Examples of interview questions

Here are some examples of questions that might be useful for exploring the applicant's ability, compatibility and commitment. It is well worth planning such questions in advance, and tailoring them to reflect the research topic and your supervisory style.

Questions for potential PhD students
ABILITY
What research training have you received to date? (Methodologies, key equipment, statistical methods, interpretation of data, problem-solving, project management)
What research experience do you have?
What relevant theory are you familiar with?
Have you conducted a research project as part of your undergraduate or postgraduate education?   • Can you describe the research very briefly?   • What did you enjoy about that research?   • What was most challenging?   • What was the methodology?   • Who devised the methodology?   • If you were to repeat that work, what would you do differently?
What journals do you read most often?
What recent research have you read and what impressed you about this research?
How do you manage your time?
Set a task as part of the interview, for example: • Make a 10-minute presentation on a previous project or research topic (prepared in advance)   • Explain this graph   • Provide a written summary of this short paragraph in 25 words or less   • Can you identify these two pieces of equipment? What would you use them for?
COMPATIBILITY AND ATTITUDE
Have you worked in a team before now? If so, what were the pros and cons?
What are your expectations of: • The kind of PhD supervision that you will receive?   • Working practices during the PhD?   • How to handle a problem that relates to the research?
Can you provide examples where you overcame adversity in your work?
COMMITMENT
Why do you want to do a PhD?
What are your career aims or preferences?
Why are you choosing this PhD topic?
Are you aware of other more recent research projects/interests in this research group? What is your perception of doing a PhD?   • How much work do you think is involved, and what kind of work?   • What working hours do you expect?   • What elements do you expect to be most demanding?   • What elements of the project are you looking forward to?