



Doctor of Philosophy in the Humanities and Social Sciences

Handbook

April 2026

Introduction

Doctor of Philosophy in the Humanities and Social Sciences

Woolf's PhD programme is designed for scholars and professionals who seek to contribute original, publishable research to knowledge in the humanities and social sciences. The programme prioritises a student-centred education delivered through rigorous engagement with supervisors holding relevant research expertise. The doctorate is suitable for both full-time and part-time students, with flexible duration arrangements available for those transferring from other accredited doctoral programmes.

1. A doctorate program has no grades, and no credits – but it does have a three-part structure with checkpoints and a final *viva voce* examination.
2. Each doctoral student is assigned a primary supervisor with research expertise in their field. Supervisors hold research doctorates and demonstrate peer-reviewed research, combining critical feedback on student work with guidance on research direction and methodology.
3. Full-time students complete the programme in 3 years (one module per academic year). Part-time students may take between 3 and 8 years, with one module every two years or as arranged.

Key Patterns

1. **Meetings:** Full-time students typically meet weekly with their supervisor and engage in regular synchronous sessions. Part-time students have flexible arrangements aligned with their schedule.
2. **Learning Methods:** A combination of synchronous and asynchronous engagement, including one-on-one supervision, scholarly articles and study materials in the VLE, asynchronous lectures, and forum-based communication.
3. **Deliverables:** Module 1 — research proposal, literature review, methodological framework, project planning documents. Module 2 — thesis chapters, research progress reports, data analysis and interpretation documents. Module 3 — completed thesis manuscript and viva voce examination.
4. **Duration of Courses:** Full-time students complete one module per year over 3 years. Part-time students complete one module every two years over a minimum of 3 and maximum of 8 years. Shorter arrangements are available for students transferring from other accredited doctoral programmes.
5. **Overall Structure and Evidence Required for Progression**

Course	ECTS	Hours	Level
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Advanced Research Planning and Methodology	0	1500	EQF 8
Research Progress and Progress Review	0	1500	EQF 8
Thesis Completion and Viva Voce Examination	0	1500	EQF 8

The programme is structured across three tiers of doctoral study, each building progressively toward the completed thesis and viva voce defence.

Year One: Advanced Research Planning and Methodology

This module prepares a student to contribute new knowledge to scholarship in the humanities or social sciences, such that they can conduct (in subsequent modules) a programme of original, publishable research that advances the state of knowledge in their chosen field.

Assets to log evidence:

At least four regular assignments and one final assignment, including research proposals, literature reviews, methodological frameworks, and project planning documents.

Learning Outcomes

1. Create a research-based approach to a discipline-specific (or interdisciplinary) problem, integrating knowledge from new research
2. Apply a professional and scholarly approach to research discipline-based problems
3. Design a scholarly project that conforms to contemporary standards around research ethics
4. Manage interdisciplinary issues that arise in connection to methodological paradigms within each field
5. Demonstrate self-direction in research and originality in solutions when engaging scholarly disputes
6. Act autonomously in identifying research problems and solutions related to at least one critical paradigm in the course, and can map these to a timeline
7. Solve problems and be prepared to take independent decisions related to the methods and principles of research, including prioritizing and scheduling research activities
8. Develop a comprehensive knowledge of received critical or scholarly paradigms beyond that associated with Master's-level study
9. Develop a specialised knowledge of key strategies related to the analysis of critical paradigms or methodologies
10. Critically understand the diverse scholarly views on methodological paradigms, forming the basis of an original research question

Year Two: Research Progress and Progress Review

While the focus of year one was on preparing the Research Proposal, the focus of year two is on the actual work of research, whether that be in the library, working with datasets, or deep reading in the

scholarship on a chosen topic, producing extensive notes and questions, and rough drafts of chapters or thesis sections. In addition to direct intervention on the student's work, faculty contributions might include exploring innovative new research methods, research integrity, or, where relevant, implications for policy and other applications.

Assets to log evidence:

At least four regular assignments and one final assignment, including thesis chapters, research progress reports, and data analysis and interpretation documents.

Learning Outcomes

1. Demonstrate a sustained commitment to the exploration of a scholarly project and the development of new knowledge
2. Apply a professional and scholarly approach to research problems pertaining to qualitative and/or quantitative methods in a scholarly discipline
3. Efficiently manage interdisciplinary issues that arise in connection to quantitative or qualitative methods in the humanities or social sciences
4. Demonstrate self-direction in research and originality in solutions developed for creating knowledge in the humanities or social sciences
5. Demonstrate increasing authority in a specialized academic field, and make judgments about scope and relevance for a well-defined research problem
6. Solve problems and be prepared to take leadership decisions related to the methods and principles of research
7. Develop a critical knowledge of methodological debates in a humanities or social sciences discipline
8. Develop a specialised knowledge of key strategies related to research methods in a specific humanities or social sciences discipline
9. Critically understand the diverse scholarly views on specific methodological approaches in the humanities or social sciences
10. Demonstrate an increasingly systematic knowledge of a highly-specialised field of study

Year Three: Thesis Completion and Viva Voce Examination

This module encompasses the final phase of doctoral study, in which the candidate completes the thesis and prepares for and undergoes the viva voce examination. The module concludes with the formal examination and approval of the completed thesis by the examining panel.

Assets to log evidence:

At least three regular assessments and two final assignments. The final assessment is the viva voce examination.

Learning Outcomes

1. Demonstrate practical skills in gathering information from a variety of primary and secondary sources and in applying it to specific disciplinary questions
2. Grasp the theoretical issues that affect the proposed field of enquiry and the relative strengths and weaknesses of alternative approaches in the secondary literature
3. Manage complex, sustained research on a problem in the humanities or social sciences, and develop new interpretive strategies

4. Conduct a programme of research that contributes to professional knowledge
5. Attain a comprehensive overview of the most important primary and secondary literature in the field of enquiry
6. Become familiar with different types of textual and non-textual evidence used for the field of enquiry
7. Understand and intervene in key theoretical, methodological, or historiographical debates for the field of enquiry
8. Possess expert knowledge at EQF 8 level of the topic addressed in the thesis
9. Deliver a thesis in a structured, well-scoped, and orderly way
10. Summarise a wide-ranging body of information from multiple sources
11. Apply historical and critical approaches to the interpretation of primary and secondary sources in such a way as to make a genuinely new contribution to knowledge
12. Understand and apply standard modern conventions concerning the presentation of scholarly work and scholarly referencing
13. Identify a specific, unique, and well-scoped domain of research enquiry for the proposed thesis
14. Assess, analyse and critique primary sources and secondary literature
15. Compare different approaches to the designated field of enquiry and make critical choices between them
16. Justify the choice of pursuing a research topic according to a specific scholarly methodology fitting to a domain of enquiry
17. Communicate clearly and convincingly, both orally and in writing, about the thesis topic

Full Details of PhD (H&SS)

Entry Requirements

1. Education Requirements

Candidates must hold an EQF 7 level degree. Admission is competitive, based on research proposal and academic record.

1. Language Requirements

English or Spanish language competency at C1 level, evidenced by: completion of an EQF 7 level degree taught in the appropriate language; or IELTS scores with an overall band of 6.5 (Writing 6, Reading 6, Listening 6, Speaking 6), or 7.5 in writing with 6.5 in other elements for English/Arts programmes; or for Spanish, DELE C1 or higher.

1. Transfer of Progress from Other Programmes

Students transferring from another accredited doctoral programme may be eligible to complete the degree in a shorter timeframe. This arrangement will be detailed as part of any offer of admission.

1. Duration of Programme

Full-time students complete the programme in 3 years. Part-time students may take between 3 and 8 years. Extensions are available in circumstances warranting additional time to complete the research.

Assessment

The programme uses a continuous assessment model throughout all three modules. Each module includes regular assignments and one or more final assignments. Regular assignments provide formative feedback and build toward the summative final assignments. Module 1 requires at least four regular assignments and one final assignment. Module 2 requires at least four regular assignments and one final assignment. Module 3 requires at least three regular assessments and two final assignments, with the viva voce examination as the capstone assessment.

The Viva Voce Examination

The viva voce examination is a signature moment in a doctoral candidate's career, as examiners from within and without the College ratify the candidate's knowledge of their selected field. Thesis examination regulations follow the Woolf Academic Handbook. The viva voce is conducted by a panel of internal and external examiners who have reviewed the submitted thesis. The candidate presents and defends their research, demonstrating comprehensive knowledge of their field and the originality and significance of their contribution.

Possible outcomes are: Pass (thesis accepted as meeting doctoral standards); Pass with minor revisions (candidate must make specified minor revisions); Pass with major revisions (candidate must substantially revise the thesis and resubmit for reassessment); or Fail (thesis does not meet doctoral standards; the candidate may be offered an exit award or an opportunity to resubmit).

Internships policy

Internships must be a genuine extension of the student's academic programme, providing opportunity to apply theoretical knowledge to substantive projects directly related to their field of study. Internships consisting primarily of administrative or routine tasks will not be approved.

Every internship must have a defined start date, end date, and formal learning plan with objectives agreed in advance by the student, the host organisation, and the relevant college. Responsibilities and task complexity should increase over time. Each student must be assigned a named supervisor within the host organisation who holds relevant expertise and is responsible for providing regular guidance and feedback.

Woolf prioritises paid internships to ensure equitable access regardless of socioeconomic background. Unpaid internships may only be approved where they constitute a genuine learning opportunity and do not displace the work of a paid employee.

Programmatic standards

Day-to-day management sits with the relevant college. Each college must have a designated Woolf contact responsible for vetting and approving all host organisations and placements before any internship may proceed. Colleges are responsible for matching students to approved positions.

Students must complete pre-internship preparation before commencing a placement, which may include CV writing, interview support, and other instruction as necessary. Virtual internships are encouraged to widen access beyond geographical constraints; support systems must address the challenges of remote work, including cross-timezone communication and fostering professional belonging.

Programme effectiveness must be evaluated on an ongoing basis. Formal evaluations will be collected from students, host supervisors, and academic advisors, and will inform curriculum design and programme improvement.

Grading Scheme

General Marking Criteria and Classification

Marking of student work keeps in view the scale of work that the student can reasonably be expected to have undertaken in order to complete the task.

The assessment of work for the course is defined according to the following rubric of general criteria:

1. **Engagement:**
 - Directness of engagement with the question or task
 - Range of issues addressed or problems solved
 - Depth, complexity, and sophistication of comprehension of issues and implications of the questions or task
 - Effective and appropriate use of imagination and intellectual curiosity
2. **Argument or solution:**
 - Coherence, mastery, control, and independence of work
 - Conceptual and analytical precision
 - Flexibility, i.e., discussion of a variety of views, ability to navigate through challenges in creative ways
 - Completion leading to a conclusion or outcome
 - Performance and success of the solution, where relevant
3. **Evidence (as relevant):**
 - Depth, precision, detail, range and relevance of evidence cited
 - Accuracy of facts
 - Knowledge of first principles and demonstrated ability to reason from them
 - Understanding of theoretical principles and/or historical debate
 - Critical engagement with primary and/or secondary sources
4. **Organisation & Presentation:**
 - Clarity and coherence of structure
 - Clarity and fluency of writing, code, prose, or presentation (as relevant)
 - Correctness of conformity to conventions (code, grammar, spelling, punctuation, or similar relevant conventions)

Definition of marks

97-100

Work will be so outstanding that it could not be better within the scope of the assignment. These grades will be used for work that shows exceptional excellence in the relevant domain; including (as relevant): remarkable sophistication and mastery, originality or creativity, persuasive and well-grounded new methods or ideas, or making unexpected connections or solutions to problems.

94-96

Work will excel against each of the General Criteria. In at least one area, the work will be merely highly competent.

90-93

Work will excel in more than one area, and be at least highly competent in other respects. It must be excellent and contain: a combination of sophisticated engagement with the issues; analytical precision and independence of solution; go beyond paraphrasing or boilerplate code techniques; demonstrating quality of awareness and analysis of both first principles or primary evidence and scholarly debate or practical tradeoffs; and clarity and coherence of presentation. Truly outstanding work measured against some of these criteria may compensate for mere high competence against others.

87-89

Work will be at least very highly competent across the board, and excel in at least one group of the General Criteria. Relative weaknesses in some areas may be compensated by conspicuous strengths in others.

84-86

Work will demonstrate considerable competence across the General Criteria. They must exhibit some essential features of addressing the issue directly and relevantly across a good range of aspects; offer a coherent solution or argument involving (where relevant) consideration of alternative approaches; be substantiated with accurate use of resources (including if relevant, primary evidence) and contextualisation in debate (if relevant); and be clearly presented. Nevertheless, additional strengths (for instance, the range of problems addressed, the sophistication of the arguments or solutions, or the use of first principles) may compensate for other weaknesses.

80-83

Work will be competent and should manifest the essential features described above, in that they must offer direct, coherent, substantiated and clear arguments; but they will do so with less range, depth, precision and perhaps clarity. Again, qualities of a higher order may compensate for some weaknesses.

77-79

Work will show solid competence in solving problems or providing analysis. But it will be marred by weakness under one or more criteria: failure to fully solve the problem or discuss the question directly; some irrelevant use of technologies or citing of information; factual error, or error in selection of technologies; narrowness in the scope of solution or range of issues addressed or evidence adduced; shortage of detailed evidence or engagement with the problem; technical performance issues (but not so much as to prevent operation); poor organisation or presentation, including incorrect conformity to convention or written formatting.

74-76

Work will show evidence of some competence in solving problems or providing analysis. It will also be clearly marred by weakness in multiple General Criteria, including: failure to solve the problem or discuss the question directly; irrelevant use of technologies or citing of information; factual errors or multiple errors in selection of technologies; narrowness in the scope of solution or range of issues addressed or evidence adduced; shortage of detailed evidence or engagement with the problem; significant technical performance issues (but not so much as to prevent operation); poor organisation or presentation, including incorrect conformity to convention or written formatting. They may be characterised by unsubstantiated assertion rather than argument, or by unresolved contradictions in the argument or solution.

70-73

Work will show evidence of competence in solving problems or providing analysis, but this evidence will be limited. It will be clearly marred by weakness in multiple General Criteria. It will still make substantive progress in addressing the primary task or question, but the work will lack a full solution or directly address the task; the work will contain irrelevant material; the work will show multiple errors of fact or judgment; and the work may fail to conform to conventions.

67-69

Work will fall down on a number of criteria, but will exhibit some of the qualities required, such as the ability to grasp the purpose of the assignment, to deploy substantive information or solutions in an effort to complete the assignment; or to offer some coherent analysis or work towards the assignment. Such qualities will not be displayed at a high level, and may be marred by irrelevance, incoherence, major technical performance issues, error and poor organisation and presentation.

64-66

Work will fall down on a multiple General Criteria, but will exhibit some vestiges of the qualities required, such as the ability to see the point of the question, to deploy information, or to offer some coherent work. Such qualities will be substantially marred by irrelevance, incoherence, error and poor organisation and presentation.

60-63

Work will display a modicum of knowledge or understanding of some points, but will display almost none of the higher qualities described in the criteria. They will be marred by high levels of factual or technology error and irrelevance, generalisation or boilerplate code and lack of information, and poor organisation and presentation.

0-60

Work will fail to exhibit any of the required qualities. Candidates who fail to observe rubrics and rules beyond what the grading schemes allow for may also be failed.

Indicative equivalence table

US GPA	US Grade	US Percent	UK Mark	UK UG Classification	UK PG Classification	Malta Grade	Malta Mark	Malta Classification	Swiss Grade
4	A+	97 - 100	70+	First	Distinction	A	80-100%	First class honours	6.0
3.9	A	94-96				B	70-79%	Upper-second class honours	
3.7	A-	90-93							5.5
3.3	B+	87-89	65-69	Upper Second	Merit	C	55-69%	Lower-second class honours	
3	B	84-86	60-64						
2.7	B-	80-83	55-59	Lower Second	Pass				5
2.3	C+	77-79	50-54			D	50-54%	Third-class honours	
2	C	74-76	45-49	Third	Pass				
1.7	C-	70-73	40-44						
1.3	D+	67-69	39-	Fail	Fail				
1	D	64-66							
0.7	D-	60-63							
0	F	Below 60				F			

Synchronous Adjustments Template

Synch discussions may affect the mark on submitted assignments: written work is submitted in advance, and a discussion follows. This provides students an opportunity to clarify and explain their written claims, and it also tests whether the work is a product of the student's own research or has been plagiarised.

The synchronous discussion acts to shift the recorded mark on the submitted assignment according to the following rubric:

+3

Up to three points are added for excellent performance; the student displays a high degree of competence across a range of questions, and excels in at least one group of criteria. Relative weaknesses in some areas may be compensated by conspicuous strengths in others.

+/- 0

The marked assignment is unchanged for fair performance. Answers to questions must show evidence of some solid competence in expounding evidence and analysis. But they will be marred by weakness under one or more criteria: failure to discuss the question directly; appeal to irrelevant information; factual error; narrowness in the range of issues addressed or evidence adduced; shortage of detailed evidence; or poor organisation and presentation, including consistently incorrect grammar. Answers may be characterised by unsubstantiated assertion rather than argument, or by unresolved contradictions in the argument.

- 3 (up to three points)

Up to three are subtracted points for an inability to answer multiple basic questions about themes in the written work. Answers to questions will fall down on a number of criteria, but will exhibit some vestiges of the qualities required, such as the ability to see the point of the question, to deploy information, or to

offer some coherent analysis towards an argument. Such qualities will not be displayed at a high level or consistently, and will be marred by irrelevance, incoherence, error and poor organisation and presentation.

0 (fail)

Written work and the oral examination will both be failed if the oral examination clearly demonstrates that the work was plagiarised. The student is unfamiliar with the arguments of the assignment or the sources used for those arguments.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the use of someone else's work without correct referencing. The consequence of plagiarism is the presentation of someone else's work as your own work. Plagiarism violates Woolf policy and will result in disciplinary action, but the context and seriousness of plagiarism varies widely. Intentional or reckless plagiarism will result in a penalty grade of zero, and may also entail disciplinary penalties.

Plagiarism can be avoided by citing the works that inform or that are quoted in a written submission. Many students find that it is essential to keep their notes organised in relation to the sources which they summarise or quote. Course instructors will help you to cultivate professional scholarly habits in your academic writing.

Depending on the course, short assignment essays may not require students to submit a bibliography or to use extensive footnotes, and students are encouraged to write their assignments entirely in their own words. However, all essays must acknowledge the sources on which they rely and must provide quotation marks and citation information for verbatim quotes.

There are several forms of plagiarism. They all result in the presentation of someone's prior work as your new creation. Examples include:

- Cutting and pasting (verbatim copying)
- Paraphrasing or rewording
- Unauthorised Collaboration
- Collaboration with other students can result in pervasive similarities – it is important to determine in advance whether group collaboration is allowed, and to acknowledge the contributions or influence of the group members.
- False Authorship (Essay Mills, Friends, and Language Help)
- Paying an essay writing service, or allowing a generous friend to compose your essay, is cheating. Assistance that contributes substantially to the ideas or content of your work must be acknowledged.

Complaints and appeals

Students and faculty should always seek an amicable resolution to matters arising by addressing the issue with the person immediately related to the issue. Students should handle minor misunderstandings or disagreements within a regular teaching session or by direct message, or with their College. If a simple resolution is not possible, or the matter remains unresolved for one party, the steps outlined in this section apply to all groups, colleges, and units of Woolf.

The Red Flag system

An issue with a red flag should be submitted in the case that a member of Woolf seeks to make an allegation of serious misconduct about another member, including matters of cheating, plagiarism, and unfair discrimination or intolerance.

Any member of Woolf, seeking to raise a matter of serious concern, should submit a red flag by emailing redflag@woolf.education. Provide a short, clear description of the issue.

If a student submits an issue with a red flag, or if a faculty member submits an issue about a student, it will trigger a meeting with the student's College Advisor. If the issue is not resolved, the matter will be escalated to the College Dean, or to a committee designated by the College Dean, which will have the power to clear the flag.

If an issue is submitted with a red flag by a faculty member about another faculty member, then the issue is reported directly to the College Dean.

For both students and faculty members, after the Dean's decision, the one who submits the complaint is provided the opportunity to accept or appeal the decision; if the one submitting the issue appeals the decision, it will be assigned to the Quality Assurance, Enhancement, and Technology Alignment Committee, which is a subcommittee of the Faculty Council.

Mitigating circumstances

When serious circumstances ('Mitigating Circumstances'), beyond the control of a student or faculty member, adversely affect academic performance or teaching support, a Mitigating Circumstances report must be submitted using Woolf's red flagging system. Mitigating Circumstances may include but are not limited to serious medical problems, domestic and personal circumstances, major accidents or interruptions of public services, disturbances during examination, or serious administrative or procedural errors with a material effect on outcomes.

Mitigating circumstances do not normally include a member's personal technology problems, including software, hardware, or personal internet connection failures; employment obligations or changes in employment obligations; permanent or sustained medical conditions (unless there is a sudden change of condition); or circumstances where no official evidence has been submitted.

Mitigating circumstances are normally only considered when a red flag has been submitted for the issue before the deadline of an affected written project or assignment, or within one week of a cumulative examination. Proof of mitigating circumstances may result in an extended deadline or examination period, or the possibility to retake an examination; it will not result in any regrading of existing submissions or exams.

Grade appeals

Students who dissent from the grades they have received should follow the normal procedure for submitting a red flag.