



Social Sciences Researcher Development



Welcome from **Professor Alexander Betts** Associate Head of Division (Doctoral and Research Training)

Hello, my name is Alexander Betts. I'm Associate Head of Social Sciences Division Doctoral and Research Training.

I want to warmly welcome you all to Oxford, as doctoral and postgraduate research students, and let you know that you are not only part of a department, and a college, but you're also part of the Social Sciences Division.

And I want to be able to tell you a little about all the opportunities that the division can offer you during your experiences of being doctoral students. But before that, I think it's really important that I emphasise that we're really excited to have you here. And this is an extraordinary opportunity in your academic and professional journey. You're here because you're passionate about a particular topic or subject area. And because we believe that you have the ability to thrive here in a community of scholars and other graduate research students, and we're here to support you and cheerlead you in the journey, you're about to embark on.

And I should say that I was sitting pretty much where you are exactly 15 years ago, when I embarked on my own experiences as a doctoral student in Oxford, and I loved it so much that I stayed. And then I stayed some more, and 15 years later, I'm still here, and enjoying it as much as ever, even in the current challenging context!

What I want to do in this very short introduction is say a little bit about the DPhil as an opportunity, what the Social Sciences Division can offer you, and why the division is particularly relevant to your own experience, as postgraduate research students.

First of all though, I think it's worth saying that we all have something in common across the division. We are all social scientists. And that's a very diverse group: diverse in terms of methods, theory, regions of the world we focus on. The social sciences has a few things in common. One of many definitions of social science is that it can be thought of as the study of the relationship between the person and society, depending of course on how each of these is defined at any particular place or time, not just one definition, but it's context specific. It looks at how people construct the world around them and how that world comes to constrain or enable what they can do.

And the Economic and Social Research Council, of course the main UK social science research council reminds us that this isn't just an esoteric, abstract pursuit, but it can matter for the world. It can matter for society and the economy. And that's because social science tells us about the world beyond our own experience.



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It can help us explain or understand how society works from the causes of unemployment, or what helps economic growth, to how and why people vote, or what makes people happy. And provides information to government policymakers, local authorities, non-governmental organisations, and others: what you are doing, and will be contributing to through your research can matter, and make a difference, in other words, and this is your opportunity.

The cartoon on this slide is a little bit facetious, it comes from 'PhD comics'. If you don't know it already, you'll probably come to be familiar with it during your experience. And I suppose the joke on this is the evolution of intellectual freedom: before you come to be a graduate student, you're saying, 'I'm going to research whatever I want'. As a graduate student, it says 'I'm going to research whatever my professor wants'. And finally, when you get later in your career you come back to 'I'm going to research, whatever I want'.

But actually, what I want to say is that this isn't for your supervisor to determine what you do. It's not for people in your department to determine what you do. It's your journey. It's your opportunity, you need to own it, and ensure that the work that you produce in your thesis, the courses that you take, and the experience you have fit to who you are as a person, and what you want to get out of it.

It's your opportunity for research, but it's also your opportunity for professional development to acquire the wider academic skills that you want in terms of theory methods and transferable skills like presentation, communication, writing, but also to acquire wider, even non-academic skills that are of broader relevance: how to engage the public, business, society at large; how to think about innovation and its relationship to research. And equally, it's your opportunity to make a difference to have an impact on the world, on society, in the economy.

So, this is your opportunity. Make it your journey. Take control of what you want it to be, and ensure that it doesn't become something for anyone other than what you really hope it can be. So, it's your opportunity.

What is the Social Sciences Division? Well, the Social Sciences Division is part of the university landscape. And all of these boxes, tell you a bit a bit about the org chart of the university, with Congregation, Council, the various other divisions: the Humanities division, the MPLS division which is broadly the sciences, the Medical Sciences Division. Social Sciences Division is one of those four divisions of the university, and it's made up of some 15 departments that includes a number of professional schools: Education, Law the Business School, the School of Government. It includes also many non-social scientists: we have humanities academics and scientists, in the many research centres that comprise the division. And there are many joint appointments of faculty across, not only departments, but also in some cases also divisions, and we pride ourselves on being a division that is doing research that matters on some of the topics that can be groundbreaking.

From, at the moment, public health, to international development to working on cities and urbanization, to thinking about crime and justice, and we hope that you will be part of a research community that focuses on the issues that matter to you, and will also matter for the wider world. But that you also get a flavour for some of the many topics and themes that are covered across the division.

And we're not shy to say that in Oxford, social science is thriving and it is, in many ways, world-leading.



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You have come to the right place to be a social scientist.

In 2018 and 19, Oxford was ranked as the top Social Science University in the world by the Times Higher Education World University Rankings. This year we've been pipped to the post by MIT, but we're still second, ahead of many of the world's leading universities, and we're aspiring to get back onto the top of the tree.

Social Science research in Oxford, has also been ranked as having more world-leading 4* research outputs than any other UK research institution, in the Research Excellence Framework [REF] exercise, the most recent one in 2014. We have a really large vibrant community. There are 1600 DPhil students among 5,000 students studying social science and over a thousand research staff: you are part of that community, and a valued part.

There are also 70 specialised research centres, working on topics from ageing to water security, and the Social Sciences Division exists because social science is about more than just disciplines. We have to be able to transcend disciplines, and the division provides support that the areas of overlap, areas of intersection, and can be part of your experience. It tries to think about areas that are multi- and interdisciplinary. To think about mixed-methods training, to recognise where there are common training needs across departments that transcend divisions, transcend departments, and disciplines. We focus on areas of impact public engagement, innovation.

And the division as a whole has many of the departments based at the Manor Road Building. Many of the very important administrative staff to support the division are based in the Social Sciences building on George Street, on the other side of the city.

So how can you get involved with the Social Sciences Division? Well, the division offers many things for postgraduate research students. And one of the most important is Researcher Development. You will find a whole array of courses events and resources on the Social Sciences Division website, at Researcher Development. It covers themes from DPhil milestones, to research integrity, research, writing and communication skills, wellbeing, opportunities for teaching, advice and guidance for project management, and a whole variety of aspects of fieldwork. And Researcher Development provides divisional training courses that you can sign up to. Many are normally face-to-face, but they're also now available online digitally, where there's a need for that. The topics include getting your DPhil off to a Flying Start, and I'm sure many of you really want to do that, the funding landscape and beyond, research ethics, fieldwork ethics, fieldwork workshops, data visualization, grant-writing workshops, qualitative methods for quantitative researchers, undertaking safe field work, and writing your methodology chapter, for instance. At different stages in your journey, those different courses will become relevant so please look at Researcher Development on the website and learn about them.

Very excitingly this year, the division is also pioneering a new initiative called Oxford Minds, and Oxford Minds is available to all graduate students across all departments in the Social Sciences Division. For the whole of this academic year, it is going to provide you with, if you like, a curricular enrichment experience through three things: opportunities for social science lectures, given by high profile speakers, panels on



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topics by leading social scientists, and discussion groups, you'll have an opportunity to sign up for, if you'd like. And, on a fortnightly basis there'll be a campus wide theme, if you like.

So, this term, we're covering themes and there are four themes: race, sustainability, justice and protection. And one week there'll be a lecture, the next week there'll be a panel and a discussion group.

And in Hilary term, which is the one after Christmas, you'll have opportunities to explore theory. And then in Trinity methods. Every week, there will be an Oxford Minds event that you can participate in, on a particular interdisciplinary topic. So, we encourage you to sign up for that, when sign up becomes available.

Finally, there are lots of opportunities in the division for collaboration and placements. We want you to develop career opportunities, undertake collaborative research. And so there's a business engagement and partnerships team in the division, and a new initiative called Accelerating Business Collaboration. The division has a support team, and a network of partnerships with collaborative organisations, from United Nations agencies, to professional services, to government departments, to startups. We've got a whole variety of established relationships to undertake a placement or build a collaborative relationship. We can support you to do this with business, government, or the third sector. And for some people who have particular scholarships, like ESRC-funded students, there's financial support available to assist with those collaborative relationships. There's a team in the division, there's information on the website. if that's of interest this particular stage.

So, between Researcher Development, Oxford Minds, and collaborative placements, that just provides you a flavour of just some of what the division can add to your experience. If you want to learn more, there's Social Sciences website, and we'd encourage you to go to that website and learn more.

But for now, a huge warm welcome to Oxford, and welcome to the Social Sciences Division, of which you are all a valued part.

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