Finding and funding a PhD

November 2026

LONDON SCHOOL of HYGIENE &TROPICAL MEDICINE

Meet the Careers Team







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Mondays and Tuesdays	Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays	Wednesdays, Thursdays & Fridays

Practical points

- Please keep mics on mute
- Use the chat box lots
- Trouble with sound? Trying leaving and coming back, try a different browser
- The session will be recorded and put on Moodle under 'Further Study (Recordings)' and to replace the booking link under Forthcoming events

Session outcomes

By the end of this session we hope you will have an increased understanding across:

- Why choose to do a PhD and a brief look at academic careers
- Structure of a PhD and routes for completing a PhD
- Where to look for advertised PhDs and for funding information
- Self-sourced and funded PhDs

Why choose a PhD, types and routes

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Why choose to do a PhD?

- I would like a long term career in academic research
- I want a PhD to get into industry, or specialist / expert roles in non academic organisations
- I want a PhD for long term career progression, for example in NGOs
- Just interested in topic / doing research – not sure long term

Academics' suggestions

'Knowing the whys' (being the 'producer' rather than one of the 'actors')

'Cognitive need' (wanting/needing to find answers – valued by employers…)

'Contribution to new knowledge'

Career progression/career necessity

What does it take?

Do you have:

Determination

Ability to reflect

Creativity

Resilience

Confidence in your ability

Something you want to research

The passion to go in to work and do the same thing again even if all your experiments failed last week

Ability to keep the bigger picture in mind

Some thoughts from those who have been there

Postdoctoral Researcher:

- It requires a lot of work and dedication. It is important to think about whether you really want to pursue it
- For some careers, a PhD may not be required, but it will always provide you with better ways of thinking and viewing problems

Associate Editor, a Science Newsmagazine

- "Do it because you really love the subject, not because you just want to get ahead"

Senior Scientific Officer, a biotech company

- "Choose a subject carefully with a job and career path in mind"

Quotes from academic careers forum

Q*: How did you decide academia was for you*?

A: I used to think academia was 'only for really clever people, now I know it's really determined people who sit down and get the damned thing done'.

The attraction of academia:

- You think about this new thing and it keeps being new
- Being inquisitive in nature and being persistent
- Biggest joy is being the first person to make a discovery (makes up for all the hours and weeks and years when you're trying to do something and it keeps on failing – you need to be driven).
- You are the world expert in that thing

PhD types and routes

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PhD – structure and types

- A novel, in-depth study of specific field – original contribution
- Results in written report as Thesis or Dissertation
- Oral examination, with 2+ experts ('Viva') follows submission. Publication(s) preferable
- Often initially registered as MPhil before 'upgrade'
- Work closely with 1, or more, experienced researchers
- UK: Traditionally, 3 yrs Increasingly 4 yr programmes (in sciences)
- Part time PhDs possible
- LSHTM 'staff PhD'
- Most in Universities and other HEIs. Other places: Government Labs, Hospital labs, Research Institutions, Commercial labs

PhD 'routes'

Structured programme (Centres for Doctoral Training/Doctoral Training Partnerships):

- At universities – PhD places funded by
  - UK Research councils (e.g. BBSRC, MRC, ESRC)
  - Research charities, e.g. Wellcome, CRUK, Gates Foundation
  - Transnational organisations e.g. EU (…?)
- Advertised Collaborative / 'CASE' studentships – universities & external collaborator

Specific PhD (like applying for specific job)

- At universities – advertised PhD studentships funded by existing 'Principle Investigator' (PI) grant

'Staff PhD'

- Study while working (e.g. Research Assistant/Fellow)

'Bespoke' - approach supervisor, put together proposal and then apply for / arrange funding:

- Research scholarships/bursaries at host university
- Charity funding
- Research councils
- Overseas funding bodies/British Council
- Self-funded

- **Other doctoral studies, such as DrPH**

PhD or DrPH?

Another option with a professional emphasis: DrPH at LSHTM.

"The DrPH programme leads to a doctoral-level qualification and is intended for leaders and future leaders in public health."

Key components:

- A taught component comprising two compulsory modules
- Research Study 1 - an Organisational and Policy Analysis (OPA) project;
- Research Study 2 - a research project leading to the production of a thesis

Requires relevant experience in areas of public health policy, management and/or leadership.

Application deadline 31 January each year, to start in the Autumn term.

Brief look at academic careers

Most people do not stay in academia, but for those who do, titles vary between disciplines/institutions/countries:

- Postdoc – Research Associate/Fellow
- Associate Lecturer (often hourly paid)
- Teaching Fellow
- Lecturer
- Senior Lecturer
- Reader
- Assistant Professor
- Professor

Many posts are fixed term contracts, especially in early career.

the-essential-guide-to-moving-up-the-academic-career-ladder.pdf

Where can I find PhDs advertised?

Funding information

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Where to look first for a PhD

Find a PhD.com is considered one of the best places to find advertised PhD opportunities worldwide. It is the world's largest database for doctoral opportunities, offering a directory of more that 4.500 PhD projects and programmes

PhD Programmes, Research Projects & Studentships in the UK & Europe

When to apply?

Many advertised Autumn to commence following Aug/Sept in line with UK academic calendar.

More all year round than programmes offered by DTPs.

Other places to find a PhD advertised: Centres for Doctoral Training (CDTs)/Doctoral Training Partnerships (DTPs)

- 4 year (usually) funded PhD programmes offered by most funding councils
- Located in individual HEIs or consortia of HEIs
- Taught elements, transferable skills, some placements
- First year rotate between different projects, focus on own project in years 2-4
- Some relevant research councils (depending on your research background/interests)
    - BBSRC (Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council)
    - MRC (Medical Research Council)
    - ESRC (Economic and Social Research Council)

Other places to find a PhD advertised: BBSRC and ESRC funded programmes

- LIDo (inc LSHTM) – London Interdisciplinary Doctoral Programme (**2027 applications opened 1 October 2026)**

- Cambridge Biosciences BBSRC DTP **(deadline 8 December 2026)**

- Manchester BBSRC Doctoral Training Partnership (see website for updates)

Current ESRC funded DTPs and ESRC funded Centre for Doctoral Training: Data Analytics and Society Centre for Doctoral Training (Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Sheffield)

ESRC funded DTP including LSHTM: Ubel (UCL, Bloomsbury and East London) includes a mental health pathway

Other places to find a PhD advertised: Charity funded programmes

Wellcome – large source of **grant funding**

Wellcome Sanger Institute – The application process for the 2027 intake of the Institute's 4-year PhD Programme is now open. **(The closing date is 24 November 2026)**

Cancer Research UK – eg Institute of Cancer Research (ICR) – **see link for details and deadlines**

Collaborative Doctoral Studentships

- Carried out in collaboration with non-academic organisations ('industry')
- Contribute resource and intellectual support and mentoring for the project
- 4 years, at least between 3 to 18 months 'on site'
- Commonly 'CASE' studentships

Info:

- UKRI on collaborative partnerships
- Examples from Oxford of Industrial CASE studentships (iCASE)

US postgraduate study

Academic/Research Master's Degree

- 2 years
- Complete a thesis
- Can lead to doctoral study

Doctoral Degree

- 4 – 6 years (subject & funding dependent)
- 2 years course work – oral & written qualifying exams
- Doctoral Candidacy – 2/3 years dissertation research
- At end, dissertation & oral exam 'Defense'

A key difference to UK: all degrees include research & taught components

Find out more from the Fulbright Commission.

Funding for international students

- For funded places check details of each scheme – some open to international applicants, others not
- Also check level of funding (often only home fees)
- Check for funding from home country/government
- Get involved with project, and PhD opportunity may come from that

Useful resources:
Searching for PhD Opportunities

1. **Global PhD Listings**

- FindAPhD: One of the most comprehensive databases for PhD opportunities worldwide, with listings by subject area and location.
- EURAXESS: European platform with PhD and research funding opportunities across Europe and beyond.
- PhDportal.com: Global search tool for PhD programs.
- ResearchGate: A platform where researchers can find PhD positions, mainly within Europe and North America.
- Academic Positions: A resource for PhD and postdoctoral job opportunities, especially in Europe.

2. **UK-Focused PhD Searches**

- **Jobs.ac.uk**: A leading resource for academic jobs in the UK, including PhD listings.
- **FindaPhD UKRI listings**: UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) opportunities and funding.
- **Postgraduate Studentships**: UK-focused PhD funding and opportunities listings.
- **University Websites**: Search specific university websites for PhD openings, particularly those aligned with your research interests.

3. **US-Focused PhD Searches**

- **Peterson's**: Comprehensive database of graduate programs, including PhDs, in the U.S.
- **GradSchools.com**: Listings for U.S.-based PhD programs.
- **NSF Graduate Research Fellowships**: Opportunities for funding graduate-level research in the U.S.

Searching for PhD Opportunities

4. **Other International PhD Opportunities**
- **DAAD - PhD in Germany**: A platform for PhD opportunities in Germany, funded by DAAD.
- **Swiss Government Excellence Scholarships**: Swiss government-funded scholarships for PhD students.
- **Australian Government Research Training Program**: Scholarships for international students seeking PhDs in Australia.

5. **Subject-Specific Resources**
- **Nature Jobs**: For PhDs in the life sciences and related fields.
- **New Scientist Jobs**: Another resource for PhD positions in science and technology.
- **American Mathematical Society**: Listings of PhD programs and fellowships in mathematics.
- **PhD in Humanities**: For humanities and social sciences, listings often include relevant PhD and research programs.

6. **Fellowships & Scholarships**
- **Chevening Scholarships**: UK-based scholarships for international students, sometimes including PhDs.
- **Commonwealth Scholarships**: For students from Commonwealth countries pursuing PhDs in the UK.
- **Fulbright Scholarships**: For U.S. students seeking PhDs abroad or international students in the U.S.

Self funding

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‘Bespoke’ PhD – proposal + funding

- Find Supervisor
- Submit research proposal
- Apply for PhD place – must meet academic requirements.

Find Funding:

- Apply for host institution grants & bursaries (check deadlines)
- Apply for funding from charitable awards (check deadlines)
- PhD student loan
- Part–time PhD & Research Assistant post (‘staff’ PhD option)
- Period of work before embarking on PhD
- For international students – funding from home country
- Investigate potential sources of funding at least 12 months before the relevant academic year

Alternative guide to postgraduate funding

Approaching potential supervisors

Guidance from UCL (useful for any university) on how to contact potential supervisors.

- Have a clear idea of the problem you seek to study
- Know the staff and their specific research interests – align your approach accordingly
- Be flexible about other options for research
- Research potential funding options

Questions to consider

- How good are the facilities?
- What is the research reputation of the group / department (REF)?
- Will I get formal training? – techniques, seminars;
- What topic would I like to research?
- What useful research skills will I develop?
- Are department systems in place if I need help?

Advice from postdoc researcher:

Find a research area that you really enjoy and choose wisely when picking a supervisor and PhD programme.

Key qualities of good supervisor:

- Approachable, available, amenable.

Tips for grant applications/proposals

Those evaluating your proposal/application for money will look for:

- Your **track record** and your potential
- A **'timely' research question** (emphasise why now is the right time to address this question);
- Supporting **pilot data** which indicates the question is an important one to ask (but is only pilot data – e.g. the question has not yet been tackled fully)
- Indication that you are **well set up** to address the question (it will be feasible to collect data, it can be done within the time frame)

- Give clear **project details** which show you are the right person to tackle the question, the question is an important one, you are well set up to answer it
- Make sure you meet the **expectations of the funding organisation**, be overt in referring to their aims and expectations
- Be clear about the **difference between aims and objectives** in setting out your proposal:
    - Aims: the changes in knowledge that you want to achieve – your vision for the future
    - Objectives: deliverables – activities you will perform to achieve the aim (aim for 3 objectives)

Identifying funding opportunities

Institutional Research Databases/information such as:

- LSHTM Centres, Research Groups and Research Projects
- UCL Institutional Research Information Service
- Kings Research Portal
- UK Research and Innovation gateway

Further resources for funding information:

- The Alternative Guide To postgraduate funding
- FindAPhD.com – Funding section
- Postgraduate Funding Guide from Prospects
- Host institution website

Session outcomes – did we cover everything?

By the end of this session we hope you will have an increased understanding across:

- Why choose to do a PhD?
- Brief look at academic careers
- Structure of a PhD
- Routes in (including some example programmes and deadlines)
- Where to look for advertised PhDs and for funding information
- Finding the right PhD
- Self-sourced and funded PhDs

What else is coming up?

Check Moodle Forthcoming workshops and events including:

- **PhD Applications** (16 & 20 Nov): We will cover what academic supervisors look for and how to design and draft the documents you need to submit

- **Discovery Series: Careers in Public and Global Health – Alumni Panel Discussion** (24 Nov)

We value your feedback

