



## Doctoral Education Strategy

UCL aims to train researchers from diverse backgrounds to be creative, critical, autonomous intellectual risk takers at the frontiers of research.

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## Vision

UCL aims to train researchers from diverse backgrounds to be creative, critical, autonomous intellectual risk takers at the frontiers of research.

We aim to produce research leaders, working with integrity and motivated to

make a positive impact on society. We prepare them to be able to work across disciplines which is needed to confront society's grand challenges in both academic and non-academic roles.

*Academic leadership grounded in academic excellence*  
~UCL 2034

*Addressing global challenges through our disciplinary excellence and distinctive cross-disciplinary approach*  
~UCL 2034



## UCL's unique global position

UCL is uniquely placed as one of the world's great comprehensive Universities to be an outstanding place to train researchers:

- a strong tradition of working across disciplines and tackling Grand Challenges facing society, seeking fair solutions to global problems
  - a longstanding tradition of radical thought dating back to Bentham
  - a very wide spread of academic disciplines and specialisms within a strong Faculty structure with world-leading experts in their fields
  - Doctoral programmes in all areas of our activity, including a growing number of professional doctorates and the largest number of funded Centres for Doctoral Training funded by UK Research Councils and charities
  - Located in one of the world's great cities with its rich diversity of cultural and scientific institutions, other strong
- Universities with whom we collaborate, a diverse population, a vibrant economy of knowledge-intensive industries, proximity to the organs of UK government, and very convenient to the home of European Union institutions in Brussels and other European capitals through excellent transport networks
- A record of providing input to policy leadership in Europe and beyond
  - Central services providing support for wide career aspirations and the development of necessary technical and generic skills
  - A very international community of staff and students
  - A Global Engagement Strategy which seeks to strengthen UCL's global impact
  - A clear long term strategy, UCL 2034 which includes the aim to close the gap between research and teaching



## Values

A desire to challenge the status quo openly and freely but rigorously; an openness to pushing frontiers of disciplinary knowledge within and beyond conventional disciplines; a desire to make impact with the fruits of research; to work with integrity; to be sensitive to diversity; and to engage with society beyond academia. UCL values its doctoral candidates as partners in its research mission.



## What are we preparing research students for?

We aim to educate our candidates to be prepared to make significant contributions in a wide range of careers in the U.K. and around the world: academic posts, research in non-academic sectors (industry, commerce, charities, public sector, cultural organisations, etc.), and in non-research jobs where research skills – the rigorous attention to evidence, interpretation and creativity – are of value. Some may wish to pursue the doctorate for personal interest. Research is an international business and it is important that all gain a global perspective to their research through conferences, collaboration, and extended visits.

We wish to encourage an entrepreneurial spirit so that our graduates leave seeking to make a social or commercial impact in imaginative ways.

For these roles doctoral graduates should be able to handle uncertainty inherent in research, have some experience of research management (of projects, people, and resources), have an international perspective, and be able to communicate complex ideas clearly both to their peers and to wider society. We expect many to be involved in UCL's Grand Challenges and all to have an awareness of them and of how UCL is making impact in these areas.

*Addressing global challenges through our disciplinary excellence and distinctive cross-disciplinary approach*  
~UCL Research Strategy

*Delivering global impact through a network of innovative international activities, collaborations and partnerships*  
~UCL 2034

*Giving our students the best possible preparation for global careers and lives*  
~UCL Global Engagement Strategy

*Increasing independent research capability around the world*  
~UCL Global Engagement Strategy

*To ensure that enterprise is embedded across the breadth of academic disciplines*  
~UCL Enterprise Strategy

*Become the UK leader in collaboration with external enterprises*  
~UCL Enterprise Strategy



## How will we do this?

All UCL academic Departments, Divisions and Centres have research active staff with particular research strengths, and educate research students. They have extensive supervisory experience. They are forward looking in their strategies to educate researchers for society's challenges and particularly seek to promote tackling cross-disciplinary approaches to research questions. Every unit maintains an environment (space, IT, laboratories etc..) required to achieve their research strategy.

UCL has been very successful in gaining support for research students and we continue to seek funding from many sources: Research Councils, charities, the private sector, philanthropy, and from UCL's budget for studentships and teaching assistantships. We will continue to seek support for part-time as well as full-time students. Students must have sufficient funds to support themselves, at

least at the level of the RCUK minimum stipend. Some may come with their own funds but we expect these to be adequate. We need to continue to seek funding for scholarships, training, and for postdoctoral fellowships to allow us to retain outstanding researchers and to enable researchers to pursue disruptive ideas that may be outside areas that are currently in fashion for funders.

UCL respects the need for maintaining a decent work-life balance at all stages of a researcher's career, including during their doctoral training. UCL has a maternity and paternity leave policy and strongly encourages all funders of doctoral training to fund these in full. UCL seeks to encourage doctoral study by all sections of society with the ability to become a researcher and is seeking to identify and mitigate barriers which may prevent disadvantaged sections from being able to pursue a doctorate.



We seek to progress these through four enabling action lines:

**1. Ensuring a high quality research education environment preparing for a broad range of careers**

- a. Encourage doctoral programmes that aim for four years
- b. Review the supervisory development programmes for new and experienced supervisors
- c. Grow training opportunities
- d. Encourage professional doctorates
- e. Ensure graduates are prepared for a wide range of careers
- f. Give all researchers exposure to the international world of research
- g. Be sector leaders in admitting academically excellent, motivated and diverse candidates
- h. Promote strategic thinking with input from the research students
- i. Promote a healthy work-life balance and mental well-being

**2. Foster leadership grounded in excellence**

- a. Encourage and support leadership opportunities
- b. Ensure doctoral researchers are treated as colleagues and are involved in UCL governance

- c. Ensure candidates are trained to work with integrity

- d. Encourage outreach and public engagement with the community

**3. Encourage cross-disciplinary working and thinking**

- a. Encourage cross-disciplinary supervisory teams
- b. Enable research students to audit appropriate courses particularly advanced research-led modules
- c. Support candidates to be part of various research communities

**4. Expand training for impact**

- a. Promote training opportunities which focus on impact
- b. Promote the inclusion in the thesis of a statement on its potential impact
- c. Promote open access
- d. Encourage contributing to solving the world's challenges using London as a testbed where appropriate
- e. Encourage opportunities to engage in teaching and learning and in UCL Arena
- f. Engage more with doctoral alumni
- g. Promote internships and collaboration with non-academic partners





## Action lines

### 1. Ensuring a high quality research training environment preparing for a broad range of careers

- a. We will increasingly promote doctoral programmes that aim for four years where the first year predominates with research methods and exposure to a range of research areas. This has the advantages of giving a broader perspective on research, ensuring that candidates are given appropriate tuition in research methods, and building cohorts to provide peer support and prevent isolation.
- b. All doctoral students have a home Department but may have members of their supervisory team from other Departments or Faculties and beyond UCL. We will review the supervisory development programmes for new and experienced supervisors to ensure consistent standards of high quality supervision, in particular to ensure that students receive a clear message about the purpose and expectations of doctoral education.
- c. All doctoral students are expected to participate in skills development activities on the basis of a self-assessment against the Researcher Development Framework. High quality skills courses are offered by Faculties/Departments, centrally through the Doctoral Skills Development Programme, by external organisations; and skills accrued through undertaking other activities. All students are expected to accrue 20 points a year, equivalent to ten days. Training opportunities will grow, and will be monitored to ensure a high quality provision meeting the needs of candidates with statistics monitored and fed back in order to enhance provision.
- c. We will encourage the development of professional doctorate programmes where there is demonstrable need from employment sectors. UCL's professional doctorates involve a significant original research project based in professional practice.
- e. We ensure that research degree graduates are prepared for a wide range of careers. UCL Careers organise a range of events to raise awareness of the breadth of career opportunities and deliver courses to aid preparation. Departments and research groups also provide advice particularly on academic and clinical careers. We will develop a co-ordinated provision for early career researchers.
- f. Research is an international endeavour so we aim to ensure all researchers are immersed in the international world of research through conferences, research exchange, internships, and joint and dual degrees where appropriate, particularly with anchor partnerships as defined in the Global Engagement Strategy.
- g. Admit academically excellent candidates strongly motivated to pursue a research degree and make an impact with their work. We aim to admit from a diverse pool of applicants and ensure that our admissions processes are transparent and encourage diversity. This will be monitored regularly.



## 2. Foster leadership grounded in excellence

- a. Encourage and support leadership opportunities to allow research students to develop leadership through experience. This will be done through UCL's Grand Challenges programme, UCL Changemakers, student societies, in Faculties, and exploiting the richness of the opportunities in London.
- b. Doctoral researchers are part of our academic community and must be treated as such: as colleagues and involved in the governance and organisation of the research environment of the Department or Division. This requires further reinforcement through supervisor training and development and further promotion of the StARs programme and comprehensive representation on committees at UCL, Faculty and Departmental level.
- c. Continue to shape doctoral education around the world particularly through LERU and VITAE.

## 3. Encourage cross-disciplinary working and thinking

- a. Encouraging supervisory teams made up of members of more than one discipline and Department (recognising that often there are multiple disciplines working in a single Department), through programmes of seminars, and through participation in Grand Challenge activities.

- b. The common timetable should enable research students to audit appropriate courses from a wide range of Departments, particularly advanced research-led modules. Co-ordination and promotion is challenging but this will be facilitated.
- c. We must support candidates to be part of various research communities. All will be a member of a Department or Division and at least one research group and also from some of the following: Centre for Doctoral Training, Journal Club, UCL Academic Society, national and/or international Professional Society, Enterprise community etc. Each community will have different aspects to offer and candidates will be supported to identify and make the best use of the communities to which they belong.

## 4. Expand training for impact

- a. Promote training opportunities particularly using the expertise in the Office of the Vice-Provost Research. Encourage impact at all levels: local, national and global in line with UCL's Global Engagement Strategy.
- b. Promote the inclusion of a statement in the thesis about the potential impact of the work (where impact is defined in its broadest sense including through its effect on policy, communities, culture, public health and well-being, industry, and education).
- c. Promote open access of research results and wide engagement with new media for making an impact.



- d. London provides a huge range of opportunities, both academic and non-academic as a laboratory for research into the particular problems of cities to contribute both to London and to other cities worldwide. We encourage students to participate: through research and professional activities and networks but also through contributing to solving London's challenges, for example by teaching and volunteering – 'London's Global University: in London, of London and for London'.
- e. Promote opportunities for as many doctoral candidates as possible to engage in teaching and learning, and to participate in UCL Arena and in the UCL Connected Curriculum initiative. The communication, facilitation and assessment skills learnt and practiced in teaching experience are valuable in all careers, not just those based directly in research. The contribution of doctoral students to the teaching process is a part of UCL being 'A global leader in the integration of research and education underpinning an inspirational student experience'. Early career researchers can inject dynamism and immediacy into research-based teaching arising from their intimate involvement in the latest research. We are also conscious that students should keep such activities in proportion. Those involved in teaching are there to support the course leader, not replace them. UCL has guidelines to ensure that a correct balance is achieved between their research and teaching activities. The guidelines also include training and open recruitment to ensure equal opportunity for all to the chance to teach and appropriate training to ensure quality both for the doctoral students and those being taught.
- f. Monitor destinations of doctoral graduates and engage proactively with alumni. Many are keen to help with training and broadening horizons of our doctoral cohorts.
- g. Promote internships and collaboration with non-academic partners in all disciplines. Internships may involve work that is directly related to the project (for example with the sponsoring partner) or be an opportunity for the researcher to experience a different type of research work. This latter form is best undertaken during a period when study is suspended and the partner provides financial support.



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