Union Theological College

# About our PhD Programme

The degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) is an advanced postgraduate research degree. It is intellectually demanding and you will need to have a high level of attainment and motivation to pursue this programme of study. It is usually best to have completed an advanced master's degree prior to starting the programme, e.g., an MTh. Completion normally requires at least three years of full-time study, or six years of part-time study. All PhD candidates need a supervisor to supervise them; finding the right one is an important part of the process, and receiving support is a key feature of the learning experience. Your academic progress will be monitored throughout your degree studies, via regular meetings with your supervisor(s) and formal progress reports.

From the start of your PhD studies, your effort will be focused on research and writing a dissertation of between 80,000 to 100,000 words. At the end of your first year there will be an assessment known as differentiation to determine if you have the ability and a suitable research project to continue in the programme. When you complete your thesis, you will then defend your thesis at an oral examination (the viva) to the satisfaction of two external examiners. Your thesis must represent a significant original contribution to learning, for example through the discovery of new knowledge, the connection of previously unrelated facts, the development of a new theory, or the revision of older views, and must take account of previously published work on the subject. The hope is that afterwards your dissertation would be published.

This PhD programme offers flexibility in the mode of delivery. You can study either as a full-time or part-time student. In the UK Higher Education sector a full-time PhD pathway means at least 35 hours of work per week with 8 weeks annual leave over a three year period. Applicants should regard full-time doctoral research as similar to a full-time occupation. A part-time PhD pathway means 17 hours per week (excluding holidays) over a six year period. It is not necessary to relocate provided you have access to an appropriate research library in your own context. A list of supervisors is available on the Union Theological College website. There you will find a summary of the research interests of Faculty members and Research Associates of Union Theological College and our various partners (The Alexandrian Institute and The Kirby Laing Center).

Initially, the application process can be a little intimidating and it involves several steps such as finding a potential supervisor and writing a research proposal. It can take anything from six months to over a year to prepare the application portfolio. It is therefore important that you give yourself enough time to do this. This will ensure that you have thought through what you want to work on and it will mean that your application will be as strong as possible. We recommend that you start planning your application one year in advance.

Once you contact a potential supervisor and you find out that they may be willing to supervise you, you then need to begin to prepare a research proposal to discuss with them.

We have put together a guide to help you understand what is involved in this significant task which is available on the College website. No doubt the proposal will evolve significantly but, even in its first draft, you need to make sure it is as focused and polished as possible. You should aim to send the supervisor a proposal that shows your potential to undertake a PhD. It is a good idea to share this draft with someone else in order to get their initial feedback prior to sending it to your supervisor. For example, you could ask a friend from your master's course to comment on it for you.

Your potential supervisor will almost certainly have suggestions to make on your draft proposal. This is a sign that they are engaging with your potential project. The proposal will go through a number of iterations and this could take quite a number of months. At this stage, you and your potential supervisor are getting to know each other, and thinking about whether you would work well together. During a PhD programme you will receive lots of feedback from your supervisor and from others at various progress review stages. Being open to feedback at this stage will show your supervisor that you are willing to receive guidance and direction.

There are other parts of the application portfolio to gather, e.g. degree transcripts, letters in support of your application, and a sample of your best academic writing. For the last of these it is important to choose a piece of formal academic writing with a strong and coherent argument and a proper form of citation for your sources.

You will also need to prepare a letter of intent which should indicate why you want to undertake this programme. We welcome students from all backgrounds to study Christian theology in a community of faith and research-led scholarship to prepare them for life, work and service in both local and global contexts. For us the doctoral research programme is about much more than simply gaining an academic qualification and therefore we encourage applicants to consider prayerfully their gifts, goals, and ambitions. Do use the letter of intent to outline to us any sense of Christian vocation that you have in making the application to the programme. Your letter of intent will also need to indicate how you will fund your studies and that you have the necessary time available to carry out the research. The latter is especially important if you are applying to be a part-time student. Furthermore, you will also need to indicate that you will have access to library resources if you are planning to study as a distance student. Finally, the letter of intent should indicate that you are aware of any language requirements which might be necessary for your chosen project.

For further details please visit the PhD Research page of the UTC website and consult the Code of Practice for Research Degree Programme which is available there.