

Doctor of Philosophy in Sustainability Science

APPLICATION GUIDELINES

2025



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I. Outline of the Doctor of Philosophy in Sustainability Science Programme

The programme aims to produce the policymakers and researchers of tomorrow, who will be at the forefront of global efforts towards a more sustainable future. It takes a transdisciplinary approach to providing the analytical and technical skills needed to advance creative solutions to issues of sustainability. Studying at UNU-IAS brings the unique benefits of:

- Collaborative research & practical experience,
- A global university within the UN system, and
- An international and interactive learning environment in central Tokyo

The PhD programme in Sustainability Science is a three-year programme that takes an innovative approach to sustainability, seeking to promote a better understanding of the issues by incorporating global change perspectives.

The programme will equip graduates with comprehensive, multidisciplinary knowledge of sustainability problems, and deepen their understanding of the role of environmental sustainability in addressing current issues related to global change. The programme provides students with unique opportunities to interact with leading scholars and policymakers through lectures, international conferences and workshops. Students undertake problem-oriented research by playing an active role in UNU-IAS research projects and acquire the quantitative and qualitative analytical skills necessary to understand the underlying principles of various systems involved in sustainability issues and debates.

The programme starts in September. By July of their third year, students are expected to complete all of the course requirements, obtaining at least 14 credits and completing a doctoral dissertation. Students can select courses from those offered by UNU-IAS, while also enjoying the opportunity to take courses at other leading universities in Japan such as the University of Tokyo, Sophia University and International Christian University.

A Focus on Sustainability: Our Thematic Areas and Research Opportunities

The UNU-IAS postgraduate programmes are closely interconnected with institute's research activities. Students have opportunities to gain practical experience by engaging actively in the research projects in UNU-IAS thematic areas. The courses offered correspond to these thematic areas under the overarching theme of sustainability.

- Governance for Climate Change and Sustainable Development (GCSD)
- Biodiversity and Society (BDS)
- Water & Resource Management (WRM)
- Innovation & Education (IVE)

Applicants are required to choose one of these thematic areas and propose relevant research to conduct at UNU-IAS. A description of each area is available on the [thematic areas](https://unu.edu/ias/thematic-areas) (<https://unu.edu/ias/thematic-areas>) page.

Student research is expected to contribute to the project with which the student chooses to be affiliated. Students hone skills learned in the classroom by conducting research in the field alongside experts and experienced practitioners.

Faculty

The programme is taught by an expert teaching faculty comprising both UNU-IAS academic staff and invited distinguished scholars and practitioners. Please see the list of faculties members (<https://unu.edu/ias/unu-ias-faculty-members>).

Programme Structure & Language

The programme is offered on a full-time basis only. The standard period to complete the degree requirements is 36 months or six academic semesters, excluding time spent on study leave of absence from the university. The degree is awarded upon satisfactory completion of 14 credits and successful defense of a doctoral dissertation. The language of instruction is English.

Diploma Programme for Specialization on the Paris Agreement (SPA)

UNU-IAS offers the SPA Diploma Programme focusing on the implementation of the Paris Agreement mechanisms, such as the enhanced transparency framework, nationally determined contributions, national adaptation planning process, global stocktake and market mechanisms. By strengthening national capacity in these areas, it aims to become an essential means of implementation of the agreement and develop future leaders who will be at the forefront of these vital efforts. The diploma will be granted upon satisfactory completion of the designated courses.

Joint Diploma Programmes

Students of the UNU-IAS PhD programme are also encouraged to pursue one of two joint diplomas in sustainability science, which are offered in partnership with the University of Tokyo Graduate School of Frontier Sciences (UT-GSFS) and with Sophia University. These diploma programmes require students to gain 18 credits, eight of which must be from courses specified by UNU-IAS and the partner university under the respective joint diploma programme. A joint diploma can only be awarded to students who successfully complete the three-year UNU-IAS PhD degree programme.

Learning Environment

UNU-IAS is a global university located in Tokyo, with all classes conducted in English. Sharing a building with many UN agencies, it offers a unique learning environment for its diverse and international student body. The PhD programme includes courses featuring international guest lecturers from leading agencies and institutions, providing students with opportunities to learn from their unique expertise and experience. The class sizes are sufficiently small, and students benefit from interactive and personalized teaching.

Facilities

The [UNU Library \(https://unu.edu/unu-library\)](https://unu.edu/unu-library) offers full access to over 29,000 books and a range of electronic resources including e-books, e-journals and databases, and UN related materials. All students are provided with a comprehensive library orientation session at the beginning of their courses. Students also have access to the libraries of Aoyama Gakuin University, Bunkyo University, International Christian University, Ochanomizu University, Sophia University and the National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies.

Academic Calendar

The [academic calendar](https://unu.edu/ias/resources-students#academic-calendar) (<https://unu.edu/ias/resources-students#academic-calendar>) shows important dates and university holidays for the academic year.

II. Admissions Policy and Requirements

1. Admissions Policy

The UNU-IAS Doctor of Philosophy in Sustainability Science Programme seeks students with the following qualities:

- Students who possess a firm academic interest in the pressing global issues on the UN agenda, in particular those of sustainability, and a strong desire to contribute to the solving of problems concerning global environment and society through a transdisciplinary approach;
- Students who have adequate research skills and clear questions related to global issues as well as a strong desire to engage in research in UNU-IAS thematic areas, with the potential and motivation to succeed in our programme;
- Students who have the intention to proactively apply academic research findings to policymaking, and aim to pursue careers in international fields in public service or private organizations, including United Nations, multinational corporations, and non-governmental organizations as well as research academic institutions.

2. Admissions Requirements

Applicants for the Doctor of Philosophy in Sustainability Science Programme are required to have met the following requirements by the application deadline in order to be considered.

- A completed master's degree (or equivalent) from a recognized university or institution of higher education in a field related to sustainability and a minimum of 2 years of professional field experience related to UNU-IAS research themes which was acquired after obtaining a university degree (full-time equivalent);
OR
Two completed master's degrees, at least one of which must be in a discipline related to sustainability studies (those who expect to receive a second master's degree before the entrance period of September 2025 may also apply);
- A GPA of 2.8 or above on a 4.0 scale (equivalent to 70 % on a 100 % scale) for at least one of the master's degrees earned; and
- English language proficiency (*).
 - 600 on TOEFL – Paper-Based Testing (PBT) OR
 - 100 on TOEFL – Internet-Based Testing (IBT) OR
 - 7.0 on IELTS – Academic format

(* Please note that TOEFL and IELTS test scores are valid for two years. Applicants are

expected to submit the valid score by the application deadline (19 February 2025). Invalid test scores will not be accepted. UNU-IAS requires original TOEFL/IELTS score reports (no photocopies accepted).

- TOEFL: Please order an official score report using the institution code D317 or search with “United Nations University”. For more information on TOEFL, please visit <http://www.ets.org/toefl/>
- IELTS: Please request that an official report be sent directly to UNU-IAS. For more information on IELTS, please visit <http://www.ielts.org/>

Applicants meeting below criteria may submit a substitute document for the English language proficiency score.

Applicants who have studied for at least two consecutive years in a degree-granting university programme taught entirely in English. If this is your case, you must provide a certificate from your university stating that English is/was your unique language of instruction.

III. Application Procedures

Note: All deadlines are indicated in Japan Standard Time (JST).

1. How to Apply

All applicants:

1. Review the checklist below and prepare the application materials.
2. Apply via application form online: <https://unuehs.questionpro.eu/unuias2025phd>
3. Submit the Application Form by the deadline* (Wednesday, 19 February 2025, 23:59 (JST)).
4. Receive an automatic email confirming that the Admissions Office has received your application.

Applicants who have been shortlisted for an interview:

1. Receive an email regarding when and how to submit the required supporting documents.
2. Submit the supporting documents via email by the deadline (expected to be mid-late March 2025).
3. Referees will receive an email from the Admission Office with a request to provide the reference by the deadline* (expected to be mid-late March 2025).

** The referees will be contacted directly by the Admissions Office to provide references only if the applicant has been shortlisted for an interview.*

Applicants are not allowed to send reference letters to the Admissions Office. Please ensure that the referees send reference letters directly to the Admissions Office.

Please also ensure that our emails are not filtered into spam or junk folders. UNU-IAS will not be held responsible for unread email communication. Applicants should inform their referees to expect an email from the UNU-IAS Admissions Office when you are shortlisted. It is the applicants' responsibility to confirm with referees regarding submission of reference letters.

2. Application Checklist

The Application Form may take at least 120 minutes to fill in and it must be completed in English. The Application Form is composed of 12 sections of questions and essays. There are back/next buttons at the bottom of each section in the Form, which enable you to go back to previous sections to edit the answered boxes before you click the submit button at the end of the form.

Before you start filling out your Application Form, please gather all necessary materials listed below and make sure to have all of them ready to fill in the Form.

Section 1. Applicant Details

- Personal details (name, gender, birth date, email, telephone, address etc.)
- Personal identification document number (passport number, birth date, national identification number etc.)

Note: Nationality and county of residence should be filled in using the list at <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/dnss/cp/searchcp.aspx>.

Section 2. Educational Background

- Qualifications (primary, secondary and higher education, years of education, years of attendance)
- Undergraduate and postgraduate education (institution, department, subjects, start and end dates, abstract of thesis, if applicable, degree awarded, grades on a 4.0 or 100% scale, other grades)
- Lists of principal publications and practical accomplishments
Please list articles, books, conference proceedings, or other material published under your name, if any, with the name and address of the publisher and the date of publication, starting with the most recent. You may also provide a link of your publication(s) wherever possible.
- Recent conference presentations (if any)
Please list your experiences of conference presentations, starting with the most recent (name, year and location of the conference; title, format, modality of the presentation; role at the conference).
- Contribution to the professional community
Please provide the major professional achievements, starting with the most recent.

Section 3. Essays

- Choose one of the UNU-IAS thematic areas of study and research that you wish to conduct at the doctoral degree programme at UNU-IAS.
- Note: Please carefully review and choose a thematic area that is most

suitable for your application and research interests. Irrelevancy may be regarded as an incomplete application.

- Reasons why you have chosen to apply for the PhD Programme in Sustainability Science (word limit: 500, appx 3,500 characters).
- Please relate the reasons to your background and explain your career goals.
- Research Proposal (word limit: 1,500, appx 10,500 characters.)
- Please explain as concretely as possible the research plan that you would like to undertake in the PhD Programme, including research questions, objectives, methodology, data resources and how you would like to take a transdisciplinary approach to the issue. Please also indicate policy relevance of your proposed research and how you plan to incorporate gender perspectives.
- Abstract of Research Proposal (word limit: 300, appx 2,100 characters)
- Personal Achievements (word limit: 500, appx 3,500 characters)
- Please describe your personal achievements including extracurricular activities, volunteer work, leadership experience and awards you have received, as well as why you think they are important.

Note: Each essay will be cut off by the number of characters mentioned above.

Section 4. Professional Background

- The number of years of full-time work experience
- Contact information of your three most recent employers (name and type of organization, email, address) *
- Start and end dates, position title and supervisor's name
- Summary of job description including main responsibilities

**If you have had more than three employers, you may include them in Section 10.*

Section 5. English Language Proficiency

- Type of proof of English language proficiency with valid score within 2 years (see page 3-4 on requirements), e.g. IELTS, TOEFL PBT or TOEFL iBT. If you have not taken the exam yet, include your plan to take the exam and submit the results by the deadline Mid-Late March 2025.
- Test result, date and examination number of TOEFL or IELTS
- Knowledge of languages other than English

Section 6. References (Three Letters of Recommendations)

Contact details for three referees (type of reference — academic or professional; name, position, organization, email, address, telephone) *

** Your referees will be required to submit reference letters only if you have been shortlisted for an interview. Please register three referees who are familiar with your character and academic/professional performance to assess your competency in pursuing the PhD Programme. At least one letter must be from a university faculty member. For this referee, the -mail address should be the one provided by the affiliation. Referees should not be family members or friends.*

UNU-IAS reserves the right to contact your referees. If you have been shortlisted for an

interview, they will be informed of when and how to submit references for your application. Please ensure that the referees send reference letters directly to the Admissions Office only when requested. Please note that your referees will NOT have access to view your Application Form. Applicants are NOT allowed to send reference letters to the Admissions Office. Before you apply, please make sure to contact your referees and ask for their approval to provide references when UNU-IAS requests them.

Section 7. Funding

- Would you be able to fund your studies and living in Tokyo for three years?
- Do you wish to apply for a scholarship and are you eligible for it?
- Type of scholarships that you wish to apply for (if applicable; either choose a scholarship that can be applied through UNU-IAS or indicate the name of scholarships if you are applying for scholarships provided by other organizations). *
- Justification essay for applying for a scholarship under UNU-IAS (If applicable; word limit: 500, appx 3,500 characters)

Note: Each essay will be cut off by the number of characters mentioned above.

** If you are applying for any other scholarships provided by other organizations on your own, there is no need to submit the justification essay.*

There is no separate application for scholarships through UNU-IAS at the time of application. There are eligibility requirements to become a candidate of each scholarship and applicants must submit several additional documents for the scholarship when shortlisted for an interview.

The scholarships available at UNU-IAS are very competitive and limited.

Only highly qualified candidates from developing countries who can demonstrate the need for financial assistance will be considered for financial support. In the case a scholarship is not available, the applicant must find own funding to be enrolled.

Section 8. Financial Declaration

- Declaration of family members (applicable if you wish to apply for scholarships)
 - Number of people in your family and/or household members other than yourself
 - Name, relation to you, occupation and annual income
 - Total family income in USD (yearly)
- Declaration of yourself
 - How will you be financing your studies at UNU-IAS? (personal resources, family resources, scholarships, employer, sponsorship, loan, others)
 - Personal resources/income in USD
 - Support from individual donor(s), including family or guardian, in USD
 - Support from sponsors — governments, sponsoring agencies, and companies (awarded, haven't applied, applying, or none)
 - Date to be notified of result and amount of sponsorship (applicable if you are applying)

- Other financial sources and amount
- Total financial resources in USD

Section 9. Health Declaration

- Your medical conditions, illness and special needs (if applicable)
- Have you received medical treatment for a serious illness or condition in the past 12 months?
- I declare I am in good health and fit to enroll in the three-year degree programme in Japan.

Section 10. Additional Information

- Any other additional information for your application

Section 11. Other Details (for administrative purposes only)

- If you have applied for a degree programme at UNU before, please specify the programme and year of your previous application.
- If you are not a Japanese national, please list your previous stays in Japan.
- If you have any relatives or acquaintances who are currently working at UNU please provide their names.
- How did you learn about the Degree Programme at UNU-IAS?
- Have you ever been arrested, indicted or summoned into court as a defendant in criminal proceedings, or convicted, fined or imprisoned for the violation of any law (excluding minor traffic violations)?

Section 12: Submit Application

- Confirmation of acknowledgement of a list of supporting documents to submit in case you have been shortlisted for an interview

3. Supporting Documents (shortlisted applicants only)

Only applicants who have been shortlisted for interviews will be required to submit the following supporting documents by email.

The deadline for the submission of supporting documents will be set out within one week after shortlisted applicants receive the announcement emails from the Admissions office.

Please ensure all documents are prepared and collected at the time of submitting the

Application Form. Any documents that are not written in English must be accompanied by an official or certified translation in English. The translation may be provided by a school, public notary or professional translation services.

1) Personal Identification Document

The document must be issued by a national government (e.g., passport, birth certificate, Japanese residence card, if applicable), which validates your legal name, birth date, nationality and residential status. In case you apply for a scholarship, this document should also endorse that your nationality meets the eligibility of the scholarship.

2) Transcript(s)

The transcripts must set out the list of courses/modules studied as well as grades obtained at all undergraduate and postgraduate education and include the institutional seal or signature. For those who have transferred between institutions, transcripts from both institutions must be submitted.

3) Proof of Awarded Degree

The degree certificate must certify the awarded degree and the conferred date (bachelor's and master's degrees).

4) Master's Thesis (or one academic research paper)

5) Proof of Expected Graduation and Student Registration Certificate (if applicable)

Applicants expecting to earn a master's degree or higher before September 2025 may also apply. An official letter/certificate must be issued by the institution stating the applicant's enrolment (registration) status in the degree programme and the date of expected graduation. It is the applicant's responsibility to check that the expected graduation date on the letter is accurate and is before the entrance period of September 2025.

6) Additional Documents for Scholarship Application, or a Letter from the Sponsor (if applicable)

All applicants who wish to apply for scholarships are required to submit a CV. Please check the other required documents on our [website \(https://unu.edu/ias/doctorate-degree/phd-sustainability-science#SCHOLARSHIP\)](https://unu.edu/ias/doctorate-degree/phd-sustainability-science#SCHOLARSHIP).

7) Proof of English Language Proficiency *

IELTS, TOEFL PBT or TOEFL iBT: Official score report

Official scores of required tests must be directly reported to UNU-IAS by the testing centres. The validity of both TOEFL and IELTS scores is two years. Invalid scores will not be accepted. Applicants are expected to submit a valid score by the application deadline (19 February 2025). Expired scores will not be accepted.

** Please see the requirements stated on pages 3–4.*

Applicants meeting below criteria can submit a substitute document for the English language proficiency score.

Applicants who have studied for at least two consecutive years in a degree-granting university programme, taught entirely in English. If this is your case, you must provide a certificate from your university stating that English is/was your unique language of instruction.

8) Three Letters of Recommendation

Referees will be contacted directly by UNU-IAS to provide reference. Applicants are not allowed to send reference letters to the Admissions Office.

4. Application Deadline

Wednesday, **19 February 2025** (23:59 Japan Standard Time)

Any inquiries after the deadline regarding unsuccessful submissions due to any personal circumstances including technical difficulties will not be accepted. Please ensure that you start your application ahead of time.

5. Key Dates *

- 19 February 2025: Deadline for applications
- Later March to early April 2025: Invitation to an interview and requests for submitting supporting documents by email only to the shortlisted applicants
- Early to mid-April 2025: Interviews (shortlisted applicants only)
- Late May 2025 onwards: Announcement of application results only to the successful applicants

* *The above timelines are subject to change.*

6. Receipt of Application

Applicants will receive an automatic email from the Admissions Office within 24 hours to confirm receipt of Application Form. The Admissions Office may at any time require applicants to provide verification of the information and documents provided as part of Application Forms and/or interviews.

7. Selection and Announcement of Results

After the deadline, only shortlisted applicants will be contacted by email regarding the invitation to an interview. Please ensure that you do not contact the Admissions Office to inquire about the status of your application unless you have been individually contacted by the Admissions Office.

- Successful applicants who are offered a place in the PhD degree programme will be notified by email at the address provided on the Application Form. Necessary documents for the admission procedure will be sent together with a letter of acceptance. To secure admission, successful applicants will be required to submit the necessary documents stated under the Conditions of Admission on page 12, and to pay at least 50% of the tuition fees for the first academic year (6,000 USD, non-refundable) by the due date as stated on the invoice issued after the result announcement. Please see further information in the section IV. Enrolment Procedures.
- Unsuccessful applicants for will NOT be individually notified via email or telephone by the Admissions Office. If you do not receive any emails from the Admissions Office regarding your application by the end of June 2025, your application has been unsuccessful. The Admissions Office does not provide individual feedback on unsuccessful applications.

- Emails will be the primary method of contact. Therefore, it is essential for all applicants to list a valid email address in the Application Form and regularly check their email. Please ensure that emails from UNU-IAS (ias.admissions@unu.edu) are not filtered into the spam or junk folder. UNU-IAS will not be held responsible for unread email communication.

IV. Enrolment Procedures (successful applicants only)

1. Date of Enrolment

1 September 2025

The date of enrolment cannot be extended, regardless of any special circumstances of the student.

2. Conditions of Admission

Successful applicants will be requested to submit the following documents by post:

- Sealed transcript
- Certified copies of degree certificate(s)

Successful applicants who have not yet graduated from their current universities at the time of result announcement should submit the transcript and the degree certificate by the deadline that will be determined by the Admissions Office.

- Medical report (format will be provided by the Admissions Office)

In addition, the following documents will be required:

- Signed Student Contract and Student Conduct Document
- Signed document of the Term of Reference for the Scholarship (if applicable)

Successful applicants must submit all the necessary official documents to the Admissions Office by the matriculation deadline (early August) prior to enrolment. Without the submission of the above-listed documents, an offer will not be completed, and applicants will not be permitted to enroll at UNU-IAS.

3. Fees

Application Processing Fee: None

Tuition Fee: USD 12,000 per year *

To secure admission, successful applicants will be required to pay at least 50% of the tuition fee for the first academic year (USD 6,000, non-refundable) by the due date on the invoice issued after the result announcement and prior to enrolment. Students who choose to pay annually must make a full one-year tuition payment before the commencement of the academic year. Successful applicants are required to submit all documents and pay the tuition fees by the deadline.**

The estimated total expenses for living and studying in Tokyo for three years are

approximately USD 84,000, including tuition fees. Applicants must ensure adequate financial resources to meet the full costs of educational and living expenses.

* *The fee is subject to change.*

** *UNU holidays are listed in the [UNU-IAS Academic Calendar \(https://unu.edu/ias/resources-students#academic-calendar\)](https://unu.edu/ias/resources-students#academic-calendar).*

V. Important Notes

1. Important Notes for Application Procedures

- All Application Forms must be typed and filled out in English. No handwritten or incomplete application documents will be considered.
- All materials and documents submitted as part of an application become the property of UNU-IAS and cannot be returned.
- If any falsification is discovered in any of the documents presented for application, admission will be revoked.
- Unsuccessful applicants from previous years who reapply for admission must submit a completely new set of application documents, including letters of reference. No previous application materials will act as a supporting document.
- Please ensure that the Application Form is submitted only once. If multiple Application Forms are submitted by one applicant, the latest form received will be considered the application. Earlier versions will be disregarded.
- Those who wish to withdraw from the application process must immediately contact the Admissions Office via the [Inquiry Form](https://unu.edu/ias/admissions/degree-programmes) (https://unu.edu/ias/admissions/degree-programmes).

2. Inquiries

Before contacting the Admissions Office, please read through the [Frequently Asked Questions \(https://unu.edu/ias/frequently-asked-questions-0\)](https://unu.edu/ias/frequently-asked-questions-0) to see if your question has been answered. For any unanswered questions, please use the [Inquiry Form](https://unu.edu/ias/admissions/degree-programmes).