



School of Education

PhD Researcher Subject Handbook
(Last updated September 2021)

ulster.ac.uk

Welcome

Welcome to the School of Education and to Postgraduate Research studies at Ulster!

Whether you are a full time or part time PhD researcher, you can be assured that the University will be on hand to support you throughout the process of completing your Research. While your supervisors will be of paramount importance in this process, many other sources of support are available to you, including the Library, Researcher Support, the Researcher Development Programme, (RDP) and the wider academic and research community including the Doctoral College and, of course, your fellow PhD researchers. The online workflow system, PhD Manager, will help you with administrative issues and reporting. It is in your interests to engage fully with the resources available to you, as this encourages your development as a researcher and as a valued member of our research community.

This guide provides you with some general information on how you, as a PhD Researcher, fit into the University (which can seem bewilderingly complex!). Also included is information on how and where to access support, whether academic, practical or personal. While you will undoubtedly need further information at some point, this guide should help to get you started and if you have any queries that are not covered, please do not hesitate to contact the Postgraduate Tutor (Dr Claire Woods) or the Research Support Officer for the School of Education (Mrs Elaine Kane). We aim to ensure that our researchers not only succeed in their research studies but also enjoy their experience at Ulster.

Professor David Barr
Research Director
School of Education

SUPPORT FOR YOUR RESEARCH

Your School, Your Faculty and Your Doctoral College

All PhD researchers within the Doctoral College are affiliated to a Research Unit of Assessment (this is the School of Education, in your case) which has responsibility for all aspects of Researchers' education and training from first application through to final examination.

The stated aim of the Doctoral College is to: facilitate and professionalise the training of research researchers within the Doctoral College, formalise monitoring and management of progress, improve the quality of research training provision, promote research excellence and increase research volume by increasing researcher numbers, and generally champion graduate education.

The Doctoral College and School Research Administration will ensure that researchers will be notified of forthcoming internal assessments and lectures/seminars on topics of interest to researchers. Attendance at such events is highly recommended as it promotes engagement with the relevant research communities.

Attendance requirements

PhD researchers are expected to be working full-time on their project. Full-time PhD researchers are entitled to 40 days leave per academic year, to include public holidays and periods when the University is closed.

Faculty Postgraduate Research Suite, Block I Room I209 and I210

These rooms provide desk and computer space, a printer, a small kitchen area and soft seating areas and is for the use of Researchers within the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences. Access will only be granted through the School of Education's Research Support Officer, Mrs Elaine Kane.

PhD researchers will provide their own tea/coffee etc. The office space provided for full-time researchers is shared and this requires a degree of consideration for others and also communal responsibility for the space. Please ensure that you do not cause waste, mess or noise that may annoy colleagues and be respectful if you need to ask colleagues to moderate their behaviour. If any problems arise, the School of Education's Research Support Officer, Mrs Elaine Kane, will be happy to assist in matters such as arranging removal of rubbish or the rearrangement of furniture (where this does not affect other occupants).

Meetings with Supervisors

During the period of research, PhD researchers are expected to meet the supervisor team regularly and frequently (fortnightly meetings are recommended for full-time PhDs). It is required that certain meetings (e.g. monthly) between supervisors and PhD researchers are designated as formal and that a record of these meetings is maintained on the PhD Manager.

A part-time PhD researcher is admitted on condition that visits to the supervisor take place at least three times each semester and during holiday periods as required. Parttime distance PhD researchers are expected to attend for a minimum of six

weeks during their period of study and are required to maintain regular contact by e-mail or other appropriate means.

As researchers at Ulster, your main source of support will come from your team of supervisors. Staff involved in supervision are expected to be able to advise PhD Researchers on aspects of their research projects including matters relating to University procedures.

A good working relationship with your supervisors will be a key factor in the success of your research project and the University provides guidance for both PhD researchers and supervisors to ensure this relationship is maximised, please see *'role of student and supervisor'*.

Standards of Professional Conduct for PhD Researchers

Ulster University is committed to creating and sustaining a welcoming, inclusive and accessible learning and working environment which is free from all and any forms of bullying and harassment. This is supported and underpinned by the University's mission, which is to: "transform lives, stretch minds, develop skills and raise ambitions, deliver globally significant research with local relevance, encourage a diverse university community and make a lasting contribution to society as a whole".

All members of the University community (including staff, PhD researchers and students) are expected to assist in the promotion of an environment where every member of the University community is treated with respect and dignity. Bullying and harassment can take many forms, from the most obvious (for example aggression, threats and shouting are clearly bullying) to the more subtle (such as isolation or nonco-operation at work, exclusion from social activities or conversation, which also fall within the definition of bullying).

For more information on Professional conduct for PhD Researchers please see:

<https://www.ulster.ac.uk/doctoralcollege/current/handbooks-and-policies/standardsof-professional-conduct-for-phd-researchers>

Portal and Blackboard Virtual Learning Environment (VLE)

The University has a Portal which is the gateway to much of our online support and you should log into the Portal and spend some time exploring the range of materials and links available to you. Most useful information will be under the 'Research' tab, but other sections also have relevant material. The Virtual Learning Environment (Blackboard) is also accessed via the Portal. Any online courses from the Research Development Programme (RDP) on which you are registered will appear automatically in Blackboard: <https://learning.ulster.ac.uk/webapps/login>

PhD Manager

<https://phdmanager.ulster.ac.uk/>

PhD Manager is an online workflow management system for your PhD – a one stop shop for PhD administration – so , for example, if you want to make changes to your study title, apply for an extension or a leave of absence, complete an annual report.....please login to PhD Manager. If you have not used it before you can find comprehensive guides within the system itself. To login, just use your normal computer login details. You can find information on the various types of changes you may need to make in our Making Changes section. If you have difficulties, please contact us on pqr@ulster.ac.uk

Library support

The Doctoral College recommends that all new PhD researchers arrange to meet on a one-to-one basis with one of the Librarians to discuss their research interests and likely needs and also to find out more about what the library can offer in terms of assistance. This specialised advice is always useful and can be invaluable, and our librarians are extremely approachable and helpful. You will find contact details for the relevant staff in 'Useful Contacts' below or through the University portal.

<https://www.ulster.ac.uk/library>

Financial support

The School of Education receives a recurrent budget from the Doctoral College and also Research Training Support Grants (RTSG) for funded full-time researchers. It is important that you discuss this with your supervisors at an early stage what funding you will require during Research. We do not generally encourage use of funding for books (which can usually be provided via the Library) or for laptops unless there are exceptional circumstances. Once approval in principle has been agreed with supervisors, the Admin Support (Mrs Elaine Kane) will assist in completion of a Prior Approval (PA) form. Once approved, a PA number is issued, expenditure can go ahead. Please remember that travel must be booked via the university's travel agent, 'Key Travel'. **All expenditure must have prior approval.** In order to reclaim approved expenditure, you must produce **receipts** (bank or credit card statements are not accepted by finance).

Terms & Conditions:

https://www.ulster.ac.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0005/297437/Postgraduate-Terms-Conditions-201819.pdf

Research Development Programme

All PhD researchers are expected to undertake a Training Needs Analysis at the beginning of their studies and to review this on an annual basis, in consultation with their supervisor(s). The Training Needs Analysis is structured around the Vitae Researcher Development Framework 'domains'. This will be used to develop your own Personal Development Plan which will map onto the offerings within the Programme.

Your supervisors will discuss training needs with you throughout your research studies and you should feel free to raise any issues with them as each researcher will have individual training needs which can be addressed in a variety of ways, including attendance at lectures and modules, training courses and independent study. Training is provided by the Research Development Programme, in areas

such as written and oral communication, time management and preparation for oral examination, and a range of short courses on specific aspects of research are available. Details can be found on the following links.

<https://www.ulster.ac.uk/doctoralcollege>

<https://www.ulster.ac.uk/doctoralcollege/current-phd-researchers/handbooks-and-policies/research-studies-handbook/supporting-your-studies>

Personal Support

Our PhD researchers vary widely in personal circumstances. On occasion, we understand that personal factors may impede academic progress and a wide range of support is available from supervisors, the Postgraduate Tutor, the Research Director and University Researcher Support Services (<https://www.ulster.ac.uk/researchersupport>) In addition, the regulations permit leave of absence where circumstances warrant this. If you find yourself in this situation, regardless of the cause, you should contact your supervisors and/or Postgraduate Tutor for a confidential discussion as soon as you realise that this is impacting on your research studies. It is in your own interest to do this as early as possible, to ensure that you are aware of options available to you and have an opportunity to take appropriate action before falling badly behind schedule. Please remember, it is also in the University's interests that you complete your research studies successfully and the School of Education and other sources of support are in place to facilitate this.

REGULATIONS AND ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

Universities are large organisations and heavily regulated. This means that during your research studies there will be a number of forms to complete within PhD Manager and it is important that you do not neglect this. Try to think of it as just another aspect of your research training (researchers and academics generally need to deal with lots of paperwork).

Ethical approval for your research

Research Governance is the regulation, monitoring and quality assurance of research on human beings, and includes appropriate legislation and procedures that impact upon universities, the NHS and other bodies. It is likely that in the near future there will be increasing demands from funding bodies and others upon researchers to be able to demonstrate that their research is subjected to appropriate scrutiny and monitoring.

Under the University's **Research Governance & Ethics** requirements, proposed research projects involving human participants (as does most Social Sciences research) should be submitted to the appropriate committee for ethical approval **before** data collection commences. The process of gaining ethical approval can be a lengthy one—and you should apply at the earliest opportunity to avoid any delay. Your supervisors will advise you on completing the application and further information may also be found at the Research Governance and Ethics section of the Portal: <https://internal.ulster.ac.uk/research/office/rofficeeg.php>

Please note that any changes to the approved research plan may have ethical implications and therefore ethical approval for the modified plan will be required before further research can proceed.

Leave of Absence

Please note that retrospective Leave of Absence is not allowed, so it is imperative that you notify the Research Director or Postgraduate Tutor and your supervisors, and you also need to submit through PhD manager at the earliest opportunity. Funded researchers should be aware that absence for more than two weeks must be notified to supervisors, up to 28 days paid sick leave is allowed in any 12 months, and longer absences may have financial implications (please see <https://www.ulster.ac.uk/doctorscollege/current-phd-researchers/handbooks-and-policies/t-and-cs-for-del>)

Attendance As full time PhD researchers, you are required to attend the University on a daily basis except by written agreement with your supervisors and Research Director. You are entitled to 40 days leave per academic year, to include public holidays and periods when the University is closed. Furthermore, if you hold a Tier 4 visa, you will be required to sign in every two weeks at your School Office and you will be provided with details on registration. This process is managed within PhD Manager. If for any reason signing in is unexpectedly not possible, you should contact the School of Education and the Doctoral College immediately so that the appropriate action can be taken.

If you need to spend a period of time studying away from the University, you should submit your request in [PhD Manager](#), which involves an assessment of risk and will provide the University with details of where you plan to be based.

<https://www.ulster.ac.uk/doctoralcollege/current-phd-researchers/handbooks-and-policies/research-studies-handbook/regulatory>

Paid work

For funded researchers up to six hours per week **paid work**, to include associated preparation and marking, is allowed provided it is relevant to your training and approved by your supervisors.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is defined in the University's Research portal:

https://www.ulster.ac.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0019/152218/Plagiarism-Policy.pdf

Plagiarism is the act of taking or copying someone else's work, including another researcher's, and presenting it as if it were one's own. Plagiarism is said to occur when ideas, texts, theories, data, created artistic artefacts or other material are presented without acknowledgement so that the person considering this work is given the impression that what they have before them is the researcher's own original work when it is not. Plagiarism also occurs where a researcher's own work is re-presented without being properly referenced. Plagiarism is a form of cheating and is a disciplinary offence

All written work submitted to the School of Education, in respect of Initial, Confirmation and Final assessments will be processed through 'TurnItIn' detection software on submission of work on PhD Manager and must be submitted in an industry standard electronic format.

Submission

Following advice from your supervisory team and prompts from [PhD Manager](#), you should notify the Doctoral College of your intention to submit your thesis at least three months prior to your expected thesis submission date. This enables the Doctoral College to begin making examination arrangements. This does not tie you to the submission date, it simply allows preparations for your submission and viva to begin. PhD Researchers who are not members of staff of the University should submit two soft bound copies of the thesis for examination in the first instance. If you have been a full-time member of staff for a period exceeding two years, or part-time equivalent, then you should submit three copies. These copies will be distributed to your examiners. Submission of thesis is also required via upload to PhD manager along with the TurnItIn report.

Deposit of data

In accordance with the requirements of the University Code of Practice for Professional Integrity in the Conduct of Research each researcher must deposit all raw data and samples with their Supervisor Team prior to final presentation of the thesis. Confirmation that the supervisory team is content that all appropriate materials have been deposited must be presented to the Doctoral College at the time of submission, this is done via the [Deposit of Data and Samples Form](#).

Getting off to a good start

Finally, a word on settling into your new environment and paying attention to professional development. Time invested in getting to know the University, the people, your supervisors and your peers is time well spent. Most researchers are keen to focus on their research, and we clearly do not discourage this at all. However, please also make time to attend assessments, talks, training sessions and to fully engage with the Research Community and the wider community which has an interest in your work. Your professional development includes a range of skills beyond academic knowledge. Networking is an important part of research development, as researchers both contribute to and benefit from the research environment by engaging in the range of opportunities on offer. Professional work practices, developing decision making skills and generally finding out how researchers work are all facilitated by seeing at first-hand how an academic and research community operates within a wider social context, and becoming a part of that. While this may take you beyond your comfort zone at times, you will benefit hugely from making the most of your time with the School of Education.

KEY PROCESSES FOR POSTGRADUATE M. Phil and Ph.D. RESEARCHERS
Summary Table

Event	Full Time	Part time
(Re) Enrolment	Mid- September annually	Electronically, every summer
Initial assessment	Within four months of first registration	Within ten months of first registration
Annual report	First week in May, annually	First week in May, annually
Confirmation assessment	Between ten and twelve months of first registration	Between 12 and 24 months of first registration
Final assessment	Within 30 months of first registration	Within 60 months (PhD) or 36 months (MPhil) of first registration
Intention to Submit notified	Three months before proposed submission date	Three months before proposed submission date
Submission of thesis	Within 36 months (PhD) or 24 Months (MPhil) of first registration	Within 72 months (PhD) or 48 Months (MPhil) of first registration

<https://www.ulster.ac.uk/doctorscollege/current-phd-researchers/handbooks-and-policies/research-studies-handbook/the-phd-journey-key-milestones>

Annual Reports

Supervisors and PHD researchers are required to submit, on an annual basis, and independently, a written report on progress via PhD manager. The progress of PhD researchers will be additionally monitored through these annual reports. Each written report must address ethical issues related to the research and also must provide information on the quantity of written work that has been submitted to the supervisor(s) for feedback during the period to which the progress assessment applies.

N.B. Where appropriate, and subsequent to initial discussions with appointed supervisors, the Research Director or Admin Support should be the first point of contact for all PhD researchers with queries/problems.

ASSESSMENT INFORMATION

Initial Assessment

This is held approximately four months full-time, ten months part-time post-registration and must be organised in close co-operation with your supervisors. The process is initiated through PhD Manager. It is concerned with a precise description of the proposed programme of work, will usually include a written submission along with a presentation at least two weeks in advance of the assessment date for circulation to panel members. As part of this process, you are asked to consider whether ethical approval is necessary for the project and to make arrangements to apply for such approval, where appropriate.

Both the written report and the oral presentation must include information on the following:

- the project background;
- the overall aim of the investigation;
- the methods to be employed and associated ethical issues ;
- the objectives to be achieved within the first year of studies.
- work completed to date including amount of written work submitted
- research training activity completed during the assessment period

You will be required to submit a [Turnitin Originality Report](https://www.ulster.ac.uk/doctorscollege/current-phd-researchers/submitted-your-thesis/submitted-work-through-turnitin) along with your assessment submission into PhD Manager. Details to access Turnitin can be found on Doctoral College portal: <https://www.ulster.ac.uk/doctorscollege/current-phd-researchers/submitted-your-thesis/submitted-work-through-turnitin>

Selected staff are designated to form the assessment panel, which provides a report on the research plans; this panel may recommend changes to the programme of work and re-consideration of the proposals after an agreed period of time. The total length of this assessment is 30 minutes: a presentation of 15 minutes followed by questions from the panel. You will be given oral feedback on the day and written feedback via a letter from the Doctoral College.

Confirmation Assessment

This is held at approximately 10- 12 months full-time and 12-24 months part-time post-registration (for full-time researchers). The process is initiated through PhD Manager. It will include a written submission along with a presentation, at least two weeks in advance of the assessment date, together with an abstract. You will not normally be permitted to re-enrol into your second year (for full time, funded researchers) until the Doctoral College has received notification from the Unit of Assessment of successful completion of your Confirmation Assessment, so you should take this into account as it may impact progression and payment of your stipend.

Both the written report and the oral presentation must include information on the following:

- the project background;
- the overall aim of the investigation;
- the methods employed and associated ethical issues;
- data obtained to date and amount of written work submitted since last assessment
- proposed programme for future Ph.D. work;
 - or, where appropriate proposed programme to complete practical and written work within the following 12-month period to submit for M.Phil.
- an outline of the thesis in the form of intended chapter headings
- research training activity completed during the assessment period

This Assessment is given to a designated panel of experienced, research active academic staff who are required to provide a written report on researchers' progress, and make recommendation concerning progress to date and suitability for PhD. confirmation (or, where appropriate, continuation to complete an M.Phil.).

The examining panel is empowered to make recommendations concerning the direction of the work and/or re-assessment after an agreed period if progress is deemed unsatisfactory.

The total length of this assessment is 45 minutes: a 20-minute presentation, followed by questions from the panel. You will be given oral feedback on the day and written feedback via a letter from the Doctoral College.

Final Assessment

This is given at approximately 30 months full-time and 60 months part-time post-registration. A written report on progress Your Unit of Assessment administrators will be able to advise on the exact nature of the assessment but it will include a written submission along with a presentation, at least two weeks in advance of the assessment date. This should include consideration of research training activity and written work submitted since the last assessment. Alternatively, if your supervisors agree, you may submit a draft journal article based on your PhD research as your written submission. Designated experienced academic staff are present to review progress, offer advice and highlight any problems which may hinder completion with the relevant period.

This assessment comprises a 20-minute presentation followed by questions from the panel.

ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

Examining staff are advised to pay particular attention to the following in relation to MPhil. and PhD. Assessment reports.

Initial Assessment

- Is the project clearly defined?
- Are the objectives to be achieved within the first 12-month period realistic and achievable within available resources (e.g. consumable or financial support, access, etc)?
- Have ethical issues been appropriately addressed?
- Will the project provide adequate research training for the researcher to at least M.Phil. standard?
- Is the programme of work likely to provide a sufficient foundation for (potential) Ph.D. study?
- Does the researcher show evidence of at least a basic understanding of the problem, the limitations of the techniques to be employed and the significance of the work within the broader context?
- Are the proposed supervisor/advisor arrangements satisfactory?
- Has the researcher submitted an appropriate quantity of written work for comment and was the quality of this work adequate?
- Has the researcher completed the appropriate research training activities?

Confirmation Assessment

- Have the objectives of the first 12-month period of work been achieved?
- Is the proposed programme of work a logical extension of the completed studies?
- Are the defined objectives likely to be achieved with the available resources?
- Have ethical issues been appropriately addressed, or do they require review in the light of changes to the research plan since the first progress assessment?
- Is the work likely to provide adequate research training to doctorate (or masters, where appropriate) level for the researcher?
- Is the work sufficiently well-defined potentially to provide publishable data within a 12-18 month period?
- Can the practical studies be completed within an 18-month period (or 6 months for M.Phil.)?
- Does the researcher show evidence of ability critically to evaluate the work and place it within the context of related studies?
- Is (are) the supervisor(s) satisfied with the researcher's progress to date, including an assessment of the amount and quality of written work submitted since the last progress assessment?
- Is the researcher satisfied with the current supervisory arrangements?
- Has the researcher completed the appropriate research training activities?

Final Assessment

- Has the work made, or is it likely in the near future to make, a measurable and worthwhile contribution to the field of study?
- Is the practical component of the work completed, or almost completed?
- Do ethical issues require review in the light of changes to the research plan since the Confirmation Assessment.
- Has an outline of the thesis been finalised?
- Has the work been (or will it be in the near future) subject to external review through conference presentation or full papers?
- Are the researcher and supervisor(s) satisfied that the written thesis will be submitted on time in the light of the amount and quality of written work submitted to date? If not, are the assessors convinced that the thesis will be submitted within 4 years of enrolment, and would they support an extension on this basis?
- Has the researcher completed the appropriate research training activities?

For further information please contact:

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PhD Manager Online system:
<https://phdmanager.ulster.ac.uk/>

Subject Librarian
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