



DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY

APPENDIX TO THE MPhil/PHD DEGREE STUDENT HANDBOOK 2024/25

This appendix should be read in conjunction with the [core MPhil/PhD student handbook](#)

The Department of Geography sits within the School of Life Sciences and the Environment, which covers the following disciplines: Biological Sciences, Earth Sciences, Geography and Psychology. The Department of Geography is located in Queens Building.

Welcome to your School

As Director of PGR Education, I am delighted to welcome you to the School of Life Sciences and the Environment. The School, which was launched on 1 August 2019 is one of the largest and most diverse in the University; our vibrant research culture spans the arts and humanities and social and natural sciences. The School – which brings together Biological Sciences, Earth Sciences, Geography, and Psychology – is designed to encourage world-leading research that spans disciplinary boundaries and addresses some of the most significant planetary challenges we face.

Postgraduate research students are central to the vitality of the School's research culture and I hope that you will find here a stimulating and supportive environment in which to pursue your studies. In the coming days you will meet the supervisory team who will offer you day-to-day guidance during your research project. You will also be introduced to the subject-specialist research groups and centres that exist at departmental level to support the wider community of researchers working in particular fields or disciplinary areas.

You will find support in your studies not only from your immediate supervisory team but also from the PGR Lead in your home department – Dr Laurence Bindschedler (Biological Sciences), Professor Jürgen Adam (Earth Sciences), Dr Sasha Engelmann (Geography), Dr Anne Majumdar (Health Studies), and Dr Rob Lachlan / Dr Shiri Lev-Ari (Psychology) – and from the Doctoral School. We are here to help, so please do not hesitate to ask questions or to seek advice, particularly as you settle into your studies.

Dr Rebecca Fisher, Director of PGR Education for the School of Life Sciences and the Environment.

Welcome to your department

Welcome to the Department of Geography! We are one of the UK's top geography departments, in terms both of research excellence and student experience, and we hope you will enjoy your time here as part of our community.

This appendix provides you with a brief overview of the department's research environment. It should be read in conjunction with the main Research Degree Student Handbook, the [Code of practice for research degree students](#) and supervisors and the [Research Degree Regulations](#) as a guide to resources and procedures.

If you have any questions about administrative or processual matters, please contact the [Doctoral School](#), Dr Christina Manning (C.J.Manning@rhul.ac.uk), the Director of PGR Education for the School of Life Sciences and the Environment. If you have questions about the department and how it supports PGR students, contact me, Sasha Engelmann, the Geography PGR Lead (Sasha.Engelmann@rhul.ac.uk). Important announcements and information about events relevant to postgraduate students will be circulated via the department's PhD mailing list. Incoming mail for you will be placed in the postgraduate post baskets in the post room (QB163).

To help us contact you please keep your address up to date via Campus Connect and check your University e-mail account frequently as e-mail is our primary way of circulating information and getting in touch with you.

Dr Sasha Engelmann, PGR Lead for the Department of Geography

Key contacts

Role	Name	Email	Phone	Room
Executive Dean	Professor Klaus Dodds	K.Dodds@rhul.ac.uk	01784 443580	QB122
Head of Department	Professor Simon Blockley	Simon.Blockley@rhul.ac.uk	1784 443405	QB161
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* For the majority of your non-academic related issues, please contact the Doctoral School. However, for queries about teaching contracts, expenses and study space within the school, please contact the School of Life Sciences and the Environment helpdesk.

Staff

[List of staff in the Department of Geography](#)

Research areas

The department is ranked joint 5th in the UK (REF 2021) for research. Times Higher Education (THE) also ranks Royal Holloway Geography as the top Geography department in London: read more about this achievement [here](#).

[Research within the Department of Geography](#)

The research in the department is focussed on the activity of three key research groups:

Centre for Quaternary Research

The Centre for Quaternary Research (CQR) was established in 1990 and has grown to become one of the leading international research centres in Quaternary science. Research carried out by our staff, postdoctoral researchers and PhD students covers the last 2.6 million years of Earth's history and is focussed on the interface between climates, environments, people and other biota on a range of spatial and temporal scales. Our diversity of expertise encompasses palaeoclimatology, geomorphology, geochronology, multiproxy palaeoecological techniques, archaeology, glaciology, palaeohydrology, geochemistry and sedimentology and allows the CQR to tackle major environmental research questions on a global scale in a uniquely holistic manner.

The CQR's current foci are on (i) developing high-resolution palaeoclimatic and palaeoenvironmental research (particularly from lake records), (ii) generating new models for the chronology and nature of early human and animal dispersal and behaviour, (iii) working across glacial, fluvial, marine and aeolian systems to quantify past landscape responses to climate change and (iv) applying our knowledge to contemporary ecosystem management issues, industrial agenda and policy development for the benefit of a range of stakeholders.

Our work also intersects with creative practice, heritage management and public engagement and we benefit from a wide range of collaborations with local, national and international partners, including major UK museums and research institutes/services (Natural History Museum, Institute of Zoology, British Geological Survey, British Antarctic Survey, the Met Office), regional museums, major national charities (the National Trust, RSPB), UK and numerous overseas universities and research institutes. The CQR is responsible for running the MSc in Quaternary Science and hosting a number of activities, including the flagship annual London Quaternary Lectures and postgraduate seminars. We are a core partner in the London NERC Doctoral Training Partnership.

Geopolitics, Development, Security and Justice

The Geopolitics, Development, Security and Justice (GDSJ) research group works on a range of vitally important issues across political, development and social geography and has interdisciplinary reach in its connections to international relations, development studies, anthropology, sociology, disaster studies, health and gerontology. We have also built interdisciplinary links across Royal Holloway with the Information Security Group (ISG), Centre for Research into Sustainability (CRIS), the Centre for the GeoHumanities, and the UNESCO Chair in ICT4D. GDSJ's 20 academic researchers and 25+ PhD students are committed to research both in and across the Global North and Global South including the UK and Overseas Territories, the Arctic and Antarctica, South and Southeast Asia, and Latin America. GDSJ organises a range of events including research theme and praxis workshops, 'brown bag' lunches and seminars.

Social, Cultural and Historical Geography

The Social, Cultural and Historical Geography (SCHG) research group was established in 1994, and it has since played a major role in the development of the field internationally. The group has a

distinctive record of supporting innovative research in the humanities and the creative arts, as well as the social sciences. In particular, SCHG has led the way in research on creative and collaborative geographies, including experimentations with practicing artists; heritage, museums and collections, in partnership with major science and heritage institutions; urban cultures and communities, including participatory approaches to planning and mutual aid networks; environmental perceptions and geographical imaginations, from genealogies of landscape, nature and the sacred to historical geographies of exploration in print and image.

In 2016 the group launched the Centre for the GeoHumanities, a research centre bringing together scholars from different disciplines across the humanities, as well as creative art practitioners sharing an interest in place, space, landscape, mobilities and other geographical concepts.

We have developed collaborations with a variety of cultural and heritage sector institutions, including the Science Museum, V&A Museum, National Maritime Museum, Museum of London, British Library, British Museum, Natural History Museum, Royal Botanic Gardens Kew and the RGS-IBG. The SCHG provides a home for a vibrant postgraduate community. We organise a lively programme of events, including seminars, workshops and field visits, as well as running a well-established postgraduate workshop series, Landscape Surgery at Royal Holloway's centre in Bloomsbury.

Staff-Student Action Meeting

The School of Life Sciences and the Environment is keen to hear the views of its postgraduate students through a new School-level Staff-Student Action Meeting. It is anticipated that meetings will be held termly, beginning in the autumn.

Postgraduate representatives from the School's four departments will be appointed in Term 1 of each academic year and the Students' Union will also provide representatives with appropriate training and support in order to allow them to undertake their roles effectively.

The Meeting is an important forum in which issues that concern postgraduate students particularly can be aired and in which solutions can be discussed and identified. It is a great way to gain experience discussing academic issues with staff and is an opportunity for leadership in the School.

Facilities and resources

The Geospatial and Visual Methods Lab (GVML)

The Geospatial and Visual Methods Lab (GVML) can be found in room QB146 and is a postgraduate human and physical geography research space and facility. It provides hardware and software for: Geographic Information Systems (GIS), including ArcGIS and QGIS; digital earth and geospatial analysis; qualitative research (video and audio editing); illustration; cartography; and quantitative data analysis.

The Humphries Graphics Suite

The Humphries Graphics Suite (QB137) houses specialist large-format printing and encapsulating services (from A4 to A0 size). The facility is managed by the department's Graphics Technician who can advise on the use of graphics software for producing diagrams, data displays and artwork for publication.

Scientific laboratories

The department has a number of scientific laboratories located across three separate buildings allowing for the study of a wide range of subjects within physical geography. Our main research themes are reflected in the more specialist facilities we possess.

- **Analytical Chemistry:** The Munro Fox Laboratories are predominantly set up for the analyses of nutrients and metals in ecological materials (water, soil, vegetation, shells). It also offers facilities relevant to Quaternary Science and Sedimentology. Facilities include a flame and graphite atomic absorption spectrometer, a segmented flow colorimeter, an ion chromatography system and a NC elemental analyser. The lab also houses equipment for the analysis of soil aggregate stability and bulk density.
- **Geochronology:** The Geochronology Building houses both our Optically Stimulated Luminescence (OSL) and Tephrochronology Laboratories. The OSL facility comprises laboratories in both light and dark room conditions, allowing for sample preparation, and contains 6 Riso TL-DA series TL/OSL readers. The Tephrochronology Lab facilities, and those in the Department's Clean Laboratory, permit separation of cryptotephra particles from sediment and the subsequent analysis of tephra shards to create chronologies from the late Quaternary period. The production of thin sections from annually laminated, or varved, sediments also allow us to generate very high precision varve chronologies.
- **Image Analysis:** The department has recently invested in a large number of low and high magnification microscopes for the study of environmental proxies. There are also a number of petrological microscopes for the analysis of thin sections. Our Image Analysis Suite also houses photography equipment for sediment core description purposes and contains an Alicona InfiniteFocus G5 for producing surface analysis measurements of macro-proxies.
- **Palaeoecology:** Our laboratories allow for a wide range of micro- and macro-palaeoecological proxies to be studied. Across the labs, facilities are available for the preparation of sediment samples and the subsequent analysis of pollen, plant macrofossils, charcoal, diatoms, foraminifera, chironomids, molluscs and vertebrate teeth and bones. The department has a Clean Laboratory with facilities for the chemical preparation of proxies and the preparation of materials for radiocarbon dating. In our microscope lab we have an extensive pollen reference collection to aid pollen grain identification. Our Palaeoecology Laboratory houses important beetle, animal bone and stone tool reference collections along with smaller collections of molluscs and plant macrofossils.
- **Soil Micromorphology:** A wide range of sediment analyses can be carried out across the department's laboratories. This includes magnetic susceptibility, loss on ignition, and particle size analysis. Across the labs a range of facilities can be found including wet and dry sieving for micro and bulk samples, low and high temperature drying areas, furnaces, an aggregate stability rig and a calcimeter. The department uses a Malvern Mastersizer laser granulometer to analyse finer sediment fractions. The Thin Section Suite is a facility dedicated to the preparation and analysis of varved sediments in order to develop varve chronologies and reconstruct recent palaeo-environments. The suite contains a range of specialised equipment including grinder polishers, a Jones and Shipman surface and profile grinding machine, and a Logitech cut-off saw. The finished thin sections are analysed in our Image Analysis Suite using specialist petrological microscopes.

Photocopying and printing

There is a postgraduate photocopier in the post room (QB163). It has the facility to copy and print. The annual allocation for copies is 1,500 pages for full-time students and 750 pages for part-time or joint-department students. Please request your photocopying code from lse-school@rhul.ac.uk.

All full-time PhD students are eligible for £150 free printing credit in each academic year and part-time or joint-department students are eligible for £75. This credit is only for use in the department and cannot be transferred to another student account. If the credit is used up before the end of the academic year students can pay to top it up. Any remaining balance from the top up can be transferred to the next academic year. The credit is applied to all accounts in September at the beginning of the academic year.

Common room

Postgraduate students can use the facilities in the common room (QB144) which consists of a small kitchen and seating area.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

The department is committed to fostering equality, diversity and inclusion in the PGR community.

After an analysis of demographic data since 2017-2018, the department made a specific commitment to supporting PGR students from Black and Global Majority (BGM) backgrounds. This has led to several initiatives, including a University-funded studentship ring-fenced for BGM candidates which ran for two years, and a mentoring programme offering UG and PGT students from BGM backgrounds the chance to get to know PGR students.

PGR students have contributed to this effort through the leading of the departmental EDI reading group and the fostering of discussions on EDI in research group seminar series. In these and other ways, the department is committed to fostering an active conversation and consistent action on EDI.

Annual reviews and upgrades

Although you will meet with your supervisor regularly during the academic year, your academic progress is formally reviewed at least once every twelve months, regardless of whether you are studying full or part time.

- [Core annual review details](#)
- [Annual reviews in the Department of Geography](#)

All MPhil / PhD students start their programme on the MPhil and have to pass the upgrade review meeting in order to be eligible to submit for the PhD.

- [Core upgrade details](#)
- [Upgrades in the Department of Geography](#)