

# Studying for a PhD



# What is a PhD?

- A Doctor of Philosophy or PhD is a type of qualification that usually follows an undergraduate or masters degree
- A doctorate allows you to use the title of Dr.
- They are a purely research degree, involving researching a topic to complete a 100,000 word thesis
- Duration: 3-4 years
- PhDs are usually funded (although you can fund your own), and you are paid to do your research
- A PhD needs to be a novel piece of research

# What do you do for 3 years?

- Design a research topic and write a proposal, this may already be decided by the supervisor
- PhDs are usually around 100,000 words forming several chapters
- You are usually assessed annually either by a presentation, report and/or defence of your work
- You will submit your thesis at the end and complete a viva, where you defend your work and what you have done
- This sounds scary, but you have practice in your other assessments and it's actually quite nice to talk about your work

# Why do a PhD



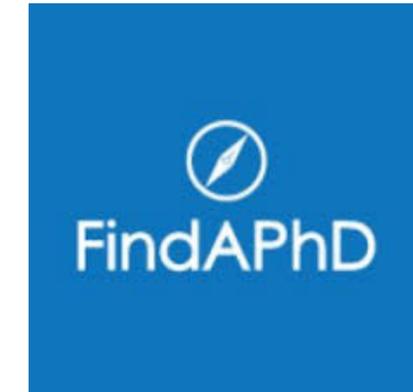
- Passion for researching
- To pursue a scientific profession
- Learn new skills
- Meet lots of people within the field you are interested in
- Travel: fieldwork, conferences and internships
- Puts you ahead of other when applying for jobs, only 1.4% of the UK population have a PhD (~50% have a BSc/BA)

# Applying for a PhD



- Requirements: Undergraduate degree (BA/BSc) at 1st class or 2:1 and a postgraduate degree (MSc) at distinction or merit
- A masters is not always needed but can help your application stand out
- Experience in your chosen field is useful, to show a passion and interest for the topic
- Try to meet and show interest in the topic to the supervisor before you apply
- Sometimes a specific topic is advertised and sometimes you can pick what you want to do

# Where to find a PhD



- Find a PhD - <https://www.findaphd.com>
- University website
- Contacting supervisors directly
- PhDs usually come in two forms:
  - A single project being advertised by a supervisor
  - Part of a Doctoral Training Programme, some of the big ones for my research area include the London NERC DTP, SCENARIO DTP and the Imperial SSCP-DTP (others for different topics)

# The application process



- A standard job interview process is the general format
- Once you find the PhD you want, you send a CV and cover letter to the supervisor
- You will hopefully be selected for interview, where they may ask you some technical questions and is a time to show your passion for the topic
- You will receive an offer/rejection
- For the following September admissions, you usually apply in November, interview in February and offers are made in March to start in September/October

# Some pitfalls...



- You aren't that interested in the topic (remember you are studying this by yourself for years! So you need to love it!)
- You need to be self-motivated, you are driving this work forward and you need to be comfortable working by yourself
- Make sure you research the supervisor, a great supervisor can really make or break your PhD, what you get out of it and how much you enjoy the process
- You need to consider the financial aspect of a PhD, you will be paid ~£14,000-£23,000/year (tax-free) depending on your funder, topic and location
- You need to make sure that is realistic for you, for a few years

**My PhD**



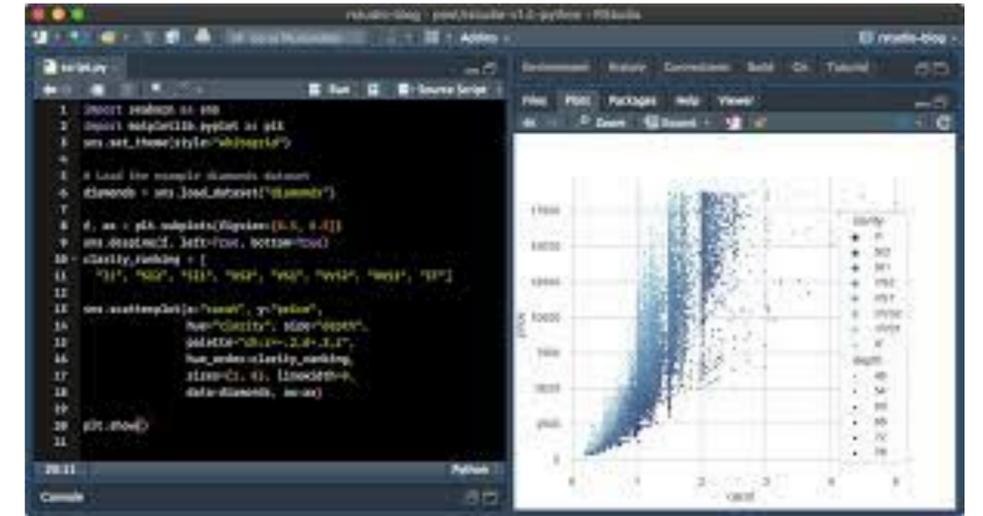
**Natural  
Environment  
Research Council**

**Grantham Institute**  
Climate Change and the Environment  
An institute of Imperial College London

- I am completing my PhD at Imperial College London in the Department of Infectious Disease Epidemiology
- I am fully funded by the Natural Environmental Research Council
- I am part of the Science and Solutions for a Changing Planet Doctoral Training Partnership through the Grantham Institute for Climate Change and the Environment
- My research focus is in epidemiology and I use statistical and mathematical models to understand the dynamics of disease outbreaks in humanitarian settings in Africa and how climate change may impact this
- I was able to design my PhD and what I wanted to do

# What I have learnt/enjoyed about my PhD

- I have learnt to computer code using R, I had not writing a line of code before this and now I have learnt a very important and versatile skill
- I really love my research, so I enjoy going to work and what I am doing
- With a PhD or academia you design your work schedule, no one keeps track of how much I am working, I get to work when I want to and take time off whenever suits me
- It's incredibly rewarding to see your work take shape and be proud of what you have accomplished
- It's great to get my work/papers published, so others can read and use my work



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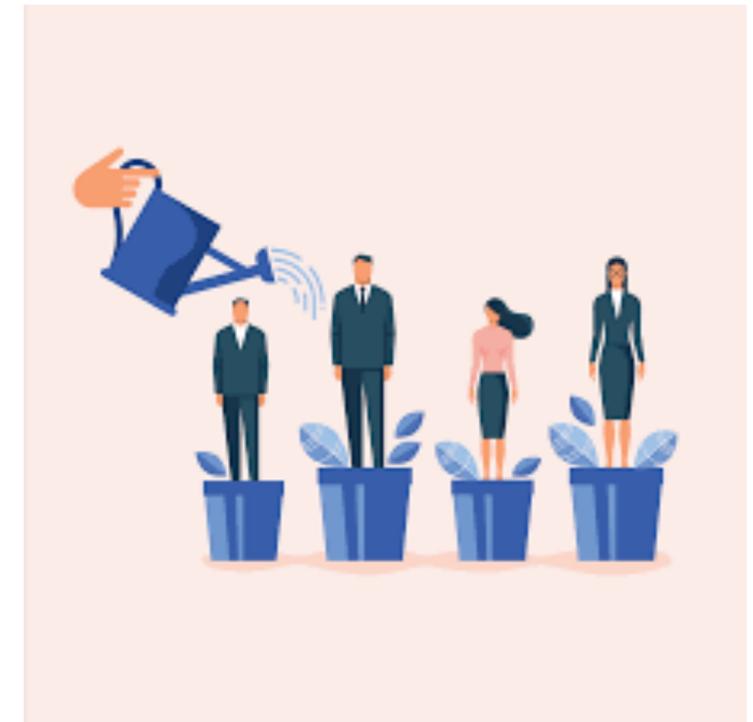
Gina E. C. Charnley , Ilan Kelman, Katy A. M. Gaythorpe & Kris A. Murray

*Scientific Reports* **11**, Article number: 5616 (2021) | [Cite this article](#)

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# Career Progression

- It will be very dependant on what you completed your PhD in but some areas include:
- Academia - following on from a PhD you can do a post doctoral fellowship, which then leads on to other academic roles
- Teaching
- Clinical psychologists have to complete a PhD
- Work in industry within your field
- Scientific writing/communication
- Whatever you want really!



# PhDs are great!

- I hope this has been helpful for those considering a PhD and also has encouraged some of you to consider it as a future career option
- Remember you can do a PhD in anything from fashion to physics, so don't think it isn't for you just because you don't want to work in science
- And don't worry if you don't know what area you are interested in yet. I didn't decide what I wanted to complete my PhD in until my last year of undergraduate study
- If you would like any more information on PhDs, this is me!
- Feel free to contact me for any advice 😊

<https://www.imperial.ac.uk/people/g.charnley19>

