



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH
School of Social and
Political Science

Programme Handbook 2020-21

PhD in Sociology and Socio-Cultural Studies

If you require this document or any of the internal University of Edinburgh online resources mentioned in the document in an alternative format please contact Graduate School (gradschool.sps@ed.ac.uk)

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Note: The handbook does not supersede the University *Regulations*, nor the formal requirements for each degree as set out in the University's Degree Regulations and Programmes of Study, nor the Terms and Conditions of Admission set out in the Postgraduate Prospectus. Every effort has been made to ensure that the information contained in this Handbook was correct at the time of going to press, but the Handbook does not form part of any contract between University and student.

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1. Key Contacts

1.1 Postgraduate Advisors:

Dr Angus Bancroft (for all on course students)

4f1, 18 Buccleuch Place

Tel: 650 6642

Angus.Bancroft@ed.ac.uk

(Guidance and Feedback hours: Wednesday 9-11, during term time)

Dr Niamh Moore (for all admissions and funding enquiries)

Niamh.Moore@ed.ac.uk

1.2 Administrative Support:

The Postgraduate Research Support Team is your first point of contact within the Graduate School of Social and Political Science. Contact details are below:

Graduate School Office

<http://www.sps.ed.ac.uk/gradschool>

Please contact via email in the first instance as staff may be working away from their campus office: pgresearch.sps@ed.ac.uk
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2. Introduction

2.1 What's in the Handbook?

This Handbook contains information for students studying for the PhD degrees in Sociology and Socio-cultural Studies. It explains our research training activities and the arrangements for supervision of students and reviewing progress.

It needs to be read in conjunction with:

- [The information on Research Training Courses on the Graduate School website.](#)

This sets out the Graduate School programme of generic social research training, and its workshops in advanced research skills. It also provides information on the wide range of training in generic and transferable skills available across the University.

- [The PhD Student Handbook.](#)

These provide information on resources and entitlements for Graduate School students, and on supervision, upgrading and other formal requirements for the progress of all research students. They also describe the School's procedure for ethical review of postgraduate research projects.

- [The University's Code of Practice for Postgraduate Research Students and their Supervisors.](#)

2.2 About Sociology

A sociological perspective can be brought to bear on all aspects of social life, and its cultures, institutions and practices. Its distinctiveness derives from the connections it makes between private troubles and public issues, or history, biography and social structure and change.

Sociology at the University of Edinburgh is immersed in this tradition. We are one of the leading research units in the United Kingdom. In the REF 2014 our research was assessed as 34% world-leading and 49% internationally excellent. Our staff have a longstanding commitment to original empirical and theoretical work on society, and to the production of cultural and scientific knowledge. We also work closely with other colleagues in the School of Social and Political Science and supervise many cross-disciplinary projects. Full details of our current research, publications and awards are on the Sociology web pages: <http://www.sociology.ed.ac.uk/>

2.3 About Socio-Cultural Studies

Socio-Cultural Studies is an interdisciplinary area of research. Ideas about culture have always been of interest across the social sciences, both as a synonym for the social and in the sense of popular and elite culture. The development of Cultural Studies over the last few decades has challenged disciplinary preserves on such matters. A new British Sociological Association journal, **Cultural Sociology**, was founded in 2007 and is now edited in Edinburgh. The PhD programme on offer is part of the discipline of Sociology's recent theoretically informed re- engagement with culture.

2.4 Research Ethos and Environment

While there is a structured framework for postgraduate research training and progress review, we believe that the development of a sociological perspective, and its translation into original work, requires an interactive, diverse and supportive research environment. We also believe in the importance of interdisciplinary work, which underpins our commitment to the PhD. These ideas are embodied in a wide range of activities, including regular research seminars, specialist conferences, student-led workshops and social gatherings. There are also a number of research clusters and research centres (Critical Sociology, Digital Sociology, Narrative, Auto-Biography and the Sociology of Culture, Nationalism and National Identity, Personal Life and Intimacy, Social Demography, Social Studies of Finance, Sociology of Energy and Sustainable Development, and the Sociology of South and East Asia), whose activities provide opportunities for students to present their work and to interact with established scholars.

2.5 Graduate Students

Our cosmopolitan community of graduate students make a critical contribution to a thriving research environment in Edinburgh. In a typical year, we have around 80 PhD students registered in core Sociology. There are around the same number studying in linked research outlets, including Science and Technology Studies, and a significant number of others who have their second supervisor in Sociology while being registered in another discipline.

We also offer taught [MSc Degrees in Digital Society](#), [MSc in Sociology and Global Change](#), and [MSc in Nationalism Studies](#) for those who prefer to defer a decision about continuing to a PhD, or for those who prefer to take 6 courses and complete a discrete research project for a dissertation..

2.6 Postgraduate Community

The Sociology Society is the social society for Edinburgh sociology students. They organise social events, parties, quizzes and pub outings. They will help you settle in to the postgraduate community.

2.7 Why Research Training?

All research students, whatever degree they are registered for, follow a programme of research training, drawn from the 'core skills' courses as well as 'specialist options' offered by the Graduate School in Social and Political Science. Please note that all research students take one or more of the 'core skills' courses. Most research students take their initial programme of research training in their first year. For details on the courses, see our [Postgraduate Research Courses webpage](#).

The Sociology and Socio-Cultural Studies specific training is described in this Handbook.

Throughout your degree, you are also strongly encouraged to **plan your personal development** through the University's wide-ranging skills training offered by the [Institute for Academic Development](#).

3. Research Degree Programmes

The PhD is a 3-year programme for full-time students (6 years part-time).

4. PhD in Sociology/Socio-Cultural Studies

Standard arrangements for supervision of all graduate students are described in more detail in the Graduate School [PhD Students' Handbook](#). The following is more specific to Sociology and Socio-Cultural Studies.

Postgraduates are critical to the University of Edinburgh Sociology and Socio-Cultural Studies research community, and we encourage students to participate in all formal and informal sociology activities, including seminars, work in progress workshops, research meetings, staff meetings and undergraduate tutoring. Postgraduate social events are also held at least twice a year.

4.1 Advanced Training, Seminars and Cohort-building Activities

In addition to personal supervision, which provides the main forum for reflection and review, research training is provided flexibly throughout the degree.

Individual ongoing training needs are identified through the supervision process, and particularly at the start of the programme (by the supervisor(s) and the PhD student filling out a [Training Needs Assessment Form](#)) and then at the Annual Progress Review.

All PhD students are strongly encouraged to attend the [Sociology Seminar Series](#). Please

note that all seminars start at **11am** and full details can be found in your subject area [Learn](#) page.

All first year PhD students in Sociology and Socio-cultural Studies (and Sociology and Socio-cultural Studies students taking the MSc by Research in Social and Political Science, defined as having a Sociology supervisor), are **required to attend and participate** in the non-credit bearing **Sociology Postgraduate Seminar Course**. This is a weekly, year-long advanced study seminar. It aims to inculcate in students a scholarly aptitude expected of sociology and socio-cultural research graduates, build the cohort, prepare them in key skills relevant to MSc R and PhD success and form a foundation for Sociology's annual staff-student 'New Directions' conference. The structure alternates weeks with a guest lecturer talking about methods and theory, and a skill/activity focused workshop. The first semester focuses on a book review and the second semester focuses on mock presentations for the New Directions conference.

Successful completion will be considered as part of PhD progression at the first year board for PhD students and MSc by Research students progressing to their hD the following year. Students will:

- Attend every session
- Prepare an academic profile
- Outline and present a first-year lecture in a small group based on your area of interest
- Present your research project to the class for extensive comment and feedback
- Write and submit to a book review for publication
- Make a research presentation to the New Directions Conference
- Attend all Sociology Seminar series talks and be prepared to discuss them in class.

For more information about the course, please refer to the course handbook, or contact the course convenor, [Angus Bancroft](#)

In second and subsequent years, advanced training, geared to student needs, may include, for example, the use of software packages for data analysis, advanced quantitative data analysis, writing for publication and so on (see Graduate School [PhD Students' Handbook](#)).

All students are encouraged to join one or more research groups run in the School and relevant to their area of research. Sociology staff members convene and/or participate in several of these. For more details, see our [Cross School Research Clusters webpage](#).

All students are also encouraged to take on limited amounts of teaching and tutoring in the subject group, for which they must attend the relevant training sessions. See page 12 below for further details.

Other training and cohort-building activities for research students are generally organised by the students themselves, particularly at the initiative of the subject area PGR student representatives. In the past, these have included 'brown bag' lunch seminars, writing retreats as well as social activities. Depending on the type of activity, financial and logistical support is often available from the Graduate School.

4.2 The Supervisory Relationship

We recognise that supervision needs to be tailored to the specific requirements of each student at the time. What works well for one student may not work for another, and most students need different input from supervisors at different stages in the degree.

Supervisors also differ in their styles of supervision. Some may prefer more frequent meetings and structured tasks, others may prefer more informal ways of working; some are more directive, others see their role more as encouraging and enabling. Whatever the preferences and needs, we encourage students to talk about what they want from the supervision process and we expect supervisors to be flexible and open enough to respond appropriately, and to negotiate how best to make the supervision work.

4.2.1 The Roles of First and Second Supervisors

All PhD students are expected to have two supervisors. It is normally expected that first and second supervisors will share responsibilities equally, but supervisors and students can agree a different division of labour, if this is more suitable and mutually acceptable. Second supervisors may become more important than the first supervisor; supervisors may meet the student together or separately; the second supervisor's role may be more passive, perhaps mainly providing continuity in the first supervisor's absence, the second supervisor may provide an alternative point of view and different kinds of support and so on. In some cases, there may also be a team of three supervisors.

4.2.2 What You Can Do if Supervision Problems Arise

Postgraduate research can be lonely and stressful at times and this places an additional burden on the supervisory relationship. Occasional disagreements, stresses and strains are part of normal supervision, and it is important for all parties to be able to talk about any tensions, initially by the student and the supervisor discussing it. Other students (and other academic staff) can also provide a great deal of informal support and guidance.

If a student feels they are having a serious problem with a supervisor and cannot talk to them about it, they are asked to act as quickly as possible. There are a number of ways to find help with this: students should meet with one of the Postgraduate Advisers (for all on

course enquiries or for student experience and support), or they can approach the Head of Sociology ([Professor Jonathan Hearn](#)), or contact their [student representatives](#) (research students elect two representatives at the beginning of semester 1).

All research students and supervisors should also make themselves familiar with the sections on supervisors and students in the [University Code of Practice for Supervisors and Research Students](#).

4.3 Postgraduate Advisors (PGAs)

The [Postgraduate Advisors](#) coordinate the Sociology PhD programmes. With the Director of the Graduate School, and supervisors, the Postgraduate Advisors take responsibility for recruitment, admissions, assessment, monitoring progress, programme evaluation and curriculum development.

The PGAs are available to all research students, including those who are enrolled on the MScR Social and Political Science with a specialisation in Sociology or Socio-cultural Studies, as their first line of pastoral support and advice for scholarly or personal issues that arise whilst studying. These may include routine advice about course choices, or advice on individual problems. Guidance and Feedback hours are times when you may drop in without an appointment. Longer meetings or meetings at alternative times can be arranged by email.

5. Facilities, Communication and Feedback

5.1 Facilities

All research students in the School of Social and Political Science have access to the facilities detailed in the Graduate School [MSc by Research](#) and [PhD Handbooks](#).

5.2 Study and Social space

For details on study and social space please refer to the Research Students' Handbook and the [Graduate School website](#).

5.3 Communication

Information about research activities, workshops, seminars, socials and other postgraduate matters is circulated by email to your University email account. It is vital that you check your email regularly. If you use another email account, you should arrange for an auto forward to be set up from your University email account. Please note that email is the University's formal means of communication with students.

Further information is also to be found on the [Graduate School website](#).

5.4 Contacts

The Subject Academic Support Officer, Joe Burrell (j.burrell@ed.ac.uk), maintains the Sociology Postgraduate email list. Please get in touch with him to ensure that you are on it.

All members of Sociology welcome contact from Postgraduate students, and are happy to discuss research and help resolve problems. We have regular Office Hours, or can be contacted by email for an appointment. See here for details:

<http://www.sociology.ed.ac.uk/people/staff>

5.5 Representation and Feedback

Student feedback and evaluation is a valued input to the review of training and supervision and curriculum development. Formally, students are invited to select one or more representatives to attend staff meetings. The Postgraduate Advisors organise at least one annual feedback meeting between staff and students, and informal feedback to the PGAs is welcome at any time.

5.6 Research Costs

Students funded by Research Councils receive research costs as part of their grant. Other students can apply for research support funding via the [PhD Funding webpage](#).

5.7 Scholarships for Doctoral Research

MSc students and first year PhD students may apply for University PhD scholarships. Deadlines may vary and fall early in the calendar year. Students who discuss their application with Postgraduate Advisors and supervisors tend to have better proposals and are encouraged to take up this opportunity. For more, visit our [Scholarships webpage](#).

5.8 Library Books

PG students are encouraged to recommend important books and resources to the library. You can help to maintain our active research holdings in this way. See the [Library webpages](#) for details.

5.9 Sociology Staff Research Interests

Profiles of staff within the School of Social and Political Science, and their research interests, can be found [here](#).

6. Part-Time Teaching Opportunities

Research students make an invaluable contribution to the Sociology teaching team for undergraduates, running tutorial groups, and reading and commenting on students' work.

The School of Social and Political Science provides training and some teaching materials for Postgraduate Tutors. [Tutoring](#) conditions of employment, job description, and rates of pay can be found [here](#). It provides a small amount of income, but not enough to meet living expenses and is primarily an excellent source of teaching experience.

Those interested in participating should apply through the PG Tutoring Call usually sent by email to current research postgraduates.

In allocating teaching, Sociology gives priority to the needs of the undergraduates, but aims to balance these with the abilities of those postgraduates available to teach, and with the possible competing demands of their research.