CV); do not use templates for mass distribution.

Standard Structure:

① Concise subject (Format: Inquiry about PhD Position in [Research Area] — [Your Name]);

② 3–4 sentences of self-introduction (educational background, core research experience, research direction);

③ Match degree elaboration (combined with specific papers);

④ Core Advantages (focus on 1–2 research experiences, highlighting skills and achievements);

⑤ Clearly state the request (inquire about the enrollment quota for 2026 and request further communication);

⑥ Attachments (only attach the academic CV; RP will be provided as needed).

Communication rhythm: If there is no response to the first email within 2–3 weeks, send a concise follow-up email (supplementing new academic entry points); communication gradually shifts towards academic discussion, with differentiated responses to tutors of different professional titles.

(3) New Trends and Precautions for Networking in 2026

① Caution in sensitive areas: For sensitive STEM fields (such as aerospace, AI, etc.), avoid sensitive keywords, clarify the academic and civilian value of research, and cooperate with background checks;

② Mainstream of online communication: You can proactively propose a 15–20 minute online meeting and prepare key points for communication in advance;

③ Strictly adhere to taboos: Do not mass-send templates, do not exaggerate scientific research capabilities, and do not mention immigration intentions.

7.4.2 Writing the Research Proposal (RP): The Core Key to a Successful Application

(1) Core Principles for RP Writing and Preparatory Work

Core Positioning: Demonstrate scientific research capabilities and potential for critical thinking, and prove the ability to independently conduct doctoral research.

Preparatory Work:

① Follow the requirements of the institution (the length is mainly 2,000 – 3,000 words, and can be streamlined for science and engineering disciplines);

② Communicate with the mentor during the preliminary contact and adjust the framework to meet their needs;

③ Submission in stages: Submit a complete RP after in-depth communication, and submit the RP framework during the initial preliminary contact.

(2) RP Standard Structure and Content Writing Guide

7 General Modules:

① Title and Abstract (the title should be concise, and the abstract should be 200–300 words, including background, problem, method, achievement, and significance);

② Research Background and Literature Review (elaborate on the current situation and gaps, analyze and evaluate the literature, without simply listing);

③ Research questions and objectives (focus on 1–2 core issues, set achievable stage and final goals);

④ Research methods and technical routes (for science and engineering, elaborate on experimental design and tools; for humanities and social sciences, highlight theories and ideas, and mark time nodes on the technical route);

⑤ Significance of the research and expected outcomes (academic + applied value, outcomes quantifiable);

⑥ Ethical considerations (if the experiment involves sensitive data, compliance measures must be specified; if not, briefly mention it);

⑦ References (30–50 articles, high-impact within the last 5 years, with compliant formatting).

Professional differences: science and engineering emphasize experimental feasibility and innovation, while humanities and social sciences emphasize the depth of literature and logic;

Avoiding Pitfalls: Do not choose overly broad topics, do not obscure research methods, and do not overlook institutional differences.

(3) New Trends in RP in 2026

① Bonus points for interdisciplinary perspective (highlighting interdisciplinary innovation and experience);

② Align with policy hotspots (enhance competitiveness by integrating with the scientific research policies of the target country/ institution);

③ Regularization of digital tools (mention the application of AI, Big data, etc. in research and demonstrate relevant skills).

7.4.3 Application Document Optimization: Comprehensive Display of Personal Competitiveness

(1) Core Document Types and Key Writing Points

Core Documents: CV, PS, and recommendation letters, focusing on academic orientation and complementarily showcasing competitiveness.

CV: Highlight research experience and downplay irrelevant content.

Modules: Educational background (in reverse chronological order, indicating GPA and core courses), research experience (STAR, highlighting personal contributions), published papers (indicating status and author order), research skills (aligned with research direction), awards (prioritizing academic ones).

PS: Tell academic stories, not repeat CVs.

Content: Origin of academic interest, core scientific research growth (encountering difficulties, solving them, and reaping rewards), fit with the institution/mentor, doctoral research and career planning (demonstrating stability), with sincere and personalized language.

Recommendation Letter: Prioritize research supervisors (most persuasive), followed

by relevant teaching instructors. Provide comprehensive supporting materials to guide recommenders to highlight research-related qualities and avoid empty praise.

(2) Document Adaptability Adjustment Strategy

University Adaptation: Research universities emphasize research potential, while applied universities emphasize practical abilities; the Commonwealth values concise logic, and the US values individual stories.

Professional Adaptation: Science and engineering disciplines emphasize quantitative achievements and skills, while humanities and social sciences focus on critical thinking and writing.

Scholarship Adaptation: Highlight academic potential and research value, align with selection criteria, and tactfully explain financial needs.

(3) Document Polishing and Review Process

Multi-round review:

① Self-review (logic, authenticity, grammar);

② External review (academic suggestions provided by research mentors, senior students, and optimization of language as needed);

③ Final proofreading (format, word count, and completeness of attachments).

7.4.4 Interview Preparation and Response: The Final Core Level

(1) Interview Types and Key Assessment Focus

Common Types:

① Single-sided (1V1, tutor-led, assessing research capabilities and suitability);

② Group interview (1VN, with faculty professors, assessing comprehensive abilities);

③ Wheel battle (multiple rounds of 1V1, high intensity, assessing adaptability and professionalism).

Core evaluation criteria: academic ability, research potential, communication skills, teamwork, motivation for studying abroad (sincerity and stability).

(2) Interview Full Process Preparation Guide

Pre-research: Thoroughly understand the supervisor's latest achievements and the characteristics of the department, and sort out the core of the RP and potential issues.

Preparation for High-Frequency Questions: Academic (RP core, innovation points, etc.), Motivation (reasons for school/tutor selection, etc.), Behavioral (research challenges, teamwork, etc.), sort out ideas in advance.

Mock Interview: Familiarize with the process, optimize expression, and adapt to interview language.

Material Preparation:For in-person interviews, bring hard copies of RP, CV, etc.; for online interviews, debug equipment, prepare electronic versions, and dress appropriately.

(3) Interview On-site Skills and Follow-up

On-site Skills: Stay calm and sincere, answer concisely and systematically, don't make up answers when you don't know, and ask 1-2 high-quality questions at the end of the interview (avoid being overly utilitarian).

Follow-up: Send a thank-you note (personalized, mentioning communication details) within 24 hours, without over-following up.

(4) New Trends in Interviews in 2026

① Online interviews have become normalized (emphasizing details);

② Deepening the assessment of scientific research potential (in-depth inquiry into research details and solutions);

③ The assessment of cross-cultural adaptation ability is prominent (prepare relevant response strategies).

7.4.5 Visa Application Guide: Core Principles of Compliance and Authenticity

(1) Core visa requirements of mainstream study-abroad countries/regions

Australia: Core Preparation GS Statement (proving genuine intention to study, no immigration tendency, available in full and reduced versions), focusing on domestic ties, course differences, and post-return career planning.

United Kingdom: Sensitive majors need to complete ATAS certification (4–6 weeks cycle, accurately fill in course modules, and clearly define civilian value of research), and apply in advance.

Hong Kong, China/Singapore: Materials are simplified, with the core being admission letters, proof of funds, and educational qualification certifications. Some institutions will provide visa agency services in 2026.

(2) General Notes for Visa Application

Core Principles: Authenticity, completeness, and consistency; no falsification of materials.

Proof of funds: Covers tuition fees + living expenses, with a clear source.

Educational Certificate: Notarized/certified as required, with consistent information.

Interview: Answer truthfully, highlight your intention to study abroad, and avoid discussing any inclination towards immigration.

Plan your time in advance, stay informed about policy changes, and avoid the risk of visa rejection.

7.4.6 Scholarship Application Guide: The Core Path to Reducing Study Abroad Costs

(1) Scholarship Classification and Application Priority

Scholarship Classification:

① Government scholarships (high in amount, highly competitive, such as CSC, ORS);

② College/Professional Scholarships (highly targeted, synchronized with the application);

③ Mentor Program Scholarship (low difficulty, stable funding, requires mentor approval).

2026 Priorities: Mentor Program Scholarship > Institutional Scholarship >

Government Scholarship (Mentor-led scholarships are easier to obtain, and government scholarships can serve as a supplement).

(2) Application Guide for Scholarships in Mainstream Countries/Regions

United Kingdom: Focus on applying for scholarships from key institutions (such as EPSRC, Chancellor's Scholarship), highlight academic achievements and research results, and apply to institutions simultaneously.

Australia: Rely on networking, strive for supervisor recommendations, highlight the feasibility of the research proposal, and meet the academic requirements.

Hong Kong, China: HKPFS has strong competitiveness (valuing university background, high GPA, and papers) and requires a tutor's recommendation.

Singapore: The SINGA Scholarship focuses on STEM fields, highlighting research skills and alignment.

CSC: First obtain a tuition-free offer, emphasize the intention to return to China, and pay attention to the cooperation quota of institutions.

(3) General Tips for Scholarship Applications

Prepare 6-12 months in advance and pay attention to the deadline;

Optimize the evaluation criteria for material fit;

Communicate with mentors to seek recommendations; apply through multiple channels to increase the success rate.

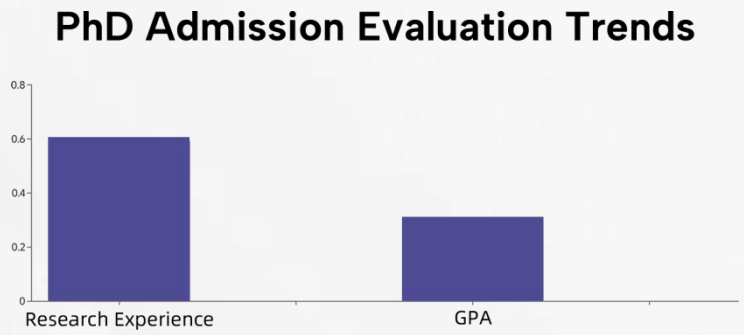
7.5 Common Misconceptions in Overseas Doctoral Applications

Studying abroad at the doctoral level is essentially the "establishment of transnational scientific research collaboration relationships," and its core logic is fundamentally different from that of "knowledge-receiving study abroad" at the undergraduate and master's levels. However, limited by information asymmetry and cognitive biases regarding the nature of doctoral training, a large number of applicants fall into common pitfalls during the process of applying for a doctoral

program overseas, which not only reduces the success rate of applications but may also pose potential risks to subsequent scientific research and academic growth. The following analyzes the six core pitfalls of applying for a doctoral program overseas and dissects the underlying cognitive roots and avoidance paths.

7.5.1 Misconception 1: Equating doctoral applications with master's applications and overemphasizing GPA and language scores

In undergraduate and graduate study abroad applications, GPA (Grade Point Average) and language test scores (such as TOEFL and IELTS) are the core screening criteria. This consistent perception leads most applicants to still regard these two factors as the "key to success" in doctoral applications, and they even invest a great deal of effort in improving their scores, while neglecting the core orientation of doctoral training – research potential and collaborative suitability. From the perspective of admission logic, the "supervisor – student" relationship at the doctoral stage is essentially a research partnership, rather than a simple "teaching – learning" relationship. The core requirement for supervisors to select doctoral students is to find collaborators who "can handle specific research projects and possess original research capabilities," rather than "high-achieving learners." The 2023 "Report on Trends in Doctoral Admissions Evaluation" by the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) in the US shows that in doctoral admissions at North American research universities, the weight of the match between research experience and research direction accounts for as much as 62%, the weight of GPA is only 28%, and language test scores only need to meet the "basic threshold," with no significant bonus for scores exceeding the requirement.



A survey of 112 top US research universities in the report further confirms that 78% of doctoral supervisors stated that "if the applicant's research experience is highly

aligned with the project, the GPA can be relaxed by 0.3 – 0.5 (on a 4.0 scale) based on the institution's minimum requirement", while only 3% of doctoral supervisors would give priority to admitting applicants due to "language scores far exceeding the standard". In addition, there are significant differences in GPA sensitivity among different disciplines. "Global Interdisciplinary Comparison of Doctoral Admission Criteria", published in Nature Reviews in 2022, pointed out that in the admission of doctoral students in science and engineering, the weights of laboratory experience, participation in research projects, and academic achievements (such as conference abstracts and patents) are much higher than GPA; while in the humanities and social sciences, although the requirements for GPA are relatively strict, experience in co-writing core journals, ability to collect field survey data, etc., are still listed as "more important indicators than GPA" by 67% of doctoral supervisors .

The core of avoiding this misunderstanding lies in shifting the focus of the application from "academic improvement" to "demonstration of research potential". Specifically, applicants need to focus on research experiences related to the target research direction (such as master's thesis topics, participation in horizontal/vertical projects), and clearly present their academic thinking, problem awareness, and research methods through a research proposal. Meanwhile, the primary goal of language proficiency is to meet the minimum requirements of the target institution, and the remaining energy can be devoted to improving academic English applications (such as paper writing and academic conference communication), which has far greater practical value for subsequent scientific research collaboration than simply increasing scores.

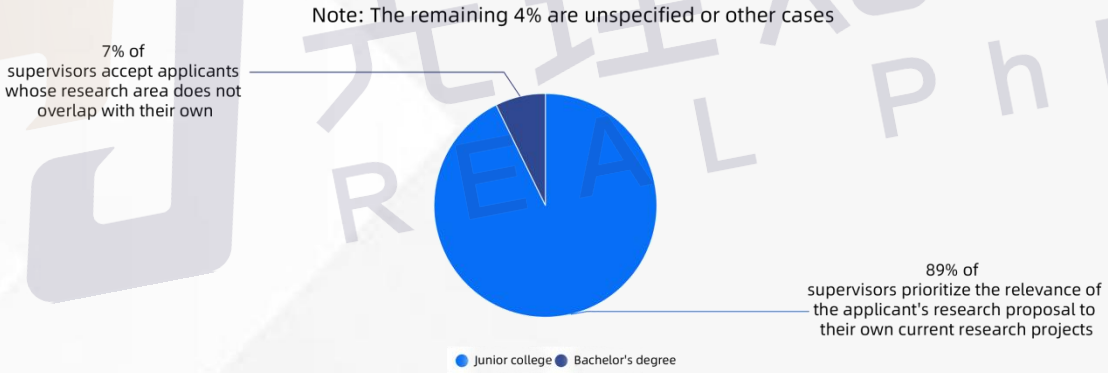
7.5.2 Misunderstanding 2: Fuzzy selection of research directions, lacking consideration of academic compatibility with the supervisor

Some applicants adopt a "scattergun approach" mindset during the application process, with their descriptions of research directions being too general (e.g., "I am interested in the field of artificial intelligence"), or blindly chasing popular fields without precisely matching the research directions of their target supervisors. This approach overlooks the core premise of doctoral training – academic fit, which refers to the alignment between the applicant's research interests and methods and the supervisor's research area and current projects, and this is precisely the key factor determining the success or failure of the application and the research

efficiency during the doctoral stage.

The OECD's 2022 Report on Doctoral Education and Knowledge Innovation, through a follow-up study of 12,000 doctoral graduates from 23 countries worldwide, found that the "academic fit" during the doctoral stage is strongly positively correlated with the success rate of doctoral training (correlation coefficient 0.78): applicants with a higher level of fit have an average completion time of 3.8 years during the doctoral stage, and their average originality score for their dissertations is 15% higher; while applicants with insufficient fit have a dropout rate of 34% (3.2 times that of those with high fit), and more than half need to change their research direction midway. From the perspective of doctoral supervisors, academic fit is directly related to the efficiency of research project advancement. A 2023 survey by the Humboldt Foundation of Germany of 500 senior doctoral supervisors showed that 89% of supervisors, when screening application materials, prioritize "the relevance of the applicant's research plan to their own current research projects," while only 7% of supervisors indicated that they would "accept applicants with no overlap with their own research fields."

Data from the 2023 German Humboldt Foundation Supervisor Survey



Taking Canada as an example, in the research funding mechanism of the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC), more than 60% of doctoral funding is tied to specific research projects of supervisors. If an applicant's research direction is not related to the NSERC projects approved by the supervisor, even if other conditions are excellent, it is difficult to obtain funding support, which in turn affects the admission results.

The key to avoiding this misunderstanding lies in "precise matching" rather than "extensive application". Applicants need to systematically sort out the research fields, core papers published in the past 5 years, ongoing research projects, and funding sources of potential supervisors through platforms such as the official

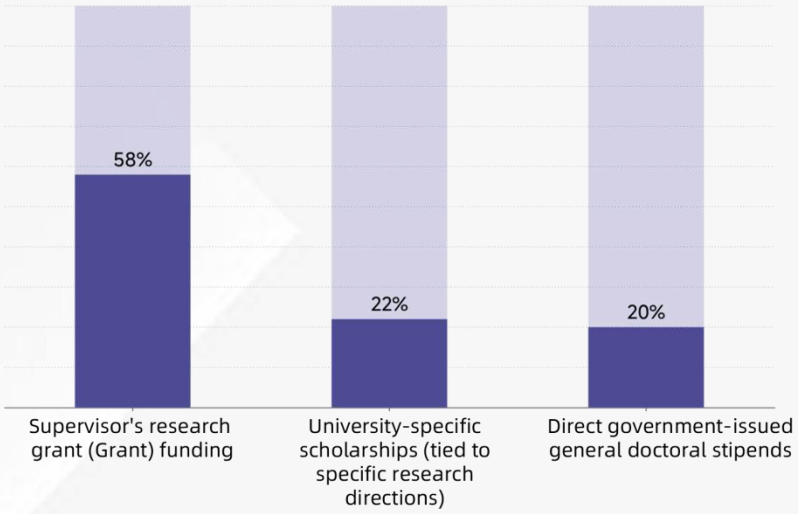
website of the target institution, ResearchGate, Google Scholar, etc., to ensure that there is a clear intersection between their own research interests and the supervisor's research direction; when writing the research proposal, they need to raise specific questions based on the supervisor's research achievements rather than making general statements. In addition, contacting the supervisor by email in advance to confirm their willingness to recruit students and the fit with the project can help improve the chances of application success.

7.5.3 Misunderstanding 3: Ignoring the particularity of the funding mechanism during the doctoral stage and passively waiting for scholarship disbursement

Different from the funding model dominated by "institutional scholarships + self-funding" during the undergraduate and master's stages, the funding mechanism at the doctoral stage has a strong "research binding attribute", with most funds directly linked to the supervisor's research projects and foundation grants. However, some applicants lack awareness of this mechanism, relying solely on "general scholarships" (such as the China Scholarship Council and scholarships uniformly distributed by institutions), passively waiting for application results, and neglecting to actively pursue special funding tied to research projects. This leads to a low success rate in funding applications or affects the stability of the doctoral stage due to insufficient funds.

From the perspective of the global structure of doctoral funding sources, supervisor research project funding is one of the core channels. According to the publicly available data from NSERC Canada in 2023, among Canadian doctoral research funding, supervisor research project (Grant) funding accounts for 58%, institutional special scholarships (tied to specific research directions) account for 22%, and general doctoral stipends directly issued by the government only account for 20%; only 15% of doctoral funding is completely dependent on "passive application" general scholarships, while the remaining 85% of the funding requires applicants to be tied to their supervisors' research projects.

Canada NSERC 2023 PhD Research Funding Distribution



Data from the US National Science Foundation (NSF) in 2022 also shows that among US STEM doctoral students, 72% of funding comes from their advisors' NSF project grants, while this proportion is 41% among humanities and social sciences doctoral students, and the proportion of those relying solely on general scholarships to cover all expenses is less than 10%. Additionally, there are significant differences in the funding application logic among different countries, and passive waiting can easily lead to missing key opportunities.For example, Germany's "Doctoral Scholarships", such as the Humboldt Scholarship and DAAD Scholarship, although open to global applicants, require that over 30% of the quota be jointly applied for with a German supervisor's research project. That is, the supervisor must first confirm that the applicant meets the project requirements and then recommend them to apply for the scholarship; Australia's "Australian Government Research Training Program (RTP) Scholarship" has its quota allocation directly linked to the supervisor's research project budget. If the applicant fails to communicate the project suitability with the supervisor in advance, even if they meet the basic requirements of the scholarship, they may still be rejected due to the quota being fully allocated.

The core of avoiding this misunderstanding lies in "actively adapting to funding channels": First, when screening supervisors, it is necessary to focus on their funding status, which can be inquired through channels such as the "public announcement of scientific research projects" on the official website of the institution and the acknowledgment section of the supervisor's published papers; Second, proactively ask supervisors about the possibility of funding support and clarify whether there are scholarship quotas tied to the project; Finally, prepare

funding application materials in a targeted manner, highlighting the value of one's own research to the project's advancement rather than simply emphasizing personal achievements.

7.5.4 Misconception 4: Expectation Deviation Regarding Academic Output: Confusing the Relationship between Doctoral Dissertations and Journal Publications

Applicants' perception of academic output during the doctoral stage often falls into two extremes: one is the "sole focus on papers," believing that doctoral graduation requires publishing multiple papers in core journals, which leads to excessive pursuit of short-term publication achievements during the application stage and neglect of research depth; the other is "neglect of publication," believing that simply completing the doctoral dissertation suffices without the need to pay attention to journal publications, resulting in limited subsequent career development (especially in the academic path). The essence of these two biases lies in the misunderstanding of the core objective of academic output during the doctoral stage – the core of doctoral training is the "formation of original research ability", the doctoral dissertation is the concentrated manifestation of this ability, while journal publication is a means of disseminating and validating research results, and the two are not simply in a "causal relationship" or "substitute relationship". From the perspective of global doctoral training standards, the originality of the doctoral dissertation is the core evaluation indicator, and journal publication is not a unified requirement. The Comparative Study on Global Doctoral Academic Output Standards published in Research Policy in 2023 covered 83 research universities in 12 countries, and the results showed that only 31% of the institutions clearly required doctoral students to publish 1–2 papers in core journals before graduation, while 69% of the institutions took "passing the doctoral thesis defense and making original academic contributions" as the core graduation criteria; Among them, due to the relatively short transformation cycle of research results, the proportion of institutions requiring published papers in science and engineering (47%) is higher than that in humanities and social sciences (18%). However, even in science and engineering, 53% of institutions allow "subsequent publication of the core chapters of a doctoral dissertation" as an alternative.

It is worth noting that the focus of academic output varies across different stages:

during the application stage, doctoral supervisors pay more attention to the applicant's "research potential" (such as whether the research participated in during the master's stage has original ideas, data collection and analysis capabilities), rather than the number of published papers;At the doctoral stage, the core of academic output lies in the depth and originality of the doctoral thesis, while journal publications serve as a further validation of the thesis results, with quality far outweighing quantity. Data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) of the United Kingdom in 2022 shows that graduates who publish one top-tier journal article at the doctoral stage have a 2.1 times higher success rate in academic career paths than those who publish more than three articles in ordinary journals.

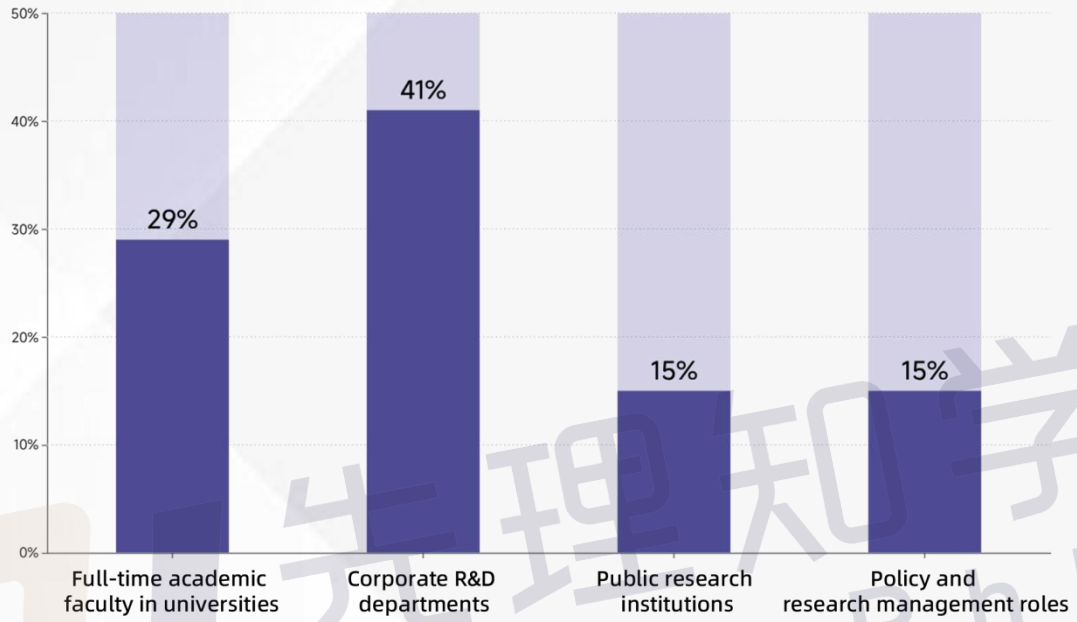
To avoid this misunderstanding, it is necessary to clarify the "phased academic output goals": during the application phase, there is no need to blindly pursue publication; the focus should be on presenting the integrity and original thinking of the master's research; during the doctoral phase, with in-depth research of the doctoral dissertation as the core, under the guidance of the supervisor, the most innovative parts of the dissertation should be organized into journal articles for submission, emphasizing the academic influence of the journals rather than the quantity of publications, while also taking into account the dissemination rhythm of research results.

7.5.5 Misconception 5: Single-minded career planning, focusing solely on the academic faculty path

Influenced by the traditional perception that "pursuing a doctorate means becoming a teacher," most applicants in the doctoral application stage solely focus their career goals on "full-time faculty positions in universities," overlooking the "diverse career adaptability" fostered during the doctoral stage. This singular career planning not only leads to increased subsequent employment pressure but may also result in neglecting the cultivation of skills required in non-academic fields due to the "academic path orientation" during the doctoral stage, thus limiting career development opportunities. From the perspective of global doctoral employment trends, non-academic paths have become one of the mainstream choices. The OECD's 2023 "Statistics on Doctoral Employment Trends" shows that globally, only 29% of doctoral graduates enter full-time faculty positions in universities, 41%

enter corporate R&D departments (such as technology companies and pharmaceutical enterprises), 15% enter public research institutions (such as national laboratories and research institutes), and 15% engage in policy and research management work (such as government science and technology departments, research foundations, and research management positions in universities).

OECD 2023 "Doctoral Employment Trends Statistics"



The proportion of non-academic employment varies significantly among different disciplines: the proportion of non-academic employment for engineering doctoral students reaches 63%, that for computer science reaches 58%, while those for humanities and social sciences also reach 48% and 45% respectively. Even applicants planning to pursue an academic path need to recognize that "academic faculty positions are not the only option," and non-academic experiences may actually enhance academic competitiveness. The 2022 "Doctoral Academic Career Development Report" of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) states that among applicants who obtained assistant professor positions at US research universities in the past five years, 43% had research-related experience in non-academic fields (such as corporate collaborative research and policy consulting projects), which gave them stronger competitiveness in interdisciplinary research, research funding applications, and technology transfer.

The core of avoiding this misunderstanding lies in "establishing a diverse career perception and planning for capacity building in advance": First, understand the

employment distribution of the discipline through authoritative employment data (such as OECD reports and annual employment reports of doctoral students from target institutions), and break the ingrained perception that "a doctoral degree necessarily leads to a teaching career"; Second, combine personal interests and abilities to identify potential career paths (academic path, industrial R&D, scientific research management, policy consulting, etc.), and cultivate relevant capabilities accordingly – for example, applicants planning to enter the industry can participate in enterprise cooperation projects during their doctoral studies to enhance their technology transfer capabilities; Applicants planning to engage in scientific research management may proactively participate in tasks such as project funding application and academic conference organization within research groups; finally, during the doctoral stage, maintain an open mind, broaden career horizons through channels such as internships, academic exchanges, and industry seminars, and avoid missing opportunities due to a single plan.

7.5.6 Misconception 6: Underestimating the importance of cross-cultural academic collaboration capabilities and only focusing on the instrumental nature of language

Most applicants equate "language proficiency" with "intercultural academic communication skills," believing that as long as their TOEFL or IELTS scores meet the requirements, they can smoothly carry out scientific research collaboration during the overseas doctoral program. However, in reality, intercultural collaboration at the doctoral level not only requires "language communication ability" but also demands "understanding the cultural differences in academic norms, mastering the communication logic of scientific research collaboration, and adapting to different academic evaluation systems." The lack of these skills is an important reason for the difficulties in adaptation and slow progress in scientific research among overseas doctoral students. The 2022 "Investigation Report on Cross-Cultural Doctoral Research Collaboration" by the Association for International Academic and Research Ethics (ORI) shows that 37% of overseas doctoral students encountered research communication barriers within 1–2 years after enrollment, among which 28% stemmed from insufficient awareness of cultural differences in academic norms, specifically manifested as: lack of understanding of the academic authorship

rules in the target country (such as author order criteria), misunderstanding of the supervisor's feedback style (e.g., the "indirect negation" of Western doctoral supervisors being misinterpreted as "approval"), and differences in awareness of research ethics. The report further points out that these communication barriers have led to 19% of doctoral research projects being delayed by more than 6 months, and 8% of doctoral students changing their research groups due to inability to adapt.

In addition, there are significant differences in academic collaboration models among different countries, which need to be understood and adapted to in advance. For example, doctoral training in the US emphasizes "autonomy and critical thinking," with supervisors more inclined to guide students to develop their own research ideas rather than directly assign tasks; doctoral training in Germany focuses on "rigor and systematization," with extremely high requirements for the standardization of research methods, and collaboration within research groups emphasizes "clear division of labor and standardized processes"; doctoral training in Japan emphasizes "teamwork and long-term commitment," often requiring students to be deeply involved in long-term projects of research groups and focusing on academic inheritance between mentors and apprentices [2]. If applicants only possess instrumental language skills without understanding the differences in these collaboration models, it is likely to lead to low efficiency in collaborating with supervisors and research groups.

The key to avoiding this misunderstanding lies in "transcending the instrumental nature of language and cultivating cross-cultural academic collaboration capabilities": First, during the application stage, proactively understand the academic norms and collaborative culture of the target country, which can be achieved through channels such as reading the <Graduate Academic Handbook> of the target institution, communicating with current doctoral students (especially Chinese seniors), and participating in online academic lectures at the target institution; Second, improve the application ability of academic English, with a focus on training skills such as academic writing (e.g., paper structure, logical expression), academic presentation (e.g., conference reports, project presentations), and academic debate (e.g., expressing opinions in group discussions); Finally, during the doctoral stage, maintain an open and inclusive mindset, proactively communicate and address the confusion in collaboration with supervisors and classmates, actively adapt to different academic thinking styles, and at the same time adhere to one's

own academic stance and original thinking, so as to achieve mutual benefit and win-win results in cross-cultural collaboration.

7.6 Case Analysis of Applying for a Doctorate: Counterattack and Cross-Border

The value of theoretical frameworks and general strategies lies in guiding the direction, while in-depth analysis of real cases can reveal the specific application of principles in complex realities and the key factors for success and failure. After all, success in doctoral applications is by no means the output of a single template, but rather the creative alignment of personal characteristics and project requirements under the guidance of strategies. To demonstrate the diverse possibilities of this alignment, this section focuses on two typical scenarios, "turnaround breakthrough" and "cross-border transformation," and conducts in-depth dissections of successful cases.

Case A: From a non-211 university clinical background to an interdisciplinary PhD at UCL, breaking through with "focus" and making a comeback with "matching"

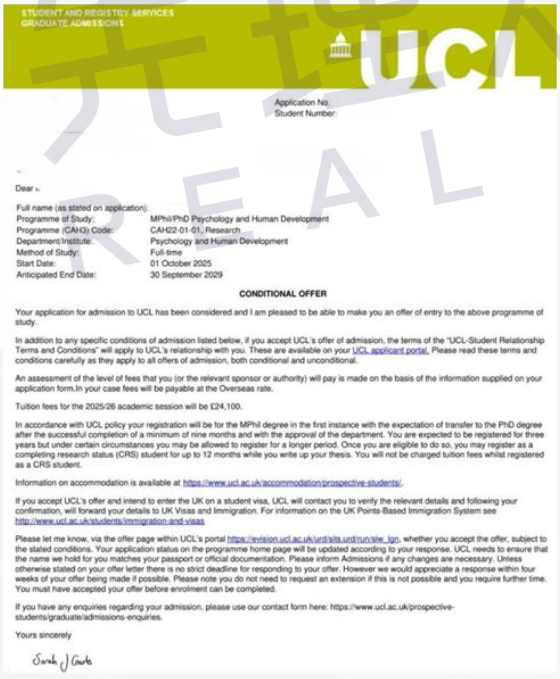
(1) Applicant Profile

- **Background:** Bachelor's degree in Clinical Medicine from an ordinary domestic undergraduate institution, with academic ranking among the top of the major; master's degree in Internal Medicine from an ordinary domestic undergraduate institution, with generally good academic performance.
- **Standardized Scores:** Excellent overall IELTS score, with balanced scores across all components and solid language proficiency.
- **Research/Internship/Paper Experience:** Accumulated rich academic achievements during bachelor's and master's studies, with multiple papers published in domestic and international journals. The applicant also has clinical internship experience at a Grade-A tertiary hospital, has participated in provincial-level research projects, and demonstrates solid academic research

ability, strong academic writing skills, and substantial clinical practice experience.

(2) Application Result

- **Finally admitted to the Doctoral Program in Psychology and Human Development at University College London (UCL, a G5 institution in the United Kingdom).**
- **Core Highlights:** Transitioned from clinical medicine (internal medicine) to psychology and human development, achieving interdisciplinary transformation. Based on multiple journal papers and extensive clinical internship experience, with rich and clear research capabilities and solid practical skills, defeated numerous competitors with better backgrounds but less prominent research achievements, and secured admission to a G5 university.
- **Offer Display:**



STUDENT AND REGISTRY SERVICES
GRADUATE ADMISSIONS

UCL

Application No.
Student Number:

Dear

Full name (as stated on application):
Programme of Study: MPhil/PhD Psychology and Human Development
Programme (CAH3) Code: CAH22-01-01, Research
Department/Institute: Psychology and Human Development
Method of Study: Full-time
Start Date: 01 October 2025
Anticipated End Date: 30 September 2029

CONDITIONAL OFFER

Your application for admission to UCL has been considered and I am pleased to be able to make you an offer of entry to the above programme of study.

In addition to any specific conditions of admission listed below, if you accept UCL's offer of admission, the terms of the "UCL-Student Relationship Terms and Conditions" will apply to UCL's relationship with you. These are available on your UCL applicant portal. Please read these terms and conditions carefully as they apply to all offers of admission, both conditional and unconditional.

An assessment of the level of fees that you (or the relevant sponsor or authority) will pay is made on the basis of the information supplied on your application form.In your case fees will be payable at the Overseas rate.

Tuition fees for the 2025/26 academic session will be £24,100.

In accordance with UCL policy your registration will be for the MPhil degree in the first instance with the expectation of transfer to the PhD degree after the successful completion of a minimum of nine months and with the approval of the department. You are expected to be registered for three years but under certain circumstances you may be allowed to register for a longer period. Once you are eligible to do so, you may register as a completing research status (CRS) student for up to 12 months while you write up your thesis. You will not be charged tuition fees whilst registered as a CRS student.

Information on accommodation is available at https://www.ucl.ac.uk/accommodation/prospective-students/.

If you accept UCL's offer and intend to enter the UK on a student visa, UCL will contact you to verify the relevant details and following your confirmation, will forward your details to UK Visas and Immigration. For information on the UK Points-Based Immigration System see http://www.ucl.ac.uk/students/immigration-and-visas

Please let me know, via the offer page within UCL's portal https://evision.ucl.ac.uk/urd/sits.urd/run/siw_lgn, whether you accept the offer, subject to the stated conditions. Your application status on the programme home page will be updated according to your response. UCL needs to ensure that the name we hold for you matches your passport or official documentation. Please inform Admissions if any changes are necessary. Unless otherwise stated on your offer letter there is no strict deadline for responding to your offer. However we would appreciate a response within four weeks of your offer being made if possible. Please note you do not need to request an extension if this is not possible and you require further time. You must have accepted your offer before enrolment can be completed.

If you have any enquiries regarding your admission, please use our contact form here: https://www.ucl.ac.uk/prospective-students/graduate/admissions-enquiries.

Yours sincerely

Psychology and Human Development MPhil/PhD, University College London, United Kingdom

25Fall Autumn Admission Showcase (Master's/Doctoral Program in Psychology and Human Development)

(3) Application Timeline and Key Planning Milestones

- **January – March 2024: Define research interests, fill cognitive gaps, and initiate language test preparation**

Sort out one's own background, combine clinical internship and work experience, and identify the interdisciplinary direction of "medicine + psychology"; focus on screening research priorities in the fields of psychology and medicine, as well as the research directions of supervisors, and clarify the core requirements and application time (language, RP, supervisor outreach, etc.) for applications; develop a detailed IELTS preparation plan, investing 3–4 hours per day, focusing on writing and speaking, while reading relevant psychological literature to accumulate academic vocabulary and research ideas.

- **April – May 2024: Prepare for networking and confirm application materials, and advance the progress of the research plan**

After confirming the relevant information of the target supervisor, start the supervisor outreach process after writing your curriculum vitae (CV) and supervisor outreach letter, and simultaneously prepare materials such as undergraduate and graduate transcripts and papers; during your work in the hospital, focus on the psychological state of chronic disease patients, consciously collect cases and primary data, and record your own observations and thoughts to provide creatives for the writing and advancement of your research proposal (RP).

- **June – August 2024: Conduct targeted networking, establish contact with the supervisor, continuously refine the research plan, and achieve the language proficiency goal**

Even during the summer vacation, I didn't stop. I continued to stay in touch with the supervisors I had previously contacted, wrote personalized prospecting letters based on their research directions, highlighting the alignment between my clinical background and the supervisors' research interests; during this period, I received the supervisors' guidance and positive responses on my RP, continuously improving and revising it; I achieved a 7.0 (with a minimum of 6.5 in each sub-score) on my first attempt at the IELTS, targeted and strengthened my weaknesses in writing and speaking, and reached the target of 7.5 (with a minimum of 7.0 in each sub-score) on my second attempt.

- **September – October 2024: Interview invitations, refining RP, and perfecting application materials**

Received interview invitations from other institutions one after another, and prepared thoroughly by deeply integrating the research directions of supervisors and personal backgrounds; after successfully obtaining the oral offer from the supervisor,

screened the supervisors and institutions that one is most interested in and wishes to enroll in, and repeatedly revised, optimized, and polished the materials in accordance with their RP requirements; sorted out the academic and non-academic materials during undergraduate and master's studies, and finalized the written materials to pave the way for subsequent online application matters.

- **November – December 2024: Submit applications and fully prepare for school interviews**

Pay attention to the application time for the program and the scholarship deadline on the official website of the target institution; when the application opens, formally submit the online application for the doctoral program and simultaneously follow up with potential supervisors; pay attention to and promptly respond to the institution's requests for supplementary materials; in light of the characteristics of UCL's doctoral interviews, organize the core interview questions (such as details of the research proposal, understanding of literature, emergency handling, etc.), conduct mock drills with foreign teachers, and prepare response strategies based on your own clinical and research experiences.

- **January – June 2025: Participate in school interviews, wait for application results, and apply for a visa**

Familiarize yourself with the core of the research plan, identify and address gaps based on mock interview feedback, formally participate in the interview, and calmly respond to questions from the supervisor and committee; patiently wait for the application result after the interview; successfully obtain the admission notice from UCL, confirm the offer, and then wait for the university to issue the CAS for admission eligibility; prepare for the subsequent visa application.

- **July – October 2025: Obtain visa, prepare for departure, and successfully enroll in school**

As time and progress advance, successfully obtain the CAS and secure the visa; pre-departure arrangements, including accommodation, air tickets, luggage, understanding the school registration process, orientation activities, and student account activation; complete tuition fee payment and insurance purchase; report in person, collect the student card, and complete course selection and laboratory/mentor matching.

(4) Core Competence Mining and Analysis: How to Transform "Ordinary" into

"Outstanding"

- **Visualization of "Research Potential":**

The applicant can calmly accept the reality of their non-elite university background, not blindly pursue "high-end" scientific research achievements, but instead focus on their most core "clinical + psychological" interdisciplinary advantage. In the application materials, the applicant not only described their experiences but also detailed how they identified research gaps in the literature, designed data crawling plans, addressed data challenges, and the econometric models used and their principles. This demonstrated to the supervisor/committee that the applicant has the potential to independently execute a complete research process.

- **Creation of the ultimate "matching degree":**

Instead of blindly following the trend to apply for the popular Doctor of Clinical Medicine program, the applicant combined their own focus on "patient psychology" during clinical internships and targeted the interdisciplinary program of Psychology and Human Development at UCL; After in-depth research on the research achievements of target supervisors, it was found that many supervisors have research experience related to "psychological intervention for chronic disease patients". Therefore, in the prospecting letter and research proposal, I emphasized my own accumulation in psychological research on chronic disease patients, and even proposed specific cooperation ideas (such as supplementing the supervisor's research samples with my own clinical data), so as to make the supervisor feel that "this student can quickly integrate into my research group and contribute to my research".

- **The "academic persona" is clear and consistent:**

From the early stages of planning, the applicant established the academic persona of a "clinical background psychology researcher", which was consistently emphasized throughout every stage of the application process; language preparation focused on academic expressions in social sciences, and research achievements revolved around "clinical + psychology"; networking and research proposals highlighted cross-disciplinary advantages; during the interview, the applicant emphasized their unique understanding of the "relationship between disease and human psychological development", avoiding the confused positioning of "pursuing clinical studies while also crossing into psychology"; this allowed the supervisor to clearly see the applicant's long-term research interests and clear academic plan,

thereby enhancing trust.

(5) Decryption of Document Strategies (Cover Letter and Research Proposal)

- **Networking Letter: Focus on "Fit" and "Potential" Instead of Listing Resumes**

Focus on Research Interests: At the beginning, directly state "one's own clinical background + research interest in the psychological development of chronic disease patients", then combine the supervisor's specific research achievements (cite 1–2 relevant papers by the supervisor) to explain why one is interested in the supervisor's research direction and what one's clinical and research experience can contribute to the supervisor's research (such as first-hand clinical data, clinical intervention experience), avoiding "general talk".

Future Goals and Conclusion: Clearly articulate one's doctoral research goals, explain the support that this UCL project can provide, and express one's willingness to learn and sincerity in cooperation. The conclusion should be concise and sincere, neither over-compliant nor hiding one's own shortcomings, openly stating that "although with an ordinary background, one has strong execution ability and enthusiasm for research".

Supplementary Tips: Tailor different versions of the prospecting letter for different target supervisors, adjusting the focus of each version according to the supervisor's specific research direction, to avoid "mass-sending the same prospecting letter" and increase the response rate (ultimately, 4 supervisors provided positive responses, and 2 supervisors offered suggestions for RP modification).

- **Research Proposal (RP): Not a "castle in the air," but "grounded and implementable"**

RP is the "core essence" of doctoral applications, especially for interdisciplinary and applicants with ordinary backgrounds, where the quality of RP directly determines the admission outcome. Therefore, its core advantages of RP are "rooted in clinical practice, aligned with the supervisor's direction, and rigorous in methodology".

Highlight innovative points, distinguish from pure psychological research (lacking clinical perspective) and pure clinical research (lacking systematic analysis of psychological development), highlight interdisciplinary advantages, and at the same

time combine with the supervisor's existing research to propose supplementary research ideas, enabling the supervisor to see the feasibility and innovation of the research.

(6)School Selection Strategy, Interview Preparation, and Performance

- School Selection Strategy: Avoid being greedy or blind, make rational school selections, reject "shotgun applications", and mostly focus on interdisciplinary programs, such as Psychology and Human Development at University College London (UCL) (core target, precisely matching one's own background and research direction); Doctor of Health Psychology at the University of Edinburgh (aligned with the "Medicine + Psychology" direction, with a slightly lower threshold than the G5); Doctor of Clinical and Health Psychology at the University of Manchester (accepting candidates from non-top-tier universities, with relatively relaxed research requirements); Finally, with precise matching, successfully secured an offer from the reach school UCL, achieving a comeback.
- Interview Preparation and Performance: Sincerity is paramount. Instead of presenting "perfect answers," showcase the "thinking process." In the early stage, approach interview coaching with dedication, value the feedback from foreign mock interviews, and invest effort in multiple mock practice sessions. In the later stage, during the actual interview, do not deliberately conceal one's own weaknesses (such as a non-elite university background), nor exaggerate one's own achievements. Always maintain a sincere and humble attitude, focusing on demonstrating "one's own thinking process" and "problem-solving abilities," so that the tutor can feel the academic qualities and potential that a doctoral applicant should possess, which is also the key for the applicant to stand out in the interview.

[Case Insights / Consultant Comments]

The victory of this case is the victory of "strategic focus" over "mediocre background", the victory of "precise matching" over "blind accumulation", and even more the victory of "down-to-earth" over "eager for quick success and instant benefits". For applicants with a medical background who have non-211 undergraduate and postgraduate degrees and no top-tier publications, cross-

applying for a G5 social science doctoral program is not a pipe dream. The core insights are as follows:

- The essence of a doctoral application is "academic matchmaking": finding a "research soulmate" is far more important than crafting a fancy resume. The core of the doctoral stage is "conducting research under the guidance of a supervisor". Therefore, "whether your research interests and capabilities match those of the supervisor" is far more important than "how good your institutional background is". The success of this applicant lies primarily in precisely targeting supervisors and programs that "accept medical backgrounds and have highly aligned research directions", fundamentally increasing the probability of admission.
- Research Proposal (RP) is your academic calling card: for applicants with ordinary backgrounds, RP is the "core weapon" to make up for their background shortcomings. An excellent RP does not lie in "how lofty the research direction is", but in "precise research questions, feasible research methods, and prominent innovation points", and more importantly, in "aligning with one's own experience and the supervisor's research direction". The applicant's RP is rooted in clinical practice, supported by first-hand data, and has clear practical value, which is also the key to impressing the supervisor.
- "Networking" is a necessary strategic step, not an "unnecessary step": For interdisciplinary applicants with ordinary backgrounds, networking can help you establish contact with the supervisor in advance, enabling the supervisor to understand your research potential and suitability, and even obtain the supervisor's suggestions for revising the RP, thus avoiding "blindly submitting applications and being directly rejected". This applicant received positive feedback from the supervisor through personalized networking, laying a solid foundation for subsequent interviews and admission.
- Telling a story of "growth" is more persuasive than simply listing "achievements": a doctoral application not only evaluates your existing achievements but also assesses your research potential and learning ability. This applicant did not shy away from their background of not being from a Double First-Class university; instead, through "persistence in language preparation", "accumulation in clinical internships", and "refinement of research achievements", they told a story of "gradually growing from an ordinary clinical student into an applicant with interdisciplinary research potential", allowing the

supervisor to see the self-discipline, execution ability, and academic enthusiasm behind it – this is also the core confidence for applicants with ordinary backgrounds to stage a comeback .

[Applicant's Self-Statement]

My journey of applying for a doctoral program lasted 20 months, starting to prepare in January 2024. Every step was filled with uncertainty and suffering. The full-course companionship of the institution was the confidence that enabled me to persevere to the end. Initially, I had no clue about the timeline of the doctoral application. It was the teachers from the institution who broke down the application process into clear monthly milestones, from language test preparation, research refinement, to supervisor outreach, RP writing, and interview preparation, providing me with a clear direction and helping me avoid confusion. During the days of waiting for responses to supervisor outreach, anxiety and irritability often engulfed me. I broke down and wanted to give up several times, but the institution's service staff always patiently listened, gently comforted me, helped me analyze the reasons, and regain my confidence.During the application process, difficulties kept emerging, such as RP bottlenecks, material errors, and confusion during interviews. They were always able to respond promptly, resolve each issue one by one with their professional capabilities, and accompany me through the tough times with warmth and meticulousness. Eventually, I was able to break through the constraints of being a non-985/211 university graduate, achieve a remarkable comeback, and secure an offer for a doctoral program at UCL, making this difficult yet precious journey worthwhile.

Chapter 8 Trend Review and Recommendations

8.1 Trend Analysis: From Scale Expansion to Quality Competition

Looking back at the overseas doctoral application and study experience over the past five years, the most prominent trend has been the shift from "quantitative growth" to "structural differentiation". The "extensive application" approach that relied on information asymmetry and the widespread admiration for prestigious universities in the early days has largely become ineffective, replaced by a refined game influenced by geopolitics, the popularity of disciplines, and funding sources. Specifically, although STEM majors in the US still hold top-level appeal, visa scrutiny and the risk of academic decoupling have led to an accelerated diversion of students to European position-based doctoral programs (such as those in Germany, Switzerland, and the Netherlands) and prestigious universities in Singapore and Hong Kong in Asia;Meanwhile, the acquisition of scholarships shows a "Matthew Effect," where top candidates hold multiple full scholarship offers, while ordinary applicants, even with qualified backgrounds, face "difficulty in admission" due to the contraction of tutor funding and the intense competition of CSC (CoinEx Smart Chain). In addition, interdisciplinary capabilities (such as "AI + Science") have become a new screening criterion, and applicants with a single-discipline background are at a significant disadvantage in the admission process.

8.2 Core Bottlenecks: Information Lag and Capability Mismatch

Despite the large application base, reviewing cases of application failure and the risk of dropout among doctoral students, the two core contradictions remain prominent. First, severe information asymmetry: the vast majority of applicants still overly rely on QS rankings to select schools, neglecting in-depth background checks on the sustainability of the supervisor's funding, laboratory culture, and graduation cycle, which leads to real dilemmas such as "supervisor job-hopping", "funding interruption", or "conflicts in mentoring style" after enrollment. Second, the

mismatch between application capabilities and doctoral requirements: A large number of applicants are still trapped in the inefficient cycle of "template-based prospecting" and "sentimental statements", lacking the awareness to demonstrate "verifiable research capabilities" – for example, they are unable to prove their "immediate combat effectiveness" with technical stacks (such as PyTorch, Cryo-EM) and pre-experimental results. This disconnection in soft skills directly results in many doctoral students facing a long adaptation period even after enrollment due to the lack of systematic academic writing and ethical review training.

8.3 Forward-looking Suggestions: Return to the Essence of Scientific Research and Implement Precise Strategies

Looking towards the future, the core advice for overseas doctoral study can be summarized as a six-character strategy of "precision, combination, and preparation". First, abandon the "casting a wide net" approach to applications and establish a three-dimensional background check system of "supervisor – laboratory – alumni": before reaching out to supervisors, thoroughly read their papers, propose specific experimental improvements or cross-application suggestions, and transform ineffective outreach into academic dialogue. Second, adopt "combined financing" to replace the mindset of "waiting for full scholarships": proactively apply for CSC living expense support, external foundation scholarships (such as Humboldt, Marie Curie), and local enterprise projects simultaneously to reduce dependence on a single supervisor's funding.Finally, strengthen the hard skill reserve of "pre-doctoral" students: complete the "minimum viable verification" of research plan writing, basic programming, or experimental operation before going abroad. For policymakers and universities, it is recommended to establish an "overseas supervisor academic credit database" and promote the British-style pre-training model for research master's degrees. An overseas doctoral degree is no longer a gilded label, but a high-risk scientific research investment lasting five years – only by making study-abroad decisions precise to specific research topics and supervisors and possessing the risk-resistant ability to independently solve unknown problems can the true value of a doctorate be restored.

Chapter 9 Conclusion

The path of studying for a doctoral degree overseas has never become easier due to information transparency, nor has it ever lost its value because of fierce competition. What this study attempts to do is not to promise a shortcut, but to tear down a high wall of information. We have reviewed the trends, pointed out the application pitfalls, and also provided specific application strategy recommendations. However, all methodologies ultimately boil down to that most fundamental question: Are you ready to invest five years or even longer in a research question? If your answer is yes, then no matter which country you go to or which supervisor you follow, you already possess the most core quality for a doctoral career – resilience. May this white paper serve as a small lamp before your journey, and the light ahead will ultimately be lit by yourself.

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