



Doctoral Degrees by Research

PhD Disability Studies

PhD Exercise, Nutrition and Health

PhD Health and Wellbeing

PhD Social Policy

PhD Social Work

Why study a Doctoral Degree?

The School for Policy Studies (SPS) offers a range of options for doctoral degrees by research, some of which are recognised by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) through the South West Doctoral Training Partnership. You will be studying in a strong and vibrant community of staff and students from multi-disciplinary backgrounds and international perspectives.

We can offer you supervision for full-time (three years plus writing-up year) or part-time (six years plus writing-up year) study in the following postgraduate research programmes:

- PhD Social Policy
- PhD Social Work
- PhD Disability Studies
- PhD Exercise, Nutrition and Health

We also offer one 'Interdisciplinary Pathway' programme through the South West Doctoral Training Partnership (SWDTP):

- PhD Health and Wellbeing

For more information about this see:
<http://www.swdtp.ac.uk>

We admit exceptional students from diverse social, cultural and economic backgrounds, nationally and internationally, and are committed to offering a friendly, inclusive and supportive environment for PhD students.



This booklet focuses on doctoral degrees by research, but the School for Policy Studies also offers a taught Doctorate in Educational Psychology. For more information see: www.bristol.ac.uk/sps/study/postgraduate/doctor-of-educational-psychology

"I was attracted to the School for Policy Studies at the University of Bristol because of the culture and the quality and diversity of the research.

The supervision that I have received has been fantastic and I have had opportunities to access courses and workshops that have broadened my perspective of academic work, and enabled me to explore specific methodologies and approaches.

My experience as a doctoral student within the School has been enlightening, collegial, challenging and rewarding, and I would recommend it without hesitation."

Rachel Wilder, 3rd year PhD student

Why choose Bristol?

The University of Bristol has an outstanding international reputation as one of the top 50 universities in the world. Within the University, the School for Policy Studies delivers highly-rated research, undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, professional training and seminars, linking theory, policy and practice in a multidisciplinary, research-intensive environment.

Our research engages with and influences national and international policy. Our team of supervisors come from a wide variety of backgrounds in social policy research, social work, sociology, criminology, history, human geography, economics, psychology and nutrition, physical activity and health, based within seven specialist research centres:

- [Centre for Exercise, Nutrition and Health Sciences.](#)
- [Children and Families Research Centre.](#)
- [Centre for Gender and Violence Research.](#)
- [Centre for Research in Health and Social Care.](#)
- [Centre for the Study of Poverty and Social Justice.](#)
- [Centre for Urban and Public Policy Research.](#)
- [Norah Fry Centre for Disability Studies.](#)

We also work closely with colleagues from the following University of Bristol research institutes:

- [Bristol Poverty Institute.](#)
- [Elizabeth Blackwell Institute for Health Research.](#)
- [Cabot Institute for the Environment.](#)



For more information about our research centres see: www.bristol.ac.uk/sps/research/centres/

Our research students are encouraged to actively participate in the School's academic life and work with the centres that reflect their research area.

The School for Policy Studies offers a top ranking learning and independent research environment. I have gained expertise in the field of social policy and social care alongside competitive skills in research, teaching, organisation and presentation. Studying for a PhD at Bristol has not only increased my confidence but my love of academic life!

Wenjing Zhang, final year PhD student

What will I study?

You will undertake research training and complete a substantial research project of your own, which you will then discuss with academics who have expertise in your field of study.

Research Training

We offer you a thorough grounding in research methods. All of our research students complete a programme of training that will give you a foundation of research methods in the discipline of social sciences, irrespective of their mode of study and the nature of their funding. Exemption may be granted for mandatory training on application to the Graduate Dean.

In general, all of your research training should be completed during the first year of study (if full-time), or during the first two years (if part-time). Students are normally required to undertake and successfully complete all of their research training prior to the formal 'upgrade' to their PhD studies.

Progression review

Students' progress is reviewed annually.

Progression with your PhD

Once you have completed your research and analysed your data, you will write and normally submit an 80,000 word (maximum) thesis or a collection of publishable papers if you choose our Integrated PhD pathway. You will be examined with a viva voce. This is an oral examination at which you are expected to defend your thesis. You will have at least two examiners, one internal to the university and one external to the university. Following successful completion of the viva, and having made any required amendments to your thesis, you will be awarded a PhD.

How will I be supported?

Pastoral

Each research student will have a supervisory team comprising at least two academic supervisors. Supervisors provide guidance to their students on how to access pastoral advice and other forms of support from within the school, faculty and University.

There is a wide range of specialist help offered by the University.

Support for your health and wellbeing

Bristol is one of the few Universities to run a full NHS GP practice. It provides all the usual GP services and is run by a team of doctors, nurses and administrative staff who have a wealth of experience in working with students and their dependants.

Wellbeing Access

This service launched in the academic year 19/20 to provide an easily accessible contact point to help students navigate the most appropriate support for their situation quickly and easily. Trained advisers are available to help triage student enquiries relating to any requests about wellbeing and mental health support.

This might include minor and / or major life events, through to concerns about managing existing mental illness. Wellbeing Access can also facilitate access to other support services within the university, including:

- **Wellbeing Service and ResiLife**

University wellbeing advisers work with academic staff to offer professional help and guidance if a student is experiencing challenges or wants some extra support to address any personal and emotional difficulties and make the most of academic study.

In our residences, there is a range of pastoral support to promote wellbeing and foster a sense of community.

- **Specialised emotional support**

The Student Counselling Service offers ways for students to maintain positive mental health, through self-help materials, workshops, and group and individual counselling. The Counselling Service also has an agreement for support provision through a local BAME charity which provides culturally appropriate counselling services.

- **Disability support**

The Disability Services team can provide confidential advice and information about options for disability-related study support for students with a wide range of disabilities, including learning difficulties, health and mental health conditions, autism spectrum conditions, sensory impairments and mobility difficulties.

- **International student support**

Our International Team will support you from the moment you accept an offer, right through to graduation, including welcome events and practical support on visas and immigration through to travel and living advice as you settle into life in Bristol.



How to apply

Our online application system makes the application process easy and convenient. On the School website you will find detailed guidance about completing each section. (bris.ac.uk/study/postgraduate/apply/)

The School for Policy Studies' minimum requirements for entry to a postgraduate research degree programme are:

- A first degree, normally at a level equivalent to at least UK Honours 2.1.
- A relevant postgraduate Master's qualification or evidence of prior learning or achievement that enables the University to assess your potential to succeed in the programme applied for.
- If your first language is not English, we require an English Language test. Please view the online prospectus page for full details of the English Language profile including a list of acceptable tests.

How to apply

When completing the online application form you will be asked to provide the following documents:

- Two official references including at least one academic reference.
- A personal statement: This should outline why you have chosen this particular PhD and how it fits with your skills, experience and academic interests.

- A research statement/proposal: This should be a concise statement (up to 1,000 words) of the rationale for the proposal, the research questions to be answered and how you propose to address them.
- A statement about research training that you have undertaken to date.
- Verified degree transcripts and certification (transcripts must detail subjects taken and grades obtained).
- English Language test - please view the online prospectus page for full details of the English Language profile including a list of acceptable tests.

Your research statement/proposal

Your research statement/proposal should include the following headings:

- Title.
- Background to the research.
- Aims and objectives of the research and research questions being asked.
- How the research project will be carried out and an indication of the methodologies that you might employ.
- How the data will be analysed.
- Potential ethical issues of your research.
- References.

For more information to help you with your research statement, visit this webpage:

www.bristol.ac.uk/sps/study/postgraduate/applying-for-a-phd/

Student case study



Selene Valerino-Perea has been studying her doctoral studies at the School of Policy Studies since 2018. Prior to this, she completed her undergraduate studies in Nutrition Science at University of the Americas Puebla in Mexico. She also worked in a non-governmental organisation promoting the importance of healthy eating habits and physical activity in children. This was followed by an MSc in Nutrition, Physical Activity and Public Health at the University of Bristol.

“After completing my MSc studies here, I decided to continue with my PhD in the University of Bristol. I not only valued the research quality conducted in this school, but also the diversity of the city of Bristol. I admired the passion of the staff towards their research topics and was encouraged by the support of my supervisors at the time of my application. Whilst their main research interests differ from my topic, both of my supervisors are highly interested in my research and provide valuable feedback based on their knowledge and expertise.”

“My PhD thesis is titled ‘Defining the traditional Mexican diet and evaluating its role in non-communicable disease outcomes’. I am interested in developing a concise definition of the traditional Mexican diet and evaluating if this diet is related to positive health outcomes. I plan to produce evidence of the feasibility of promoting the traditional diet (i.e. based on fresh and culturally appropriate products) as a sustainable public health measure in Mexico. I hope my research can have an impact in learning about other traditional diets and the measures needed to promote them, which could potentially involve public policy.”

“During my PhD, I have experienced a high sense of responsibility, but I have also enjoyed the success that comes with hard work. I have used this time to conduct my research, learn important skills, gain professional experience, meet experts in my topic, and expand my interests. Once I have completed my PhD, I would like to work in academia, although I have also considered working as a public health consultant.”

Funding your studies

Finding funding for your PhD is competitive, but there are some options available to help you cover your tuition fees and living costs.

Funding (sometimes called scholarships or studentships) is available to students to help with tuition fees and/or living costs.

Each funding body has different deadlines, eligibility criteria and guidelines.

You can find details of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) and University of Bristol (UoB) funding opportunities at this website;

bris.ac.uk/fssl/courses/postgraduate/scholarships/

You can 'search for funding' on this website;

bris.ac.uk/fees-funding/search/



Career opportunities

Future careers

We want to make sure that not only do you excel in your studies, but that you are also a highly employable person when your studies are complete.

The School for Policy Studies can help you develop a broad-ranging skill set that will help make you valuable to future employers.

What careers opportunities can the PhD lead me to?

The PhD programmes are primarily focused on the development of research skills, and successful graduates develop skills that enable them to gain employment in the following sectors:

- Education.
- Universities and academic research.
- Charity and voluntary sector.
- Public and private sector research institutes, or international consultancy firms.
- Health and social care.
- Self-advocacy and user-led organisations.

Prior to embarking on a PhD, students will often have been employed in education, policy or research-related posts, and many use their PhD qualification to gain advancement in their previous organisations or positions.



The information contained in this leaflet is correct at the time of printing (October 2020). For up to date information, prospective applicants should check the website:

bristol.ac.uk/sps/study/postgraduate

bristol.ac.uk/sps

Frequently asked questions

You are welcome to contact the Postgraduate Office at any time during normal office hours (Monday - Friday: 9.00am - 4.00pm) if you have any further questions.

Are there any particular aspects of social policy for which you invite proposals?

We accept proposals on topics related to the broad fields of social policy, social work and health and wellbeing, from different multi-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary perspectives, and incorporating different methodological approaches.

How can I find out who might be able to supervise my research?

There are several places you can look for more information about the kind of research we supervise and who might make an ideal supervisor. Visit the School website and examine:

- Current and recent research activities in our [Research Centres](#).
- Current and recently graduated PhD students.
- Staff research interest pages.

Can I contact a prospective supervisor to discuss my proposal before submitting it?

Yes. If you have a particular idea that you want to develop, we strongly recommend you to begin by identifying a member of staff with an interest in that area and having a discussion with them.

Is there an interview?

All potential research students are normally interviewed in Bristol, over the telephone, or on Skype/Zoom by their potential supervisors.

When does the programme run?

You can start your PhD by research at any time of year, with the agreement of the PhD Director and your supervisors. However, to benefit from induction programmes and research course progression, it is advantageous to start in September.

Can I defer my application?

Applicants are able to request a deferral.

Contact information

If you have any queries about the programme please contact the Senior Postgraduate Admissions Administrator:

Email: sps-pgadmissions@bristol.ac.uk

General information

University of Bristol
8 Priory Road
Bristol BS8 1TZ

Tel: +44 (0)117 954 6785

Fax: +44 (0)117 954 6756

University guide to the city of Bristol
bristol.ac.uk/pg-study
Postgraduate study website
bristol.ac.uk/pg-study

 [@ChooseBristolPG](https://twitter.com/ChooseBristolPG)

 [School for Policy Studies](#)

 [UniversityofBristol](#)