School of Geography and Environmental Sciences (GES)

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PhD Researcher Handbook – 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 supervisory team, 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, the Research Studies Guide, and the School SharePoint site.

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 postgraduate 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)
Dr Paul Dunlop – Director of Research (p.dunlop@ulster.ac.uk)
Maura Marshall - Clerical officer (m.marshall@ulster.ac.uk)
Niamh McInerney – Support Assistant (n.mcinerney@ulster.ac.uk)
Dr Bob McNabb – Postgraduate Tutor (r.mcnabb@ulster.ac.uk)
Gordon Neill – Technical Services coordinator (g.neill@ulster.ac.uk)
Yvonne Walsh – Academic Excellence Executive 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 postgraduate 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 (typically held in March, June and October). In addition, GES interests are reflected in a series of seminars that run each semester. These include guest speakers, 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) unless otherwise specified, and a

schedule of upcoming seminars can be found on the School SharePoint site. 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. For a more detailed guide to each assessment, see the School SharePoint site.

The Initial and Confirmation 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. 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 postgraduate tutor), your supervisors and two assessors, ideally with expertise in your area of study.

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 Admin Assistant (Yvonne Walsh), in conjunction with the postgraduate tutor (Bob McNabb) and your supervisory team. 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 requires you to undertake a Training Needs Analysis to provide a framework for your specific requirements. This should be completed with your supervisory team before the Initial Assessment and updated regularly throughout your studies. 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 and postgraduate classes, you are welcome to sit in – just contact the module coordinator (and see this [list](#)).

4.1 Teaching Practice

Many postgraduates 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, you may 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.

Before demonstrating for the first time, you will need to attend the demonstrator training provided by the University, [Introduction to Learning & Teaching at Ulster for Postgraduate Teaching Assistants (PgTAs)](#). This session provides you with information about your role as a demonstrator, as well as an introduction to effective teaching practice.

PhD Researchers are also eligible to attend [First Steps to Supporting Learning and Teaching in Higher Education](#) (PHE705), an accredited short course that leads to Associate Fellow of the Higher Education Academy (AFHEA) status upon successful completion. This is a year-long part-time module that will help you to develop your understanding of, and practice in, effective learning, teaching, and assessment in higher education. Because this course represents a significant time commitment, you should discuss this with your supervisory team before enrolling.

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 expenditures, as we have found this is the most effective and accurate way for you to manage your finances. To help you with this, Yvonne has created individual spreadsheets, which she will share with you upon enrolment.

For a detailed guide for how to spend against your account for your project, please see this Process Map (also located on the School SharePoint site).

6. GES Facilities

6.1 The School Office (G268)

In the School Office, you will find 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 in 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. Please be sure to clean up after yourself, including washing, drying, and putting away any dishes that you use!

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.

Any IT issues should be pursued through the Service Desk, either by sending an email to servicedesk@ulster.ac.uk, or by opening a ticket via UniDesk, available through the Portal. When opening a ticket, be sure to include the following information:

- Your university email address
- Student ID
- Campus/Room number
- A full description of the issue, including screenshots of any error messages
- Device Name (Service Tag or ST)

In addition to the computer provided at your desk, we have a number of additional computing resources. These include the Data Analysis Lab (G0120), which has 8 workstations equipped with

a variety of software for more resource-intensive computation and analysis. If you need any additional software installed on these computers, please contact Bob McNabb.

We also have two High-performance computing (HPC) facilities, vulcan and atlas, which can be used for even more intensive computational analysis. Additionally, we have access to the Northern Ireland HPC facility through. For more information about how to access these resources, please contact Bob McNabb.

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 the Technical Services Coordinator (Gordon Neill) in room G260. The vehicle booking system is maintained online through SharePoint. You can access the Vehicle booking area and navigate through the calendar to book a vehicle on the date required – you may first need to ask Niamh in the School Office for access. A folder for each vehicle is kept at the front security desk of the University, as they are open at all hours. This includes a log book which must be filled out for each episode of use and a fuel card for each vehicle. 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 the Technical Services Coordinator. 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 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, and 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, and 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. via [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, Ethics and Wellbeing

8.1 Safety and Risk Assessments

Your well-being during study and fieldwork is paramount. All research activities, even desk-based activities, should be subject to risk assessment (see Appendix). The Risk Assessment form should be filled out and countersigned by your supervisor, and a copy submitted to the file in the school office. This should be done as part of your Initial Assessment and updated as needed throughout the project. 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 (Dr Joerg Arnscheidt).

8.2 Ethics Concerns

Research involving human subjects, **in any capacity**, must go through ethical approval **before it is carried out**. Any research which is found to have not been through the due ethical process will be deemed invalid. Our School Ethics Committee, Dr Suzanne Beech and Dr Sara McDowell, can provide any relevant documentation. Further details on the University's position with respect to governance of research involving human participants can also be found [here](#).

8.3 Health and Wellbeing

The University provides a range of health and wellbeing resources for staff and students, including awareness-raising activities, workshops, and counselling. The [University website](#) also has links to advice and information about both physical and mental health, among other topics. On the Coleraine campus, the Student Wellbeing can be found in Room E023.

Ulster University has its own Sports Centre with reduced memberships for students, including PhD Researchers. The Sports Centre offers two multi-purpose sports halls (for football, basketball, badminton, and table tennis), a fitness suite, a strength and conditioning suite, a steam room and sauna as well as outdoor facilities and group classes. There are also several walking and running trails across campus.

8.4 Bullying and Harassment

The University has a zero-tolerance attitude to bullying and harassment, by both staff and students. This includes any unwelcome physical, verbal, visual or written conduct that causes the

recipient to feel upset, threated, humiliated, or vulnerable. If you feel that you have experienced bullying or harassment, you have different options for how to proceed. At any stage of the process, you can seek confidential advice from any of the University's Trained Harassment Advisors, a Trades Union or Students' Union representative, or a member of the University's Policy Implementation Unit.

You can try to resolve matters informally by requesting a meeting with the alleged bully/harasser and a third party (e.g., one of the harassment advisors or a Trades Union or Students' Union representative). You can also discuss the matter with a third party, including the alleged bully/harasser's Line Manager, and asking them to speak to the alleged bully/harasser on your behalf, or you can engage in the University's mediation process. If you feel comfortable with it, you may also try approaching the alleged bully/harasser directly and making it clear that the behaviour in question is offensive and should be stopped.

If you feel that the nature of the allegation/behaviour is such that it would be inappropriate to investigate/resolve it informally, or if the informal process fails to resolve the behaviour, you may make a formal complaint. To submit a formal complaint, fill out this form and submit it to the Chief People Officer (if the complaint is about a member of staff), or the campus Provost (if the complaint is about a fellow student). At any stage of this process, you can seek advice or assistance from any of the harassment advisors or a Trades Union representative.

For more detailed information about the University's policy on Bullying and Harassment, see the University's Policy and Procedures document, or the University information page.

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 (Postgraduate 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
_____	

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	frequently	MEDIUM	HIGH	HIGH
I **K** **E** **L**				
I **H**	sometimes	LOW	MEDIUM	HIGH
O **O**				
D	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

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** _____