



School of Geography and Environmental Sciences (GES)

PhD Researcher Subject Handbook
(Last updated October 2021)

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PhD Researcher Guide – School of Geography and Environmental Sciences (GES)



1. Introduction

Welcome to the School of Geography and Environmental Sciences! While your primary point of contact for information is your supervisor, this short guide is intended to provide a handy, practical introduction to facilities and mechanisms within the School. There is a wealth of information on the [Doctoral College](#) pages on the university website, as well as a [Research Studies Guide](#).

Supporting you in your studies is a range of lecturing staff, researchers and technicians. Their details, interests and activities can be found on the [School web pages](#). Of special relevance to post-graduate researchers are:

Dr Joerg Arnscheidt – Health and Safety coordinator (j.arnscheidt@ulster.ac.uk)

Dr Sara Benetti – Head of School (s.benetti@ulster.ac.uk)

Euan Dawson – Senior technician (len.dawson@ulster.ac.uk)

Professor Paul Dunlop – Research Director (p.dunlop@ulster.ac.uk)

Dr Bob McNabb – Post-Graduate Tutor (r.mcnabb@ulster.ac.uk)

Maura Marshall - Clerical officer (m.marshall@ulster.ac.uk)

Niamh McInerney – Support Assistant (n.mcinerney@ulster.ac.uk)

Yvonne Walsh – PhD Researcher Admin Assistant (y.walsh@ulster.ac.uk)

2. The School

The School of Geography and Environmental Sciences (GES) comprises members of academic staff, post-doctoral research fellows and post-graduate researchers. We are located in Block G of the Coleraine campus. We carry out a wide range of research on geographical and environmental subjects, ranging from physical processes to biological and social topics. There are regular meetings of the School Board throughout the year that you are welcome to attend. In addition, GES interests are reflected in a series of seminars that run each semester. These include guest speakers and GES staff and postgraduate researchers and you should attend all of them. You are also welcome to propose speakers relevant to your subject area. Seminars are held in G1117 (Coastal Seminar Room), usually on Wednesday afternoons (3pm) unless specified otherwise. PhD researchers, in common with all staff, are also regularly alerted to research and funding opportunities via email.

3. Progress and Assessment

You will be aware from your *Research Studies Handbook* that your progress is monitored by a number of [assessments](#) at which you present your project. The [PhD Manager system](#) alerts PhD researchers when [an assessment is due](#), and you must use the online application to begin the process. Assessments take the form of a report and presentation. Your written report is typically 6-10 pages detailing your progress, methods and results as appropriate to each assessment level (see below). It must be written and uploaded to PhD Manager at least a week in advance of the seminar so it can be considered by the panel. Please note that the report generates a Turnitin score that measures similarity to other work. The 15-minute presentation is in the form of a research seminar attended by a chairperson (normally the post-graduate tutor), your supervisors and two assessors, ideally with expertise in your area.

Initial Assessment – in the first year of your project you are attempting to demonstrate that your understanding of the fundamental concept(s) underpinning your project is sound as well as your methodology, knowledge of the subject and schedule. The panel will be asked to assess:

1. The quality of your presentation and report and your response to questions
2. Your engagement with the relevant literature
3. The viability of your project
4. Any training undertaken or needed and any ethical issues

Confirmation Assessment – This is the crucial seminar to progress through to PhD level and typically held just prior to re-registration for second year of your studies (full-time researchers). By this stage you should have made progress on collecting data that will successfully address the aims of your thesis. You need to demonstrate adequate depth of understanding and analysis, and have a clear idea of the schedule and issues as you progress toward completion. The panel will be asked to assess many of the same issues as the Initial assessment, and also:

1. Suitable progress and likelihood of completion within the relevant timeframe
2. Suitability and application of the methodology based on initial results
3. The ability to solve problems, collect relevant information and effectively communicate the concepts involved in your project

Final Assessment – This is a more informal seminar. Researchers should give a presentation based on the results of their work to their supervisors and other relevant individuals. This may be completed as part of the GES seminar series, or the University's Festival of PhD Research. The presentation is good preparation for the viva and provides valuable tips for successful completion.

The dates, times and locations of the Initial and Confirmation Assessments are arranged by the post-graduate tutor (Bob McNabb) in conjunction with your supervisor. The Final year Assessment relies on a more informal arrangement between you and your supervisor. You need to present these seminars in order to re-register and progress your project so please ensure you are adequately prepared. In addition, there are other internal opportunities to present your work,

such as the 3-Minute Thesis competition (where GES researchers have had considerable success!) and the poster session in the University's Festival of PhD Research.

Finally, you are also required to submit an annual report (each April/May) through PhD Manager providing you with an opportunity to comment on your progress, supervision, and any challenges or needs. Similarly, but separately, your supervisor also submits a report on your progress. Both reports are confidential and allow the Research Director to review any issues that arise. It is vital that you submit these reports in order to progress.

4. Training

The Doctoral College encourages you to undertake a Training Needs Analysis to provide a framework for your specific requirements. The [Researcher Development Programme](#) has a range of generic and specific opportunities to improve your skills. As well as generic skills there may be instances where you require additional specialized courses. These may or may not be available through the university or as part of training delivered to undergraduates so make enquiries through your supervisor. Finally, if you wish to broaden your basic knowledge via undergraduate classes you are welcome to sit in – contact the module coordinator (and see this [list](#)).

4.1 Teaching Practise

Many post-graduates are keen to widen their experience and CV whilst undertaking their PhD project. Often this involves taking a small number of undergraduate classes or demonstrating within a practical class or fieldtrip. Lecturers are provided with a list of doctoral researchers and their skills and may come seeking help – alternatively, approach one allied to your interests. Bear in mind that preparing lectures is a time-consuming process and it is important that you ensure that any teaching you undertake does not impede the progress of your project – particularly in your final year. Support programmes for teaching include *First Steps* and *Introduction to Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*.

5. Financial mechanisms

PhD researchers are funded in a range of ways by a number of bodies. Most spending mechanisms within the university rely on charging cost codes related to specific budgets. Department for Education or Vice-Chancellor Research Scholarships are allocated £900 held in cost code 82056Q. Externally-funded researchers should establish and use their own cost codes as far as possible. This code is your key to the procurement of most items you will need as well as booking vehicles etc. You must maintain a spreadsheet of all your expenditure, as we have found this is the most effective and accurate way for you to manage your finances. Part-time and self-funded researchers have sometimes encountered difficulties with paying fees at registration. Please note there is a mechanism for paying in instalments to ease this burden.

In order to book, for example, a conference or research trip using your cost code, you must submit a Prior Approval form (hardcopy in school office). This is an estimate of expenditure for your trip, the details of which you should confirm with your supervisor, and the form signed by Research Director.

The Prior Approval should be submitted to Eileen Gallagher¹, who will provide a claim number for you to recoup expenses. The claim number can also be used to book flights (with the university's travel agent, Key Travel), accommodation etc. using the School credit card. On your return a claim form (hardcopy) with your receipts should be sent to Eileen.

Should you need to order specific items outside the University for your research a purchase order can be raised. See Euan Dawson for forms and details.

6. GES Facilities

6.1 The School Office (G268)

The School Office holds a number of central reference files for school activity, and many of the forms you will need (though most are now online). There is also a pigeonhole for researchers to collect their post, and trays for out-going post. Maura has a world of institutional information at her fingertips and is privy to the schedule of most staff should you be looking for your supervisor!

Opposite the office, room G256 is the staff and researcher resource area – a small kitchen and informal meeting place which you are free to use for lunch, discussions, presentations etc.

6.2 Work Space and PCs

The desk space you need within the school and a computer to work on will be established for you in one of our PhD hub rooms. Computers provided are often second hand, though it is possible to purchase a PC through your cost code – you should discuss your needs with your supervisor. IT issues can be pursued through the faculty's technicians at H064B.

6.3 Vehicles

The school maintains a fleet of vehicles in order to carry out research, teaching and administrative activities. University staff and PhD researchers are automatically insured for their use once registered. In order to register you should provide a copy of your driving licence to Euan Dawson in the ORC². The vehicle booking system is maintained online, through Blackboard. You can access the Vehicle booking area and navigate through the calendar to book a vehicle on the date required. A folder for each vehicle is kept in the school office (if it's not there try the front security desk). This includes a log book which must be filled out for each episode of use. Vehicle use is charged per mile to your cost code and expenses incurred should be included on your budget spreadsheet.

6.4 Mobile Phones and field work contact

Mobile phones can be booked out for fieldwork etc. through Euan. Please note that these are for work purposes only. All calls are detailed in our phone bill and personal calls will be detected. We also operate Garmin *In Reach* systems for those researchers operating alone in regions where

¹ Finance Support Assistant, Room X014, Coleraine campus

² Open Resource Centre – opposite the school office

mobile phone coverage is poor. These units send a satellite signal with coordinates to alert emergency services in the event of an incident.

6.5 Photocopying, paper & stationery

Photocopying and scanning may be undertaken in the ORC using your Ulster ID card. This will be automatically charged against your cost code. Similar machines are available in the library. The school has a stationery cupboard for common items the key to which is held by Maura and Niamh in the school office.

6.6 Faculty Stores (G045)

Faculty Stores (G045) hold supplies such as paper, printer cartridges, sample bags, laboratory equipment etc. An order form must be filled out for supplies and you will need your cost code.

6.7 School equipment pool

The school has a range of equipment to aid research into the environment. This includes geophysical devices, boats, an ATV, surveying apparatus. Much of this equipment pool is held within the school's stores and the faculty store G0103A. Some of this equipment can be booked out including laptops, hand-held GPS units, first aid kits. Others need to be organized with the research group they belong to. It is important that you consider both the necessity of using what is often sophisticated (and unfortunately delicate) gear and your level of competency in handling it.

7. The Library & Resources

The [library](#) provides enhanced services to PhD researchers, including the ability to borrow more books at a time, to receive delivery of documents (e.g. inter-library loans) via email and access to enhanced electronic resources. In addition, some material that may be helpful for your project is available within the school. This includes electronic resources such as databases and cartographic datasets.

8. Health, Safety and Ethics

Your well-being during study and fieldwork is paramount. All research activities should be subject to risk assessment (see [Health and Safety Services](#) and appendix). This should be filled out, countersigned by your supervisor and a copy submitted to the file in the school office. Should an accident occur these forms will be referred to ensure you took all reasonable steps to mitigate against danger. In addition, all accidents or potential accidents should be reported to the school Health and Safety coordinator. Equally, research involving human subjects may raise ethical issues and these can be dealt with by submitting the necessary form to the school ethical committee. The contact in both cases is Dr Joerg Arnscheidt.

9. Social Media

The School is keen to promote you and your research via social media and our webpage. Please consider writing a short synopsis of your project for our Twitter page:

<https://twitter.com/@UlsterUniGES>
<http://www.ulster.ac.uk/es/research/>

We'd also be pleased to highlight any papers you present at conferences, training events, funding acquired, papers published, awards won and of course celebrate your graduation!

Dr Bob McNabb (Post-Graduate Tutor)
Room G166A
Geography & Environmental Sciences

Appendix - Health and Safety Risk Assessment- general hazards to staff 03/07

Work activity assessed _____	Faculty/School/Department reference _____
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Person(s) affected Staff↑Students↑Others ↑ Numbers affected _____
Activity frequency Daily↑Weekly↑Other↑
Campus (please tick) J ↑ C ↑ M ↑ B ↑
Room ref (if relevant)
Review due

L
I
K
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I
H
O
O
D

frequently	MEDIUM	HIGH	HIGH
sometimes	LOW	MEDIUM	HIGH
rarely	LOW	LOW	MEDIUM

SEVERITY ☐ trivial significant severe

Individual Tasks	Hazards	Controls required	In place Yes ✓ No ✗	Risk rating (use matrix)	IMPLEMENTING THE CONTROLS	
					Action by whom	Action by when

Appendix - Health and Safety Risk Assessment- general hazards to staff 03/07

This risk assessment will be reviewed at least annually where any significant changes are made, new equipment introduced or if there is any reason to suspect it is no longer valid.

Assessors Comments

Faculty/School/Department/Research Institute _____

Signature of assessor _____ Print name _____ Designation _____

Management Comments

Manager/supervisor _____ Print name _____ Designation _____

Risk assessment communicated to: Technicians Academic/supervisor Students PRD Others _____