



Graduate School

Research In Contemporary Context

Module Booklet – '20sep_1' Registration

USSJLK-30-M

30 credits

Module Leader: Neil Willey

Introduction

In the UK until relatively recently, research degrees consisted solely of a piece of research. This contrasted with research degree provision in many other parts of the world. It also meant that the transition from undergraduate to research degrees was so abrupt that, even though a Masters was seldom a prerequisite, in many disciplines recruitment occurred almost entirely from those holding Masters degrees. Perhaps as a consequence, towards the end of the 20th century UK research degrees had low completion rates and numerous studies showed that in the years after graduation postgraduate researchers were unsure what they had gained from their research degree. Further, it was concluded that often research degrees did not provide the skills employers expected. The proved very influential, so its focus employers' demands (and STEM subjects) is significant. There are still occasional rumblings, often traceable to the influential [Robert's review](#), that the UK research degree does not equip doctoral graduates very well for work other than research. The upshot of all this is that UK PGR providers have to make sure that PGRs engage in some professional development activities.

Postgraduate researchers develop advanced skills. We believe that postgraduate researchers might want to develop these skills for professional or personal reasons or for a mixture of the two. And further, demands that did not exist until recently are put on more or less all contemporary researchers so it's vital that contemporary research degrees reflect context. We think the evidence shows that advanced research skills are learned primarily through practice but that both an understanding of intellectual foundations and of the development of complementary skills helps the process enormously. We believe that UWE should provide the opportunity for postgraduate researchers to engage with activities that might help their personal, professional and career aspirations because it will increase their chances of enjoying their degree, and therefore completing it and getting what they want out of it. Hence, Research In Contemporary Context!

The [QAA 'Doctoral Characteristics'](#) (Feb 2020) from the OfS is clear that Graduate Schools should play a key role in the delivery of personal and professional skills development for research degrees (p13). Such skills are now an essential component of UK research degrees, with particular emphasis on professional development. The [QAA Quality Code's](#) chapter on research degrees includes Guiding Principle 4 to ensure that institutions provide PGRs the opportunity for professional development. Vitae (<http://www.vitae.ac.uk/>) was supported over a number of years by the UK Research Councils (and now UKRI) and others to enable 'personal, professional and career development of doctoral researchers'. They have proposed a widely used Researcher Development Framework (RDF), that is used as a reference point for the Quality Code. The UWE Graduate School module, 'Research in Contemporary Context', uses Vitae's RDF to focus the provision of personal, professional and career development for research degree students. In a 2010 review of postgraduate education in the UK, the [Smith Review](#), there were clear recommendations that Universities should work to QAA guidelines on skills development and within the Vitae framework.

Aim of the Module

On the RD1 form that postgraduate researchers use to register their projects, there is a 'researcher development needs analysis'. The 'Research In Contemporary Context (RCC)' module (30 M credits) is intended to complement other module(s) that postgraduate researchers and supervisors may choose/advise for skills development. Our intention is to use the RCC module to help make skills development at UWE enjoyable, useful and flexible in meeting needs. The aim of the module is to embed personal, professional and career development in each postgraduate researcher's individual research degree to help them make the success of it that they want.

Module Content

Learning on the module will be enabled by workshops in two complementary strands – 'Professional Researcher' and 'Researcher Skills Development' (see below). The series of 6 Professional Researcher workshops are mandatory (topics below). The Graduate School runs a significant number of Researcher Skills Development workshops and, from those attended, students will be expected to choose 6 to focus their learning on this module.

Workshops are generally 3 h in duration giving 36 h contact time across 12 workshops. Each workshop will provide a free-standing opportunity to support learning. Postgraduate researchers need to complete their credit requirements before graduating but it is preferable that they attend the workshops early in their studies and complete the module towards the end of their studies so that it complements their research. It will be expected that they will ordinarily register on this module in the first year of study for FT or first 2 years of study for PT, although the module might not be completed until later on. Professional Researcher workshops will run about 1 every two months. Researcher Skills development workshops run regularly through most of the year. All Professional Researcher and some Researcher Skills Development workshops will be available remotely and recorded via Panopto – which requires an internet connection to view, that is all.

<i>Professional Researcher</i> <i>(workshops)</i>	<i>Researcher Skills Development</i> <i>(example workshops)</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What's a Doctorate? 2. Epistemology & Research I 3. Epistemology & Research II 4. Governance & Impact 5. Public Engagement & Research 6. Transdisciplinarity in Research 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Art & Sci of Communication 2. Digital Media 3. Academic Publishing 4. Project Management 5. How to Win Funds 6. Social Enterprise

Registration and Timetable

The module run for 2020-21 starts in September via registration through the GS office but the first workshop is actually at the beginning of November. Students can register on this module in any year of their doctorate and if they register early enough will have a module run of up to 3 years.

For 2020-2021, the details of all the UWE Researcher Skills Development workshops are available via the Graduate School [Skills Development](#) Blackboard pages. These workshop programmes and the ones listed below run, in a fairly similar form, every year so, if necessary, you can access them again at a time appropriate for your studies.

For the Professional Researcher workshops the dates are as follows:

Weds 4th Nov 2020 - *What's a Doctorate?* Collaborate/4E13a. 9:30-12:30 GMT

Thurs 3rd Dec 2020 – *Epistemology I.* Collaborate/4E13a. 1:30-4:30pm GMT

Tues 26th Jan 2021 – *Epistemology II.* Collaborate/4E13a. 9:30-12:30 GMT

Thurs 11th March 2021 – *Res Governance and Impact.* Collaborate/4E13a. 1:30-4:30 GMT

Thurs 22nd April 2021 – *Public Engagement & Research.* Collaborate/4E13a. 1:30-4:30 BST

Thurs 25th May 2020 – *Transdisciplinarity in Research.* Collaborate/4E13a. 9:30-12:30 BST

All these Professional Researcher Workshops will be available remotely via Collaborate and be recorded for later viewing, via [Panopto](#).

Learning Outcomes

On successful completion of this module students will be able to:

- Demonstrate an understanding of the intellectual foundations of research in a contemporary context including the creative and cognitive abilities necessary to carry it out
- Understand the responsibilities of research governance necessary to lead research in a contemporary context including professional conduct and research management
- Evidence personal exposure to a variety of epistemologies and research paradigms
- Actively promote research findings including communication to a variety of audiences, including engagement with other researchers and stakeholders
- Understand and develop the personal qualities necessary for carrying out high quality contemporary research including personal effectiveness and career development

- Evidence personal experience of demonstrating the importance of the research endeavour in a contemporary context

Learning Strategies

This is a 'Research-Based Learning' module that utilises the pedagogy of Work-Based Learning but in the context of research. This approach embeds the development of skills for postgraduate researchers into their research context. This learning strategy has been chosen for two reasons. First, to help break down the gap that postgraduate researchers and supervisors sometimes perceive between their skills development and their research, by explicitly embedding the former in the later. Second, much 'skills' development for postgraduate researchers at UWE, and often elsewhere, has focused on methodological or discipline-specific training. This only addresses part of the Researcher Development Framework and embedding other aspects of Professional and Personal Skills in research will emphasise their importance. The workshops will be run by a module team drawn from across Faculties and disciplines, with each workshop leader drawing on their specific expertise.

Postgraduate researchers from all Faculties will participate in workshops providing a significant cohort with different experiences to draw on - so a key learning strategy will be to enable PGRs to learn from each other about key aspects of contemporary research. PGRs' primary learning will be from evidencing and reflecting on aspects of contemporary research in action in their own research. They will keep a reflective portfolio of evidence of topics covered in the workshops in action in their own research or research discipline. The structure of the portfolio will be derived from the Vitae Researcher Development Framework. PGRs will also prepare a case study on one aspect of the RDF in action in the research. It is expected that for each hour spent in workshops students will spend 2h of research-based learning evidencing and reflecting for their portfolio and case study.

Learning Support Materials

Phillips E.M & Pugh D.S. (2015) *How to get a PhD: a handbook for students and their supervisors* Open Uni Press, 6th Ed.

Boud, D., Lee, A. (2009) (Eds) *Changing Practice in Doctoral Education*. Routledge.

Cryer, P. (2006) *The Research Students Guide to Success*. 3rd Edition. McGraw-Hill.

Marshall, S. & Green, N. (2010) *Your PhD Companion: The Insider Guide to Mastering the Practical Realities*. How to Books Ltd 3rd Ed.

And there is a list of book reviews about doctorates on the 'FindaPhD' [website](#).

Assessments

- The assessment approach is informed by that used by professional practice modules, which means that a competency framework will be used for assessment. Vitae's RDF will provide the framework against which evidence of engagement and competency will be assessed.
- Summative assessment via portfolio of evidence and reflection on Professional Researcher and Researcher Skills Development workshop topics in action in student's research or research discipline. This Portfolio will provide evidence of professional engagement and must be passed to pass the module.
- Summative Assessment by case study of chosen aspect of Research Degrees Framework in action by presentation, demonstration, report or other appropriate format. Assessed by module team and peer-review.