RESEARCH SCHOOL FOR EARTH AND PLANETARY SCIENCES AT BIRKBECK

Notes for Graduate Research Students (MPhil/PhD)
Welcome to the Research School of Earth and Planetary Sciences at Birkbeck & University College London. The School encompasses all of the graduate and research activities of the Department of Earth Sciences of UCL and the School of Earth and Planetary Sciences of Birkbeck College, which are co-located on the Gower Street UCL site. We hope that you will enjoy working here and that, in several years’ time, you will be proud of the contribution to scientific knowledge embodied in your thesis and feel that you have developed your potential as a research scientist.

A major advantage of studying in London is the many opportunities it offers for hearing about the latest scientific developments. Most scientific societies, including the Geological Society, the Mineralogical Society, the Royal Astronomical Society, the Royal Society, and the Royal Institution are located in central London. These societies organise meetings with specialist speakers on a regular basis. In addition, our central location allows you to attend the many conferences that are held in London. Keep an eye on notice boards for information about conferences and society meetings and remember that most societies and conferences have preferential rates for research students.

The School’s objective is that we provide you with an opportunity to gain an MPhil or Ph.D. and, in return, you undertake to do so within the time available. If you hold a studentship allocated from the Research Councils (e.g. NERC) and you over-run that allotted time, the School may be heavily penalized. So, please recognize the two-way nature of this contract.

Supervisors and Supervisory Panels
Your research training will be provided primarily by your Principal Supervisor, with assistance from a Subsidiary Supervisor, who, possibly with others, comprise your Supervisory Panel. This Panel monitors your progress and provides, where necessary, a broad range of expertise that you can tap, e.g. if your project spans several different sub-disciplines, or if your Principal Supervisor is away from the Research School for an extended period.

Postgraduate Tutor
The Postgraduate Tutor takes an overview of the progress of research students in the School of Earth and Planetary Science, and acts as liaison between you, Birkbeck and the University of London. The Postgraduate Tutor may also provide logistic, pastoral or financial assistance to students when it is needed. Academic guidance is a matter for supervisors and the supervisory panel, unless exceptional circumstance warrant otherwise. The current postgraduate tutor is Dr. Andy Carter (Telephone: 02076792418, e-mail a.carter@ucl.ac.uk).
Students who find themselves in severe financial difficulties may be eligible to apply for assistance. Visit: http://www.bbk.ac.uk/mybirkbeck/services/facilities/studentfinance/pgt_finance

The Birkbeck College Research School
On registration, Birkbeck graduate students become members of the Birkbeck College Research School. Information on the training courses and other resources provided by the CRS can be found on the following web site: http://www.bbk.ac.uk/crs/. All students are strongly encouraged to attend the CRS courses, which are generally free of charge.

Details of the college code of practice for Postgraduate training and research for the MPhil and PhD degrees can be found at; http://www.bbk.ac.uk/mybirkbeck/services/rules/pg_code

Bloomsbury Post-Graduate Skills Network
The College is also an active member of the Bloomsbury Postgraduate Skills Network, meaning you can take advantage of various facilities offered at other University of London colleges located in the Bloomsbury area. They collaborate on a number of activities, including doctoral research training.

There may be undergraduate courses, or modules from the Research School's MRes course, which are relevant to your research, or can help to widen your academic horizons. Employers increasingly look for width of experience, and this is one way to obtain it. Talk with your Supervisor or the Postgraduate Tutor about such options.

The Graduate School’s oversight of departments, as set forth in its Code of Practice for Graduate Research Degrees (http://www.bbk.ac.uk/mybirkbeck/services/rules/pg_code) aims to ensure that Research Students are supervised effectively in order that their research potential may be achieved and their research completed within the prescribed period of study. Essentially, it lets you know what you can expect from us and what we expect from you. Please remember that an M.Phil. or Ph.D. is a two-way contract: we provide you with the opportunity to obtain an M.Phil or Ph.D. and, in return, you must finish on time. Students funded by the Research Councils who do not finish on time attract a severe sanction to the department.

Research Seminars
Undertaking research should not isolate you from the wider issues in earth science. You should use the opportunity to hear about those wider issues and to communicate your research ideas and results to a wide audience. To assist you, the School suggests that graduate research students attend the Research Seminars held in the Garwood Lecture Theatre most Tuesdays at 5.00 p.m. during term-time, if you are able to. Seminars are given by specialist speakers, usually from other universities, and provide a glimpse of exciting and controversial developments in Earth Science research. Details of the seminars are advertised within the Research School.
**Departmental Services**
Research Student rooms have telephones for incoming calls and outgoing internal calls, but may not have external telephone lines. Use of telephones in any of the Research School offices is available only in an emergency. Incoming mail (internal and external) is placed in the postgraduate student pigeon-hole in the main School office, and you should check this regularly. Email addresses are allocated to all students after registration. Internet services are provided for legitimate use in connection with your studies. Other support and technical services, such as thin-section making and photography, can be obtained only by use of the official Requisition Forms, which must be signed by your supervisor.

The following notes offer a synopsis of the stages through which you progress from an MPhil to a PhD. For details of rules and regulations you should refer to the following site: [http://www.bbk.ac.uk/reg/regs/prog_regs/res_regs](http://www.bbk.ac.uk/reg/regs/prog_regs/res_regs)

**Annual Presentation of Work**
All research students in the Research School are required to make one presentation about their work in each academic year, in order to help them develop their presentation skills.

- First-year presentation: short presentations (10-15 minutes each) in December or January by all new research students aimed at introducing the student and their project to other members of the Research School.
- Second-year presentation: a poster display outlining the progress made on the research project; held in March as part of the UCL Graduate School competition, with prizes for the best posters.
- Third-year presentation: a 20 minute lecture in the summer term as part of the research seminar series.

If you are a part-time student, you should take part in these presentations at the appropriate time within your study (e.g., if you are working half-time on your project, you should do your first-year presentation in the second year of your part-time studies).

**Transfer from MPhil to PhD**
All graduate research students are initially registered for the MPhil degree and should expect to upgrade or transfer to PhD degree registration during their second year, after at least 24 months, subject to satisfactory progress. That progress is judged by verbal examination before at least two transfer report evaluators (who are not the principal supervisor but who generally form the supervisory panel) and of a Transfer Report prepared by the student. The transfer report should consist of several chapters of the thesis containing the aims and objectives of the thesis, the literature review and some results and discussion, as well as a plan for completing the thesis. The size and scope of the transfer report should be discussed in advance with the principal supervisor. The feedback that students receive on the transfer report is often invaluable in preparing the final PhD thesis for submission.
To complete the transfer process - two things must be done:

1) An Upgrade Supervisory Session must be held where the student and transfer report evaluator / supervisory panel meet to discuss progress and the transfer report.

2) The Birkbeck Confirmation of Transfer Forms must be completed and signed by the supervisory panel. The Postgraduate Tutor will countsign the forms and forward on to Registry.

Length of Study
Full-time MPhil/PhD students have up to 4 years to complete their PhDs. Part-time students have up to 7 years to complete their PhDs. The School of Earth Sciences does not receive any funding for students who do not finish within these deadlines, so students who do so may not be entitled to full supervision.

Writing-up Research Student Status
A full-time programme of study is normally 3 years (full-time equivalent) but if you have not submitted your thesis within this time you can ask Andy Carter to write to Registry on your behalf to ask to be changed to ‘writing-up status’, which will incur a lesser fee than a full-time fee. Part-time students are not eligible for writing-up status.

Examination Entry & Appointment of Examiners
When the end is in sight, at least 4 months before submission of the PhD (or MPhil) thesis, an examination entry form must be completed and submitted, and examiners must be nominated.

The form and specific information and regulations on the format, binding and submission of theses can be found at: http://www.bbk.ac.uk/mybirkbeck/services/administration/assessment/phd_dissertations/res_entry

The Supervisor will be contacted by Senate House to nominate at least 1 internal and 1 external examiner. Once you have submitted the form your thesis must be submitted within 18 months.

and finally ...
Some people find the challenge of research rather daunting at first: there can be a great deal to learn, progress often seems slow, and considerable adjustment may be needed to the many differences between undergraduate and postgraduate work. Furthermore, three years may seem a long time at the beginning, but it will pass surprisingly quickly, and you are much more likely to complete a good thesis within three years if you work steadily and systematically from the beginning. If you are at all worried about your progress, work pattern, or frequency of supervisory meetings, you should talk this through with your Principal Supervisor, another member of your Advisory Panel, or the Postgraduate Tutor, and do so sooner rather than later.

Research in the Earth and Planetary Sciences offers a considerable challenge, but you can be certain that we are committed to helping you to develop your potential to rise to that challenge.

Birkbeck Postgraduate Tutor, November 2012