

## Distance learning for research degrees

### Introduction

1. Recruiting outstanding PhD students is central to Birkbeck, University of London's (the College) mission to be a world-class research institution. The availability of a distance learning mode for research degrees, provides opportunities to recruit PhD students who might not otherwise be able to complete their research studies at the College. However, undertaking a PhD by distance learning presents specific challenges for candidates and for schools. The following guidelines outline:
  - a. requirements that schools and students must meet in order to ensure the quality of research degrees when carried out by distance learning
  - b. essential features of how requests for distance learning will be considered
  - c. how programme amendments for distance learning are requested.

### Admission requirements for distance learning applicants

2. Additional requirements apply for applicants wishing to study for a PhD through distance learning, in order to ensure that both the candidate and the school are suitably prepared. When considering whether to accept a PhD student for distance learning, the school must be able to demonstrate that the student is suitably prepared and equipped for this mode of study.

### Entry requirements, recruitment and selection

3. Due to the importance of independent work, the distance learning programme must have an even more selective admissions process than campus-based students: distance learning should only be offered to outstanding applicants. In addition to meeting the standard academic and language eligibility requirements for the programme, distance learning applicants must be able to demonstrate the following:
  - a. Evidence of an outstanding academic record; minimum academic requirements would normally be a distinction at master's level in a related field or as specified in the programme amendment.
  - b. An IELTS score of a minimum of 8, to ensure that the candidate "handles complex detailed argumentation well". The school should also evaluate a substantive writing sample, preferably from a master's dissertation (or equivalent).
  - c. Examples of postgraduate research experience, demonstrating an ability to work independently e.g. papers/presentations at professional and academic conferences or publications in professional journals or previous completion of an independent research project, etc.

- d. Two academic references prior to the interview stage, which should demonstrate the candidate's preparedness for research and the suitability of the project.
- e. International applicants- International Student Administration (Registry Services) must be consulted about arrangements for visits to the College during the PhD programme. Applicants from outside the EU will be required to obtain a Short-Term Study Visa to enter the UK for study visits. This visa permits a maximum of 56 days in the UK in any 6 month period.

## **Research proposal**

4. The school must be able to demonstrate that the student has a detailed research proposal including:
  - a. a clear justification for registering for the distance learning mode of study rather than by standard, full-time (FT) or part-time (PT) on-campus options. In particular, how the research proposal is appropriate for their chosen study location.
  - b. information about the research resources/facilities they will need to complete it.
  - c. The research proposal must include a timetable that outlines how the research will be completed within the maximum registration period (four years FT, seven years PT).
  - d. The research proposal should be accompanied by a supervisory statement of support.

## **Access to essential resources**

5. Applicants must be able to demonstrate that they can access essential resources at their remote study site. This must include evidence that they will have:
  - a. access to local and/or online resources (e.g. collections, archives, libraries) required for their research proposal
  - b. access to appropriate IT facilities and resources for their research including secure and reliable data storage
  - c. access to communications resources, including reliable access to email and video communication (e.g. Skype or Facetime) to engage with their supervisor(s) remotely
  - d. remote access to facilities to support any disclosed study-related disability.

## **Requirements for accepted distance learning students**

6. Schools must ensure that the following requirements are met for distance learning research degree students:
  - a. Fulfilling the minimum number of formal supervisory consultations as specified in the College Code of Practice (three per term FT, two per term PT) carried out via online video call or other 'virtual' face-to-face meeting. Supervisory meetings should be scheduled in advance at the start of each term and should be structured as formal meetings. Email

- alone must not be used as a substitute for distance learning supervisory meetings.
- b. Receipt of termly reports (a shortened version of the annual report) to make goals explicit both to the supervisor and student, in the context of submission within the maximum registration period. These should also be evaluated by the second supervisor. These reports also give an opportunity to reflect on distance learning engagement (e.g. virtual attendance of seminars available online, etc).
  - c. Ensuring that a mandatory visit to London is completed by the student at the end of the first year (FT) or second year (PT), during the induction week of other PhD presentations/workshops. Students will also need to visit London for their upgrade from MPhil and presentation of a paper (these may be scheduled to coincide). Students will also normally need to be present in London for their PhD viva.
  - d. Schools must discuss arrangements for access to the following resources for any distance learning research student: remote access to the College library facilities or to other facilities off site; remote access to the College IT resources; access to any other resources that are required for the research project.
  - e. Completion of Training Needs Analysis during the first term of their studies and on an annual basis from that point onwards.
  - f. Arrangements in place to ensure that where needed, a data management plan will be completed as well as any ethical approval for the project.

Latest update: January 2019  
Date of next review: 2024-25  
Owner: Graduate Research School Manager  
SLT owner: PVC Research  
Committee oversight: Research Committee for Academic Board

## Distance Learning Research Degrees- programme amendment form

This form should be used to request a distance learning mode of study for an existing PhD programme. Please read the accompanying guidance before submitting the form. The programme amendment will be considered in the following sequence:

1. Amendment proposed by the PGR School Lead
2. Considered/approved by the Head of School
3. Considered/approved by the Faculty Research Committee
4. Consideration/Final Approval by Research Strategy Group (RSG)

On final approval by RSG:

- The outcome will be reported to Research Committee and Academic Board
- Outcome passed to ASQ, who will notify administrative colleagues in BSIS/External Relations to update the prospectus accordingly.

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Name of proposer</b>   |  |
| <b>Date proposed</b>  |  |
| <b>PhD programme</b>  |  |
| <b>Programme code</b>   |  |
| <b>Research degree title</b>  |  |
| <b>School</b>   |  |
| <b>Faculty</b>  |  |
| <b>Date distance learning mode will be available from</b>   | [Month, Year]  |
| <b>Amendment applies to</b> (delete as appropriate)   | a. New students only<br>b. Returning students only<br>c. Both new and returning students |
| <b>Programme features</b><br>In addition to the requirements set out in the guidelines above, schools are asked to give specific examples to illustrate how distance learning students will be supported for this particular PhD programme-   |  |
| <b>Entry requirements, recruitment and selection</b><br>Please use this section to highlight any additional features of the recruitment and selection procedure, that will ensure that distance learning will only be offered to outstanding research degree students including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How assessment of student access to resources will be carried out</li> <li>• Any additional entry requirements to supplement requirements outlines in the guidance above</li> </ul> |  |

- Interview and selection procedures/features
- Any additional supervision arrangements

### School resources for distance learning PhD students

Schools are asked to outline whether any of the following will be available to distance learning students:

- School resources that will be remotely available to distance learning students on this programme e.g. available online or via Moodle
- Opportunities for distance learning students to join online forums, in order for them to connect with staff and other students e.g. via buddy or student mentor arrangements
- Pastoral support mechanisms specifically for distance learning PhD students

### Requirements for accepted distance learning students

Please use this section to highlight any additional features or requirements for distance learning PhD students who are accepted on this programme including:

- Any amendments to progression and review arrangements that apply to distance learning PhD students on this programme
- Information about mandatory visits during their studies and the frequency and timing of these

### Signatures/approval

In signing this form the PGR School Lead and Head of School confirm:

- That all contributing schools have been consulted regarding this distance learning amendment and that all parties agree with the proposed change.
- That the requirements for distance learning outlined in this guidance have been considered fully and can be met.
- That administration teams will be advised/updated as part of this process.

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|  |                     |       |
| PGR School Lead  | Name:<br>Signature: | Date: |
| Head of School   | Name:<br>Signature: | Date: |
| Faculty Head of<br>Research/ Faculty<br>Research Committee | Name:<br>Signature: | Date: |
| Research Strategy<br>Group Final                           | Name:<br>Signature: | Date: |