



Thames Valley University  
London Reading Slough

## Research Degrees at Thames Valley University Enquiry Pack and Guidance Notes for Initial Application

### MPhil and PhD Research Degrees

TVU has an outstanding national and international reputation for the application of research methodologies in the subject areas of health, arts, humanities, business and commercial studies, and human sciences. Research also contributes to TVU's excellent undergraduate and postgraduate provision and is fundamental to the economic contribution of the University to the Thames Valley region.

The University welcomes applications from students who wish to study for an MPhil/PhD research degree in any of the following subject areas:

Animation	Information Management
Animatronics	Knowledge Management
Anthropology of Childbirth	Law
Anthropology of Health	Learning Disabilities
Art and Design	Literary Criticism
Art History	Literature
Biochemistry	Management
Built Environment	Maternity Services
Business	Media
Child Health	Mental Health
Civil Engineering	Microbiology
Community Health	Midwifery
Complementary Medicine	Music and Composition
Computing	Music Technology
Creative Technology	Nursing Practice and Theory
Criminology	Nutrition
Cultural Theory	Physiology
Culture and Ethnicity	Postnatal Care
Digital Arts	Psychology
Educational Policy	Public Health
Environmentalism	Sentencing
Film, Television and Radio	Sexual Health
Health Science	Social Science
Healthcare Education	Software Engineering
Higher Education	Substance Abuse/Misuse
HIV Infection and Infectious Diseases	Structural Engineering
Hospitality Management	Teaching and Learning
Human Resource Management	Tissue Viability
Human Sciences	3D Visualisation and Kinetic Perception

The aim of the MPhil/PhD research programme is to enable you, as a research student, to explore and critically evaluate issues surrounding your chosen subject, to extend the knowledge base of your field and, where applicable, to recommend new practices and policies. The programme is designed to build on your existing strengths and to bring you to the leading edge of knowledge in your chosen area of research.

This document describes the entry qualifications, the requirements for enrolment and subsequent registration, stages in the registration process, the research career at TVU, and areas of supervision expertise currently offered within the University. The purpose of the document is to provide guidance as to what is expected from applicants, and how the application process works. It is intended for guidance only and should be read in conjunction with the TVU document *Research Degree Regulations*. All prospective students should discuss their ideas and needs, the guidelines given here and any clarification needed with a relevant member of academic staff before making an application. If you are unsure of whom to talk to, or need more general advice, please contact the Graduate School.

The Graduate School has a cross-university role in providing support for Research and Postgraduate activity and Educational Development. It co-ordinates research activity for all staff and students in the University, and supervises the monitoring and examination of research students. It implements policy developed by the University Research and University Research Degrees Committees. It aims to ensure that the University provides a consistent quality of environment and support for MPhil and PhD students, in addition to the essential support provided by individual supervisors and subject areas.

The Graduate School is based at the St. Mary's Road, Ealing campus. As well as providing a meeting and resource area for Research Students, the Graduate School organises a programme of university-wide events to complement those available in different subject areas, including postgraduate student seminars and a virtual students' forum, using the e-learning platform, Blackboard. These are useful for meeting other students as well as providing study support.

Contact details:

Research Degree Programmes Office  
Graduate School, TC 374  
Thames Valley University  
St. Mary's Road  
London  
W5 5RF

tel: +44 (0)20 8231 2105

email: [research.degrees@tvu.ac.uk](mailto:research.degrees@tvu.ac.uk)

To find out more about the University, its courses and research activities, and support for students, please consult the Postgraduate Prospectus, or go the University website at [www.tvu.ac.uk](http://www.tvu.ac.uk) and click on the research banner.

## **Thames Valley University**

TVU is home to four faculties, and most research students will be supervised by staff from one of them and take part in seminars and activities organised by departments and subject areas in that faculty.

The **Faculty of Health and Human Sciences** is one of the country's largest providers of nursing and midwifery education and offers programmes in human sciences and psychology. It is also home to the Institute for Research in Health and Human Sciences which incorporates a number of specialist research centres:

- The Centre for Research and Implementation of Clinical Practice (CRICP)
- The Mary Seacole Centre for Nursing Practice
- The Centre for Research in Midwifery and Childbirth (CeMaC)
- The Richard Wells Research Centre (RWR)
- The Centre for Complementary Healthcare and Integrated Medicine (CCHIM)
- The Centre for the Study of Policy and Practice in Health and Social Care

The **Faculty of the Arts**, formerly the London College of Music and Media, offers a wide range of programmes in creative and media subjects, combining practical and theoretical approaches. The faculty has a strong research culture in many diverse subjects: music theory, composition, music technology (the faculty has close links with the Centre for the History and Analysis of Recorded Music), ethnomusicology, media, cultural and critical theory, art history, digital and computer arts, environmentalism and eco-criticism and digital arts.

The **Faculty of Professional Studies** encompasses a broad range of subjects and disciplines, including law, business and computing, and is home to the School of Tourism, Hospitality and Leisure. It has strong research expertise in law and criminology, business and business ethics, information studies and computing.

The **Faculty of Technology** was established in 2006 and currently offers programmes in construction, engineering and computing. The faculty offers traditional skills and teaching methods mixed with up-to-date input from consulting with industry.

The **Graduate School**, which supports all research students, is also home to the Research Office and the Educational Development Unit and offers research supervision in pedagogy and many aspects of education and education policy.

## **MPhil or PhD?**

At TVU the majority of students enrol on a joint MPhil/PhD registration with the possibility to upgrade to PhD status. After a suitable period you may decide to either apply for full PhD status or instead submit your thesis for an MPhil award. This system allows some flexibility if the scope or complexity of your research does not develop as you expect.

## **Master of Philosophy**

A candidate for an MPhil degree is expected to critically investigate and evaluate an approved topic, and contribute to knowledge of this topic. The candidate must demonstrate an understanding of research methods that are appropriate to their chosen field, and must also present a thesis and defend it by oral examination to the

satisfaction of examiners appointed by the University. An MPhil is normally completed in two years (full-time) or four years (part-time).

### **Doctor of Philosophy**

A candidate for a PhD degree is expected to critically investigate and evaluate an approved topic resulting in an independent and original contribution to scholarship, worthy of publication in complete or abridged form. The candidate must show evidence of the ability to undertake further research without supervision and must also present a thesis and defend it by oral examination to the satisfaction of examiners appointed by the University. A PhD is normally completed in three years (full-time) or six years (part-time).

### **PhD by Published Work**

The PhD by Published Work provides an alternative route to a traditional PhD. It differs from the thesis-based PhD in that it retrospectively evaluates the research training and subsequent published work which an applicant has previously undertaken. Please contact the Graduate School for further information on the PhD by Published Work.

### **Programme outline**

The MPhil/PhD research programme consists of the following stages:

- Initial stage

You will need to submit a short outline research proposal and a brief CV to help us to assess your suitability as a research student, to assess the viability of the topic to be investigated, and to allocate a suitable supervisor to you. You will also attend an informal interview with your prospective supervisor. (Please see the guide to completing your proposal in the following section.)

- Acceptance of candidate

Once your suitability and the topic for investigation have been established, you will be accepted onto the programme on a probationary basis. You will enrol as a student of the University and arrange for your fees to be paid. This will entitle you to receive supervision and to use all the University's usual facilities for study in order to develop your work. You should also receive a copy of the Research Student Handbook, which provides more detailed information about studying for a Research Degree at TVU. At this stage you will begin exploring your chosen area of research, probably by undertaking a detailed literature review.

If you do not have a masters qualification that involves some form of primary research you will be expected to complete the first 60 credits of the University's generic MA in Research (exemption will only be on the basis of APEL). On completion of 60 credits you will be eligible to receive a Postgraduate Certificate as recognition of your initial achievement. Once you have completed the Postgraduate Certificate and your application has been approved by the Research Degrees Committee you will be formally registered as an MPhil/PhD student (see below).

- MPhil/PhD registration

During the initial stages of your enrolment your research supervisor will support and guide you to produce a full research proposal for submission to the University's Research Degrees Committee. You are expected to progress to formal registration within six months to one year of enrolment, depending on your status as a full or part-time student. Once the committee has accepted your proposal you will be formally registered as an MPhil/PhD student.

- MPhil to PhD upgrade

Following a period of 9 to 18 months, depending on the mode of study, you can apply for upgrade to PhD status. To gain PhD status you are expected to submit: a revised research design and plan, an account of preliminary data collected and any preliminary data analyses, two or three draft chapters, and a detailed plan describing how the thesis is to be completed from that stage.

- Submission of thesis and PhD examination

Three to six years after the initial acceptance, depending on the mode of study, you will be expected to submit the final draft of your thesis which you will then defend in an oral examination.

### **How long will it take?**

As a research student you can study full or part-time. You will have to register for a minimum of 33 months as a full-time student or 45 months as a part-time student, and are expected to complete within three or six years respectively.

The ideal way to complete a PhD is to study full-time for three years, but many students at TVU study part-time, or mix full and part-time study during their registration period.

## **Student Support**

When you are registered as a research student you will be assigned two, or more, supervisors, one of whom may be an external supervisor, to guide and support your research. A key aspect to your study will be regular meetings and correspondence with your supervisors.

The University also runs an annual conference for MPhil/PhD students, and many students opt to write and present a paper on some aspect of their research. As well as being an opportunity to discuss your work with other students the conference is also a chance to gain valuable experience in presenting research and participating in open discussions. You will also find other opportunities such as postgraduate student seminars and forum, and seminars within your subject area.

## **Monitoring Your Progress**

While you are a research student your progress will be monitored both formally and informally by the University. You can expect to meet with your supervisors to discuss your work and tackle any concerns or problems you may encounter. You will also be required to submit a formal report once a year to the Research Degrees Committee to outline your progress and your plans for the forthcoming 12 months.

## **Entry Requirements**

The minimum entry requirements for a research degree are either:

- a good first degree (First Class or Upper Second Class), or equivalent qualification in a relevant field
- or**
- a Masters Degree (MA, MSc, MBA or MRes), or equivalent postgraduate or research experience.

Candidates with other qualifications will need to discuss their eligibility with a member of staff.

Competence in written and spoken English is a pre-requisite for entrance to this programme. An IELTS (International English Language Testing System) score of seven is the minimum standard required. The University offers some specialist courses in academic English for students for whom English is not their first language and this is something you may wish to discuss with your supervisors as an option before or early in your studies.

## **The Outline Research Proposal/Statement of Research Interest**

Once you have made contact with staff in your relevant subject area, we will check whether you meet the basic entry criteria and whether your interests are in an area where we are likely to be able to offer adequate support. Many of our current students are linked to established Research Centres or groups. You will be asked to discuss your initial ideas and plans with a senior member of academic staff who may also be your prospective supervisor. You will be asked to submit a short outline research proposal or statement of research interests. This is used:

- to help in assessing your preparedness for higher degree work;
- to establish whether you have a viable topic to investigate;
- to consider the most appropriate supervision arrangements and confirm whether TVU can offer you the most appropriate support.

Although this must be your own independent work, you are encouraged to discuss your ideas with a member of academic staff prior to submission of your proposal and enrolment.

Although it can seem very challenging to produce a research proposal, even in outline, before you have formally 'begun your studies', it can be a valuable way of working through your own ideas and interests, and assessing whether they are likely to develop into a feasible project, to form the basis of your doctorate. It will also form the foundation for your more detailed proposal to apply for formal registration as an MPhil/PhD student. The initial proposal should not be treated as a rigid commitment, and some students do change their plans as their work develops but research students are expected to have viable and sufficiently coherent projects, and the requirement that a proposal should be written is the first demonstration of this capability.

The guidelines set out below are intended to help you to identify and address the important areas you will eventually need to cover in your formal proposal. If you feel it is more appropriate at this stage to simply provide a statement of research interests, please discuss this with an appropriate member of academic staff.

## **Guidelines**

### **Introduction**

This should identify your proposed research topic and contextualise it within a particular discipline or area of interest. It should contain some reference to the relevant literature and/or practice issues, and your introduction should build on the knowledge and issues raised. You should also make clear why the research topic is worth investigation, for example, in terms of the need to extend knowledge or to address gaps in existing knowledge, and also of the importance of the topic and its potential contribution to the subject area or discipline.

### **Statement of Research Focus, Problems or Questions**

You should describe your proposed research focus within the topic you are interested in, and, if appropriate, the problems or research question(s) it is likely to address. This should give an idea of what questions, issues, or hypotheses will be investigated. This section may not be expressed very precisely at this early stage, particularly for types of research where the questions will unfold as the work

progresses, however, some degree of focus is important to help you to plan the work and to help us to identify what kinds of support you will need. This will then continue once you are enrolled and working on your more detailed proposal.

## **Research Design and Methodology**

This section should indicate your initial ideas about how to address the research problem. Its form will depend upon your chosen discipline and the research topic, as well as on your interests and the kind of approach that you anticipate taking. This may change as you develop your work further, but it is valuable at this stage to consider the most likely approach as this will help you to clarify your ideas and help us to consider the most appropriate supervision for you. You may also wish to discuss the theoretical interests and focus which are likely to inform your decisions about the approaches to take.

Ideally, you should include some discussion of the following:

### Research Design and Planning

Discuss the research design you expect to use – for example, ethnographic, experimental, quasi-experimental, naturalistic, practice-based and why you feel this is appropriate for your study.

### Setting, Fieldwork and Data Collection

Discuss where the research is most likely to be conducted, and what practical arrangements you will need to make to have access to viable subjects/informants or sources.

You should indicate the methods you anticipate using to collect your data and discussion of ways in which they are relevant to your topic. For some subject areas, such as arts, this may involve the development of a process, work, performance or artefact.

### Timescale

The proposal should indicate how long you feel the research is likely to take and what kind of timescale you feel it is realistic for you to work to. Time management can be a major challenge for research students, since this form of work is both demanding and less structured than ‘taught’ modes of study. It is important to consider the needs of the research project but also your personal circumstances and resources that will impact on the timescale of the work. Please check these against the information we have provided on minimum and maximum registration periods.

### Data Analytic Procedures

Although it may seem a long way ahead, it is very useful to think about data analysis right from the outset since it will have implications for the planning of your work. The data analysis approach will need to relate to your anticipated research focus or problem, design and methods and this will vary according to your discipline and subject area. Whatever the nature of the data, you should provide some indication as to how the data will be handled as part of the research, any problems anticipated (and the outline of solutions to these) and any support you will need.



### Practical issues

It will be useful at this stage to outline practical considerations for your research, including the resources you will need, any access, permissions or ethical issues that are likely to arise, any anticipated difficulties and how these might be overcome. You may find it useful to consult the University's Research Governance Policy, which can be read by visiting the TVU website and clicking on the research banner.

We also recommend you give careful consideration to financial issues and your own time management. Some initial searching for possible funding sources would be useful. You might wish to start by looking at the different UK research councils (and any others relevant to non-UK students such as the British Council) and the major research charities and foundations. You can find some useful pointers by visiting the TVU website, and clicking on the research banner.

### **Bibliography**

Please include a full list of references and sources you have used. You may also wish to provide a wider bibliography to indicate the range of sources you are likely to draw on and to indicate the preparatory work you have undertaken.

TVU uses the Harvard reference style as a standard style. You can obtain details on this style by visiting <http://www.tvu.ac.uk/lrs/guides/harvard.html>.

Even at this early stage, you may wish to consider starting to use established referencing software. It will prove very useful for organising your sources and references as the work builds up. The two main systems used at TVU are Endnote and Reference Manager. You can find out more about these by visiting the publisher's website at <http://scientific.thomson.com/>.