University of Reading

Doctoral and Researcher College

PhD by Distance

Guidance

Studying for a PhD by Distance permits individuals who cannot attend the University of Reading the opportunity to gain a doctorate when their circumstances and location do not allow them to study on site.

By Distance registration may particularly appeal to candidates who:

- have an extensive fieldwork element to their research
- have responsibilities (e.g. caring or employment) that prevent them from attending on campus
- are already based and/or employed in an environment that is relevant and conducive to their research
- do not reside within travelling distance of the University
- are based in a UK research organisation/institution with a UoR collaborative agreement in place

PhD by Distance programmes are governed by the University's Code of Practice on Research Students; they are delivered and examined to the same high academic standard as 'standard' PhD Programmes.

A PhD by Distance is not suitable for all candidates. In offering a PhD By Distance programme specific consideration is given to the suitability of the research project, and whether it can be completed successfully without regular access to campus. Further consideration is given to areas of supervision, support, transferable and subject-specific skills training, research environment , progression milestones and the examination process in order to ensure off campus research students receive a comparable (although, not similar) experience to on campus students registered on 'standard' PhD programmes.

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PhD by Distance Registration

PhD by Distance registration is available for students who will study at least two-thirds of their minimum registration period off campus.

Students registered By Distance will benefit from being physically present on campus for periods of time, for instance to attend induction and selected training, to meet their supervisor and peers, and to attend at key points such as Confirmation of Registration. It is strongly recommended that the first month of their programme be spent on campus.

Mode of Attendance

Candidates can apply to study by distance on either a full-time or part-time basis. The minimum registration periods (3 years full-time or 4 years part-time) and maximum registration period (4 years full-time or 6 years part-time) are the same as for campus-based students.

Eligibility Criteria for PhD by Distance

1. The academic and English language entry requirements for a PhD by Distance are the same as campus based PhDs
2. The candidate has a research project which can be undertaken successfully by distance; regular access to campus should not be essential for successful completion of the research
3. The candidate must be able to demonstrate that they have the time to undertake a PhD on the selected mode (full-time or part-time). Part-time doctoral study at Reading typically equates to between 50% and 60% of full-time
4. The candidate has independent access to the resources needed to successfully complete their research; this will vary between candidates and projects but may include access to archives, facilities, data collection, digital infrastructure or space in their off-campus location
5. The candidate is well motivated to work alone; they understand that By Distance registration is not an online learning programme and has reduced access to campus training
6. The candidate and School/Department have discussed the suitability of their research project and personal circumstances for study by distance
7. The candidate, where appropriate, has access to support from a local supervisor or mentor with experience in the academic field and also of supporting students or equivalent researchers. Advisors/mentors may be appointed to provide a regular point of contact and are normally in a position to act as an ‘advocate’ and provide pastoral care if needed.

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Skills Training and Learning Needs Analysis

Training should be provided for all research students, including those studying part-time or for a PhD by Distance. This training should involve both research skills specific to a particular subject area and also additional (also called transferable or generic) skills training. An appropriate doctoral training programme is provided at two levels: the Doctoral and Researcher College provides Institutional generic research and professional skills training, and Schools provide appropriate discipline level training (CoP 5.(a)).

As part of their doctoral programme, all students are encouraged to take responsibility for their own professional and personal development. Therefore, each student should undertake a Learning Needs Analysis (LNA) in consultation with their supervisor, to identify gaps in their skills / knowledge base and what courses within the Doctoral and Researcher College or School training are most relevant to them. (CoP 5. (b)).

Doctoral and Researcher College Training for Students Registered By Distance

The Doctoral and Researcher College provides a suite of generic researcher training open to all doctoral researchers at Reading; this complements subject-specific training available via Schools. The specific content of the programme changes from year to year but broadly includes the following.

Live online training (available off-campus) - A selection of our training sessions in the Reading Researcher Development Programme (RRDP), typically representing not less than 100 hours of learning, is delivered live online each year. UK time zone applies

Recorded tutorials (available off-campus) - A small but growing selection of recorded tutorials on key topics such as managing data, academic English and research funding

Face-to-face training (available on campus only) - Other RRDP training sessions and selected longer programmes are offered face-to-face only. Students registered By Distance have access to face-to-face training when physically present on campus. [1]

[1] For international students there may be visa restrictions on the frequency and duration of campus visits

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By Distance study entails reduced access to training opportunities and on-campus experience. By Distance candidates are encouraged to discuss and mutually agree overall training plans with their supervisor and seek supplementary training external to Reading (e.g. via an employer or nearby institution) as appropriate.

During their visits to Reading, PhD by Distance students are strongly encouraged to attend face-to-face RRDP training. Students can contact the Doctoral and Researcher College in advance of their visit to Reading to discuss the training course they wish to book during their visit. The Doctoral and Researcher College will offer priority booking for their chosen training courses. A training guide on the Doctoral and Researcher College website details which courses are offered in each term. Bookings typically open at the very start of the autumn term, and at the very end of the latter two terms.

School Subject Specific Training and Programme Specifications

Schools should not underestimate the time, effort and resource required to support By Distance students and offer them a comparable experience to that of on-campus students. It is the responsibility of the School to ensure that an off-campus student will receive the best possible training, and academic and pastoral care. The School needs to consider how to make available a suitable research environment, including opportunities for off-campus students to discuss their research, interact and network with their peers.

The PhD Programme specifications outlining various details and requirements of PhD Programmes also apply to PhD by Distance. Some Schools have a formal requirement for students to attend and be assessed on taught modules. By Distance Students can register on modules for attendance only and can access learning materials on the virtual learning environment. Schools need to be aware that online timetabling is not available for any distance learning student, including PhD By Distance students. Schools need to consider the implications of off-campus students not being able to be assessed on taught modules remotely, as per the requirements of the Programme Specifications, when accepting by Distance students. An assessment of prior experience and learning may be appropriate where students have had previous experience in research or have taken similar modules as part of another degree.

Fees

Information on fees for doctoral research programmes is available on the fees webpage.

Approval process

A case for PhD by Distance should be made at the time of admission. An approval form must be completed and considered by the School. Schools are responsible for approving cases for PhD by Distance. A copy of the form, once approved and signed by both Director of Postgraduate Research Studies and Head of School is retained by the School Postgraduate Research Administrator.

Immigration/visa requirements for international students

PhD by Distance students must ensure that when visiting the University that they obtain the correct visa. The correct type of visa depends upon the period of time which a student intends to spend physically at the University.

PhD by Distance students can visit the University for up to six months within each academic year with a maximum of eighteen months in total for the duration of their programme. Students must discuss their intentions with the Doctoral Research Office (DRO) well in advance of any planned visit to the University. The DRO is well-placed to provide information on a range of immigration-related matters related to Postgraduate Research Programmes dro@reading.ac.uk.

Induction

A University-wide induction event is held by the Doctoral and Researcher College near the start of each term for all new doctoral researchers. PhD by Distance students studying at Reading in the first term are expected to attend. Where it is not possible for PhD by Distance students to attend in person (i.e. they are not on campus), a recording of the induction will be made available on the virtual learning environment.

In addition, Schools will make every effort to ensure that PhD by Distance students attend (or have access to) a local induction event which allows them to become familiar with the School research environment.

Whilst it is accepted that it may be harder to involve PhD by Distance students in induction programmes, Schools should make every effort to ensure that such students are able to attend; considering, for instance, hybrid events or recordings.

Please see the Monitoring and assessing the progress of postgraduate research students guide.

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Supervision arrangements

Before PhD by Distance status is agreed, a student, in consultation with their supervisor, should identify the student's training and development needs and how and where these should be met.

Where PhD by distance status has been agreed, the ultimate responsibility for students' supervision and training, and for ensuring that their thesis is submitted on time and is of an appropriate standard will rest primarily with the University supervisor. This will be the case even where day-to-day supervision and/or support will be provided by an external organisation.

- At the outset of the project, the student and their supervisor(s) should agree expectations including:
- the responsibilities of both sides during the period that the student is studying away from the University;
- how the supervisory relationship will work;
- how communication is to be maintained during the 'working-away' period; and
- the timing, duration, and funding of any supervisory visit.

All students will have a named PGR Administrator (in addition to their supervisor) within their School and will be informed about this following registration. Students can also keep in contact with Schools via Blackboard, Facebook sites, etc.

Examination

The normal expectation is that the viva of a PhD by Distance student will take place in Reading. Where this is not feasible, online examinations will be arranged.

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