

PhD Study - What is a PhD?

A PhD is a postgraduate doctoral degree, awarded to students who complete an original thesis offering a significant new contribution to knowledge in their subject. PhD qualifications are normally the highest level of academic degree a person can achieve.

What does 'PhD' stand for?

PhD stands for 'Doctor of Philosophy' which is an abbreviation of the latin term, (Ph)ilosophiae (d)octor. The word 'philosophy' here refers to its original Greek meaning: philo (friend or lover of) sophia (wisdom).

The PhD research process - what's involved?

Unlike most Masters Courses (or all undergraduate programmes), a PhD is a pure research degree and does not involve any taught classes. The PhD is a diverse and varied qualification with many different components and moves through a series of stages

Whereas the second or third year of a taught degree look quite a lot like the first (with more modules and coursework at a higher level) a PhD moves through a series of stages.

A typical PhD normally involves:

- Carrying out a literature review (a survey of current scholarship in your field).
- Conducting original research and collecting your results.
- Producing a thesis that presents your conclusions.
- Writing up your thesis and submitting it as a dissertation.
- Defending your thesis in an oral viva voce exam.

These stages can vary between subjects and universities, but they tend to fall into the same sequence over the three to four years of a typical full-time PhD.

Professional development, networking and communication

Traditionally, the PhD has been viewed as a training process, preparing students for careers in academic research. The more modern PhD is viewed as a much more flexible qualification, not all doctoral graduates end up working in higher education. Many follow alternative careers that are either related to their subject of specialism or draw upon the advanced research skills their PhD has developed.

As such, the PhD will include opportunities to pick up additional skills and experiences that are an important part of a scholarly CV but also with an emphasis on transferrable skills, to help students communicate and apply their research beyond the university.