RESEARCH DEGREES AT ROYAL HOLLOWAY

Professor Rosemary Deem, Vice Principal (Education) & Dean of the Doctoral School
Becoming and being a research student

- It is a hybrid status between being a student and being a member of staff (you can eat in the SCR, for example), though students may be staff as well if they do some teaching or are an RA.
- How you regard yourself will change as your study progresses, from a beginning researcher to knowing far more than your supervisor.
- It’s generally a rather different experience than being a Masters or undergraduate student as you will be doing a lot of work on your own (though if a STEM student you will also be part of a research team).
- It will at different times be enjoyable, challenging and demanding and will always be hard work.
- Sometimes you will love your thesis, sometimes you will wonder why you began a research degree but that is normal, everyone gets fed up or anxious at certain points in the thesis work.
sometimes you just don’t want to think about research

Do NOT ask me how my Ph.D. is going!
What does doing a research degree mean?

- You embark upon a process of becoming an independent researcher by the end of the period of study (3-4 years for a full-time doctorate, 6-8 years for a part-time doctorate, 3 years for MPhil, 1 year full-time Masters by research).

- It is hard work and it can sometimes be lonely, so networking is crucial: try
  - [http://www.linkedin.com/home](http://www.linkedin.com/home)
  - Start or join a reading or writing group in your department
  - Use social media for open & closed discussions
  - Also join learned societies (ask your supervisor which one(s))

- Research degrees have their own criteria, e.g. ‘the thesis for the degree of PhD will form a distinct contribution to the knowledge of the subject and afford evidence of originality by the discovery of new facts and/or by the exercise of independent critical power’. You have up to 100,000 words to achieve this, excluding references & appendices.
Student

Main Supervisor + co- or 2nd supervisors (one could be from outside organisation or different university)

Possibly an Advisor
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<th>Department</th>
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<td>Admin advice</td>
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The % Cs of doctoral study

- Cultures
- Collaboration
- Consultation with supervisor(s)
- Completions
- Cake (but not cabbage)
Student Slanguage #6 “Communi-caking” - A session where someone encourages students to network by bribing them with cake and donuts.
Integration into research cultures

- PRES survey regularly indicates student dissatisfaction with integration into their departmental research community & ambience (never above 70% satisfied)
- International students may feel particularly detached from their departments (Deem and Brehony 2000)
- In 2014 we set up a Doctoral School to further develop research student culture & have a Research Student social room, the Doctoral Hub, in the basement of the International Building which all pgrs can access and a dedicated room in the EWD building; social events like today’s are also organised plus a regular tea drop in session
6.1 My department provides a good seminar programme 70% UK, 71% RH

6.2 I have frequent opportunities to discuss my research with other research students 63% UK, 66% RH

6.3 The research ambience in my department or faculty stimulates my work 59% UK, 58% RH

6.4 I have opportunities to become involved in the wider research community, beyond my department 59% UK, 59% RH

Overall satisfaction with culture UK 63%, RH 64%

Overall satisfaction with supervision UK 86%, RH 87%

Overall experience UK 80%, RH 83%
The pgr reading room in Davison building – please use it!
Desk space and easy chairs/sofas in Davison building
Collaboration

We've balls'd our experiment up! We've lost all of our data!...and our report is due in today!

What do we do now then?

Tea break anyone?

Sounds like a plan! Good Idea! Cool!
Learning to collaborate

- Even if you are a scientist, your thesis will be judged on your own contribution (which may be part of a bigger research project)
- Also outside of lab-based science, most research students will gain little or no experience of team work during their studies
- Yet team work is important in most postgraduate level jobs, including academe as well as the public, private and third sector
- Researcher development training offers opportunities for team work experience, as can volunteering, entrepreneurship schemes, placements and internships
CONSULT YOUR SUPERVISORS (THEY MIGHT LOOK MORE FRIENDLY)
Some students are unsure of the difference between submission and completion. Are you? How long does a full time PhD student have to write their thesis?

Since the mid 1990s, universities, under pressure from the UK Research Councils, have altered their regulations so a doctorate is what can be done in 3-4 years full time.

Prompt completion helps students (topics up to date, not yet bored with thesis, more likely to get job if thesis finished), it helps supervisors (no students hanging around for years so can take new ones), helps external funding (Research Councils can remove scholarships if completion rates poor).

Both supervisors & students may conspire to lengthen submission and completion rates – don’t join them!
CAKE – essential ingredient of doctoral education

But don’t eat too much!
Green vegetables are also good for your brain

And you can eat more of them than cake
Completion plus: Graduation day

They made it; so can you
Finally a thought about researcher development & career skills training

I actually heard someone shout out ‘is there a doctor in the house’ the other day – so I made a joke about not being a “real doctor”

How did that go down?

I wish they’d taught me CPR on those career skills workshops...
Some suggested reading

- [http://www.jobs.ac.uk/careers-advice/studentships/600/top-ten-tips-for-doing-your-phd](http://www.jobs.ac.uk/careers-advice/studentships/600/top-ten-tips-for-doing-your-phd)
- [http://www.wikihow.com/Get-a-PhD](http://www.wikihow.com/Get-a-PhD)
- [http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/features/10-truths-a-phd-supervisor-will-never-tell-you/2005513.article](http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/features/10-truths-a-phd-supervisor-will-never-tell-you/2005513.article)