

Checklist: To PhD or not to PhD

Use the following checklist as guideline to review your decision as to whether to commit to a PhD or not.

1. What's your motivation for doing a PhD?

Do you have a real passion and interest for the subject? Alarm bells should be ringing if you are deciding to commit to the PhD because your supervisor has asked you and you haven't explored whether this is truly the right option for you. It requires a big commitment in terms of time and energy, so it's important to prepare and be clear about what you are getting into.

2. What's your career plan?

Are you undertaking a PhD as a first step towards an academic career or do you foresee career routes outside of academia that are enhanced by the doctoral qualification? Are you returning to academia after a period of employment to deepen the knowledge that underpins their practice through a doctorate or are you pursuing it in order to seek a change in direction?

Knowing whether you want a career in academia or not before commencing a PhD will help you get the right skills and experiences from the doctorate program and make your next career transition step easier.

3. What if I'm deliberating over an academic or non-academic career?

If you're not sure, explore other options before committing to a PhD. A clearer idea of your career goals will help you work out what sort of research project would be most useful for you to do during the PhD.

4. Have you taken advice?

The best way to find out about life as a PhD candidate is to talk to them: ask about their experience of doctoral research – what they enjoyed, what they didn't and what their tips might be. Also, speak to your professors: ask their opinion about you applying for a PhD. They may be able to help you identify the best departments to apply to.

5. Have you the criteria for applying for a PhD position?

Do you have an outstanding academic record at Master's level and the right educational/career background within the field of the PhD subject including technical skills and research related knowledge? Are you genuinely interested in and enthusiastic about doing research and teaching in the specific field and can demonstrate you are an independent worker?

6. Where should I do a PhD?

Do you know what country and university you would like to undertake a PhD? Programmes vary from country to country and from university to university so ensure you research and understand the program before you apply.

7. Have you identified your research field?

Finding the right topic is not as straightforward as you may think. Do you have a topic that interests you? Explore ideas and research articles you might have come across during your Master's studies. Test potential ideas to see if they are possible.

8. Finding the right institution

Before making a formal application, you need to select one or two institutions where you might want to do your doctorate. Ideally, arrange to visit the university to check out the relevant lab or technical facilities, the library and accommodation. Experiencing the environment can be quite revealing about the culture within a department.

9. Finding the right supervisor

Your supervisor is a major influence on your PhD experience - so choose wisely. Have you identified a potential supervisor specialised in the specific area you want to study? (*Checkout their online profiles, stated research interests and publication lists on institution and department web pages and read up on their previous or current research*). Have you spoken to doctoral researchers they are currently supervising to find out the experience and style of the supervisor and the number of doctoral candidates are they currently supervising? Have you arranged to talk to a potential supervisor in some detail about your ideas and the opportunities available, before you apply formally? If they are not enthusiastic about your intended research, you'll know to pursue other options.

10. Do you know how to find a PhD position?

Have you searched for vacancies on university websites and on-line sites? In addition, read up on your preferred field of interest and identify research groups working on similar topics and reach out to connect with them to pitch your idea and enquire whether there is funding available.

11. Do you know how you will fund your PhD?

Do you know how you will fund your PhD? A number of options are possible: paid employment, scholarships and fellowships, working and studying part-time or crowdfunding is the latest idea for attaining sponsorship.

12. Need further help?

Still deliberating whether you are willing to commit to a PhD or not? Attend one of the Career Centre workshops planned throughout the year (see Blackboard) to explore your thinking further or request a one-to-one consultation session with a Career Counsellor to understand whether the PhD route is right for you.