

Want to do a PhD?

The what, why and how of
postgraduate study at PhD level

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Today's programme

- **So what's it really like?** – Daniel Bear
- **Why** do a PhD?
- **Employer** perspectives
- **Where** and **When** to study?
- The **Application** process
- Resources, support and next steps



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What is a PhD?

- 3-4 years (5/6 years US) of independent and original research
- Supervised by an academic(s) in the subject area(s)
- Fieldwork, archival research, experiments (plus courses in the US)
- Writing a thesis – normally c. 100,000 words in UK (approx 60, 000 US)
- *Viva voce* oral exam or ‘defence’ of thesis

Why do a PhD?

In small groups, discuss some of your reasons for contemplating doing a PhD

Feedback to audience and comment.



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Main motivations



<http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/postgraduate/pres-reports>

PRES 2011: 97,571 students surveyed From 1 March until 17 May



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Words of wisdom from former PhDs.....

- First and foremost, I think it's important to have a genuine interest in your topic and know why you want to do it. Loving what you do makes all the unavoidable frustration much easier to deal with.
- This came from my former boss: 'The only PhD worth having is a finished one!'

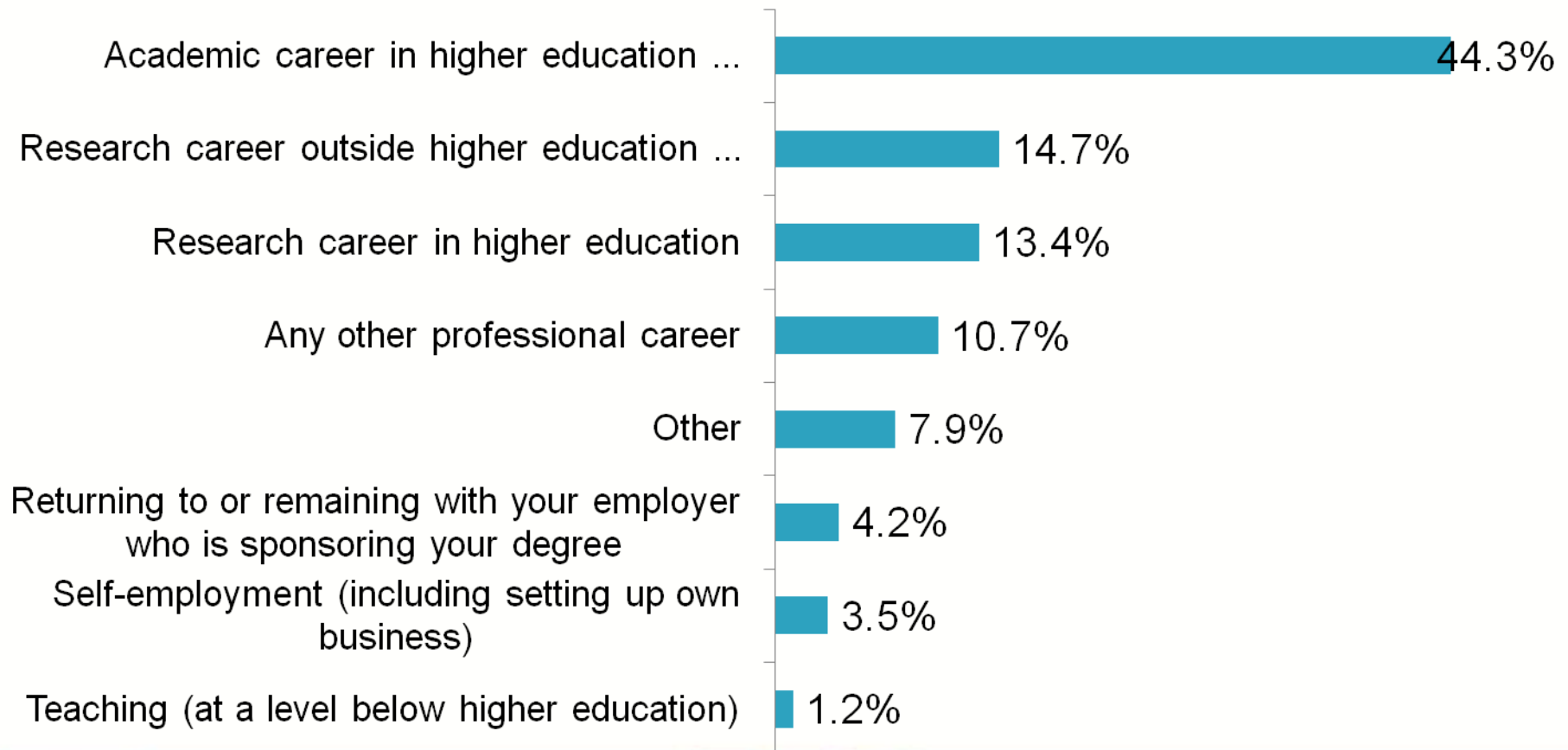


Why not to do a PhD

- You can't think of anything else to do next year
- My Master's dissertation went OK, so....
- I don't want to get a job yet
- There are no jobs out there
- It's an easy way to spend 3 years



PhDs anticipated type of career



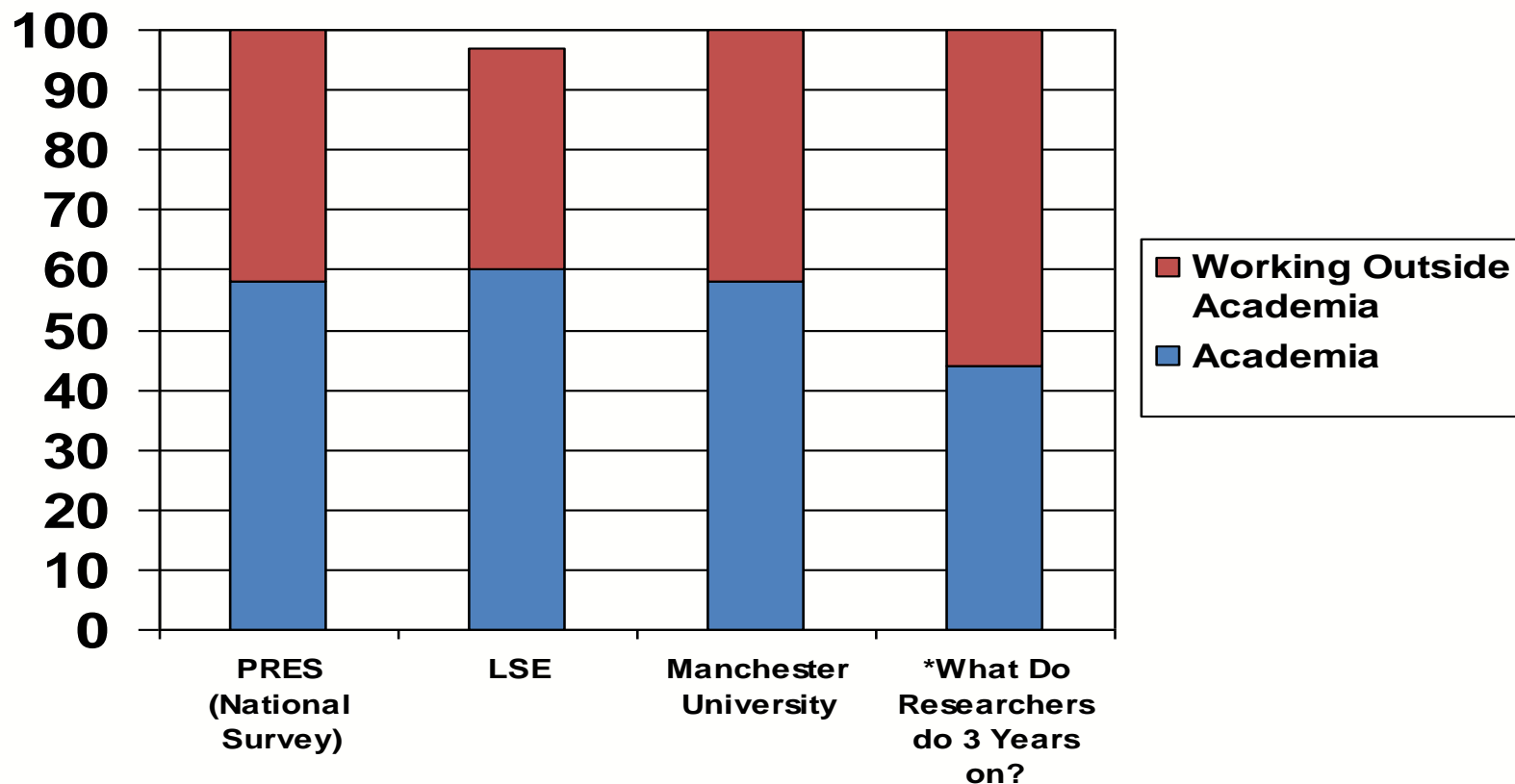
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What do PhDs actually do 3 Years after Graduating?



LSE Data from 2003 – 2007 (Sample size=131)

Academic – Includes Lecturers/Professors/Fellows and 3% of people working in university administration/ academic support roles

* http://www.vitae.ac.uk/CMS/files/upload/WDRD_3_%20years_%20on_soft%20copy.pdf

Some things to think about (1)...

Think about the pros and cons from **your** viewpoint and whether it will suit **you**

- It can be lonely – working alone both physically and intellectually
- Independent working – can be a challenge. No clear short-term goals/measurable/tangible outcomes.
- Supervisor relationship is crucial
- What's the point if don't want to go into academia?



Some things to think about (2) ...

- Non-academic recruiters can be 'afraid' of PhDs and reluctant to hire them
- May not be much, if any, salary difference
- It can be challenging to transition into a different employment sector/career area
 - You will need to articulate the transferability of skills
- Talk to employers/organisations at presentations and fairs etc to find out their views about PhDs
- Keep options open and outside interests active

Employer Perspectives:

What it also shows is that the individual is able to set and achieve goals, manage their own time, think both analytically and creatively, and overcome problems; a set of highly desirable skills and attitudes in any professional person.

Recruiter, English Nature

We like PhDs in our business sector - they never take anything at face value. That is a real bonus in a business compliance function. Their philosophical training and critical judgment have direct application in business services, whatever their research topic.

Head of Grad Recruitment, 'Big 4' Accountancy firm

We find many PhDs are not able to articulate the skills developed through their PhDs. They also tend to have limited experience of working in teams and lack the commercial savvy we look for. I suppose, in summary they lack some 'real world' experience and outlook which is essential in our business.

HR, global pharmaceutical firm



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Career Options for PhDs

- If considering doing a PhD to advance your career
 - Check out if it will help before you start
 - www.prospects.ac.uk/links/occupations
 - occupational database, includes “entry requirements” for 600+ grad level careers
- Look at destinations of PhDs from the department
- Your PhD what next? – www.prospects.ac.uk (includes case studies, academic and non-academic careers)
- www.vitae.ac.uk
- www.beyondthephd.co.uk



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- ▶ 1. Russell - coping with uncertainty during and after the PhD
- ▶ 2. Joanne - commissioning editor
- ▶ 3. Colin - moving into an academic post
- ▶ 4. Liz - employer attitudes to the PhD
- ▶ 5. Laura - moving into an academic post


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Audio clip of the day...



Colin - lecturer and reader in media and popular culture: Colin describes his varied workload as an academic, and the changes he has witnessed in his physical and cultural working environment.

[▶ View details of clip](#)



Publications

What do researchers do?

- ▶ [What do researchers do? First destinations of doctoral graduates by subject 2009](#)
- ▶ [What do researchers do? Doctoral graduate destinations and impact three years on 2010](#)
- ▶ [What do researchers do? Career profiles of doctoral entrepreneurs 2010](#)
- ▶ [What do researchers do? Career profiles of doctoral graduates 2009](#)
- ▶ [What do researchers do? Powerpoint slides](#)

What Do PhDs Do?

[Concordat briefings to engage stakeholder groups](#)

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What do researchers do?

Career profiles







What do researchers do? Career profiles of doctoral entrepreneurs (2010) is a collection of 30 career stories from doctoral researchers who have gone on to become entrepreneurs.

Destinations



What do researchers do? Doctoral graduate destinations and impact three years on (2010) provides, for the first time, comprehensive evidence of the value of doctoral study to the researchers, their employers and

Documents

-  [What do researchers do? First destinations of doctoral graduates by subject](#)
Size: 6MB
Analysis of first employment destinations of doctoral graduates 2003-2007 from UK universities by discipline and subject
-  [What do researchers do? Doctoral graduate destinations and impact three years on](#)
Size: 2MB
The next chapter in the 'What do researchers do?' destinations series
-  [What do researchers do? Career profiles of doctoral graduates](#)
Size: 2MB
A collection of 40 career profiles and around 1000 first destination job titles of doctoral graduates
-  [What do researchers do?](#)

When should I do a PhD?

- Immediately after a Masters – *high intellectual and academic momentum*
- After first job – *time to reflect and think carefully about your reasons*
- Alongside a job, studying part time – *cross-pollination*

Would a 'real world' experience inform your research and give you intellectual maturity?



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Where to study?

Do your research first and choose wisely



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Some tips.....

- Research your subject area
- Course structure – UK, Euro or US model?
- University culture – other relevant departments, PhD support courses
- Departmental culture – size, seminars, methodology support, no. of PhD students
- Academics whose work interests you
- Support for fieldwork or archival research



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Application Process:

Choose your university

- Research the entry requirements for university/department in chosen country
 - Research the academics and departments
 - Ask your MSc supervisor for advice
 - Talk to a graduate tutor in the department you are interested in
-
- Potential supervisors – to approach or not?



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Application Process: The Research Proposal

- Read other proposals first, if you can.
- Balance – detail vs. development of ideas
- Must show **originality, depth, scope, sense of context**
- Write a draft, get feedback from a tutor, then redraft!
- Accuracy is vital – spelling/punctuation
- Check institutional requirements, e.g. length, detail, bibliography

<https://lfylive.lse.ac.uk/lfy/tc/enquiries/enquiry.html?a=4&q=557&searchString=>



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What type of things go in a research proposal?

- What is your general topic?
- What questions do you want to answer?
- What is the key literature and its limitations?
- What are the main hypotheses of the work?
- What methodology do you intend to use?
- What are your case studies, if any, and what are your case selection criteria?
- 1,500 words.

Application Process: Personal Statement

- Can be the hardest thing to write
- Usually separate from your research proposal
- Usually asked to convey:
 - Why you want to do research at this particular institution
 - Relevant experience of research activity/research skills
 - Suitability for study at PhD level (very different than taught programmes)
 - Contextual knowledge of subject area
 - Sense of direction – where will it take you?
 - Passion



Application Process: Funding

- Start with the department/university first.
- Research proposal usually needed
- Joint application with supervisor/institution



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Funding your studies

- [School and External Funding Opportunities](#)
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- [Departmental Support for Conference Attendance](#)
- [School Support for Conference Attendance](#)
- [LSE \(School-wide\) Financial Help and Information](#)
- [Links to other External Funding Sources](#)
- [Useful Publications](#)

School and External Funding Opportunities

You can find links below which will take to information about funding opportunities for MSc and Research Students.

Scholarships and Funding Opportunities for MSc Students

- [Graduate - Taught Programmes \(Home/EU Countries LSE Based Awards\)](#)
- [Graduate - Taught Programmes \(Overseas Countries LSE Based Awards\)](#)
- [Graduate - Taught Programmes \(Overseas Countries External Awards, including the British Council\)](#)
- [Generic MSc Scholarships \(including Economic and Social Research Council Quotas and Open Competition\)](#)

Scholarships and Funding Opportunities for Research Students

- [LSE PhD Scholarships](#)
- [LSE Research Studentship Scheme](#)
- [Graduate - Research Programmes \(Home/EU Countries LSE Based Awards\)](#)
- [Graduate - Research Programmes \(Overseas Countries LSE Based Awards\)](#)
- [Graduate - Research Programmes \(Overseas Countries External Awards\)](#)
- [Generic Research Scholarships \(including ESRC\)](#)

Departmental funding for PhD students

Research studentship awards

The Department has a small amount of funding available for the allocation of Research Studentship Awards, which can provide some assistance with fees or maintenance. In 2009/10 a total of 85 awards have been made on the basis of merit and need.

Research Awards are available to all full or part time Research students. All MPhil/PhD and MRes/PhD applicants who receive an offer of admission will be sent details on how to obtain the application form via a website link. Hard copies of the form can also be requested from the [Financial Support Office](#). To contact them email Financial-Support@lse.ac.uk. Continuing students will be sent the form by email in December.

Application forms must be returned to the [Financial Support Office](#), NOT the Government Department, before the deadline advertised on the [LSE Research Studentship Scheme](#) page (usually early June).

Application Process: Funding

Grants may be available from:

- UK funding bodies - www.rcuk.ac.uk – Research Councils UK (ESRC, AHRC)
- University scholarships/studentships - www.jobs.ac.uk / www.FindAPhD.com
- National press – eg Guardian
- Charities, foundations and trusts
- Overseas Governments
- Employer support
- Prospects PG Funding Guide – www.prospects.ac.uk/funding

Careers information room resources (3rd Floor Tower 3) include:

- Grants Register 2011
- Educational Grants Directory
- The Alternative Guide to Postgraduate Funding

Getting your application in

- It takes time - don't leave it all to the last minute!
(UK Late spring but some like LSE on a rolling basis.
US beginning/mid December – March. Information on the Fulbright website - www.fulbright.co.uk)
- Application procedures and fees
- CV, covering letter, online forms, proposals
- GMAT/GRE requirements
- Protocol for contacting a supervisor
- Deadlines for applications
- Deadlines and protocols for funding



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Further Resources and Support

- Careers Service handouts – ‘Further Study’
- Your current Master’s supervisor
- PhD students in your department
- LSE Careers Service
- LSE Teaching and Learning Centre
- Careers Library resources
- Fulbright Commission for US study



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Information leaflets on the careers website/at careers service

- Want to do a PhD?
- Writing a successful Statement of Purpose for postgraduate study in the USA
- Applying for and funding postgraduate study in the USA
- Writing a successful Statement of Purpose for postgraduate study in the USA
- Studying for a PhD in the USA
- Academic Careers in the USA



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What Next ?

- To find out about life as a Postgraduate
 - www.beyondthephd.co.uk
 - www.vitae.ac.uk/policy-practice/107611/What-do-researchers-do-2010.html
 - Postgraduate Study and Research (AGCAS Information Booklet)
 - How to Get a PhD : A Handbook for Students and Supervisors
 - Achieving a PhD : Ten Students' Experiences
 - www.prospects.ac.uk – Your PhD...What next?
 - Visit Departments and talk to other Postgraduates!



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So you decide to go ahead with a
PhD.....



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Words of wisdom from former PhDs.....

- From my part, doing a PhD, does not mean constraining yourself to academia-many technology research companies look for Ph.D. graduates to conduct ethnographic and anthropological research on how users adopt technology (Microsoft research, Google, IBM research etc).
- However, I would say be as focused as possible from the beginning to save yourself as much time as possible and getting lost in the process.



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Words of wisdom from former PhDs.....

- 1) Find a supervisor whose research interests are reasonably well-aligned with your own. This should at least guarantee an audience with him/her!
- 2) Keep engaged- Attend and network at conferences, seminars etc to become well-acquainted with how people think about your topic and in which camp they might fall. This not only helps strengthen the research but is also useful when seeking an examiner.
- 3) Keep an open mind- Talk to people outside your field about your research, even the average Joe might have useful insights. It also forces you to express complex ideas in simple ways, key to gaining buy-in with an idea. Think about practical uses of the idea, and try to communicate this to a new and wider audience- it could lead to interesting new opportunities.
- 4) Be committed-Like the quote in Eat Pray Love about having a child being like getting a tattoo on your forehead, a PhD can be a little bit like that, but instead of a child, you're nurturing an idea. If you don't have the passion for that idea and the commitment to develop it, no one else will. It is a learning experience, so be patient with yourself, and accept that since it is something new, the idea can develop in ways you never before expected. You might end up taking wrong detours, but it is part of the journey. It pays off in the end!



Doing a PhD – Your action plan

1. Think about how motivated you are
2. Investigate what departmental support is available to you
3. Speak to people
4. Identify potential supervisors
5. Think where it fits with your career goals
6. Get the right advice
7. Start doing something about it now!

Any Questions?



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