What is a PhD?

A PhD is the highest level of degree that a student can achieve. At some institutions a Doctor of Philosophy is known as a DPhil. You will usually undertake a Masters qualification before starting your PhD.

Full-time courses usually last three years; part-time courses usually last six. Over this time, you must conduct original and significant research in a particular field or subject. Your work will be research based and almost entirely independent with the guidance and support of at least one academic supervisor.

These resources may help you decide whether a PhD is the right career option for you.

- findaphd.com/advice/doing/what-is-a-phd-like.aspx
- findaphd.com/advice/finding/why-do-phd.aspx
- vitae.ac.uk/doing-research/are-you-thinking-of-doing-a-phd
- theguardian.com/careers/phd-right-career-option
- economist.com/node/17723223

Funding

Your PhD can be funded in a number of ways, however funding awards are competitive so it’s important to research all your options: jobs.ac.uk/careers-advice/studentships/1534/phd-funding-a-checklist-of-possible-funding-sources/

Choosing a good PhD supervisor

An important part of the PhD process is choosing the right supervisor and working with him or her. When contacting a potential supervisor it is essential to do your homework on the research topic, institution, department and the supervisor. This is crucial for helping you decide whether you want to apply for the post in the first place. It is important to remember that you are choosing them as much as they are choosing you. Any early steps you can take in finding and applying for a good student-supervisor match will be a great help in ensuring a smooth passage to the award of a doctorate.

timeshighereducation.co.uk/features/10-truths-a-phd-supervisor-will-never-tell-you/2005513.article?page=0%2C2

After your PhD

Completing a PhD opens up a range of career options whether you want to stay in academia or move into a different employment sector. If you want to work as a Higher Education Lecturer then you will almost certainly need a relevant PhD.

Academic jobs

Academic recruitment is extremely competitive. It is important to be aware that there is a considerable gap between the number of doctoral graduates and the number of vacancies in academia. There is no correlation between the number of doctoral graduates and post-docs, and the number of available academic jobs.
Permanent posts are highly sought after and early careers in higher education are often pursued through a series of temporary jobs. It is important to consider other potential career sectors where you can apply the knowledge and skills you gain from your PhD.

There are a number of factors which can improve your chances of a successful academic job application:

- Acquiring publications in well-recognised journals with collaborators who are frequently cited.
- Gaining experience of applying for and securing research funding.
- Demonstrating efficient project management that consistently delivers stated outcomes on time and within budget.
- Gaining experience of designing, delivering and evaluating degree level courses.
- Understanding the process of quality assessment in teaching and research.
- Being conversant with current issues in higher education.
- Networking with people who are aware of your ambitions and can advise on your job search strategy.
- Using conferences as a way of raising your profile within your discipline and as a possible springboard for publications.
- Analysing the selection criteria of academic selectors and providing convincing evidence that you meet their standards.
- Developing a plan for future research and publications.
- International experience will also enhance your application.

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- [prospects.ac.uk/higher_education_lecturer_job_description.htm](http://prospects.ac.uk/higher_education_lecturer_job_description.htm)
- [prospects.ac.uk/your_phd_what_next_academic_jobs.htm](http://prospects.ac.uk/your_phd_what_next_academic_jobs.htm)

**The value of a doctorate**

A doctoral degree can prepare you well for employment in lots of different sectors and it is likely (statistically) that this might not be as an academic. Thinking about potential career sectors and taking advantage of opportunities and experiences that could help build your employability in them is important throughout doctoral study.

[vitae.ac.uk/doing-research/are-you-thinking-of-doing-a-phd/what-do-doctoral-graduates-do](http://vitae.ac.uk/doing-research/are-you-thinking-of-doing-a-phd/what-do-doctoral-graduates-do)

Most of the doctoral graduates who work outside what we think of as research occupations undertake research some or all of the time.

The transferable skills you have gained from undertaking a PhD include:

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- **Entrepreneurship:** thought leadership, innovation, bidding for funding, networking, international experience
- **Communication skills:** writing, public speaking, publicity and PR, stakeholder management, web, email and social media
- **Knowledge and information skills:** research, teaching and training, managing information, ICT, writing reports.
There are a number of factors which can improve your chances of a successful job application:

- Gaining relevant work experience in an area which interests you while undertaking your PhD.
- Identifying your transferable skills.
- Researching different job sectors and career options.
- Learning how to market yourself to prospective employers as a capable generalist or professional rather than as an academic specialist.
- Developing the language and professional style used in your target job sector.
- Taking opportunities to network - your contacts in other career sectors can help you to access vacancies that are not widely advertised.
- Developing commercial awareness to demonstrate that you understand the business environment in which an employer is operating.

More useful links:

Before your PhD

- findaphd.com/
- vitae.ac.uk/
- prospects.ac.uk/postgraduate_qualifications_doctorates.htm
- matt.might.net/articles/phd-school-in-pictures/

Career options

- jobsontoast.com/the-20-skills-that-make-you-totally-employable/
- jobs.ac.uk/careers-advice/studentships/1227/i-have-got-my-phd-where-do-i-go-from-here
- cheekyscientist.com/big-companies/ How to be a PhD big companies want to hire
- jobs.ac.uk/careers-advice/studentships/2144/war-of-the-worlds-choosing-your-post-phd-career/
- youtube.com 'How to secure a job after your PhD' video Q&A mini-series