

Introduction: About this Book

This book seeks to provide a readable and informative guide to the research degree process. The doctoral degree can still be treated as something of an oddity among lawyers. If you're *that* clever, doctoral researchers are often asked, why aren't you in practice? Nonetheless modern law schools are more and more coming around to the idea of their doctoral cohorts as key parts of the life of the school and you should find that the degree is better understood now that it was a decade ago. Other academic disciplines—in particular the social sciences—are well-served with how-to guides. During our own degrees we drew on the wisdom of Phillips and Pugh's *How to get a PhD: A Handbook for Students and Their Supervisors*—a book which has gone through four editions since its first publication in 1987. Dunleavy's *Authoring a PhD: How to Plan, Draft, Write & Finish a Doctoral Thesis or Dissertation* provides further sage advice—especially for the more humanities-oriented parts of our theses. However, during our studies we felt keenly the absence of a book aimed at us as academic lawyers. Though we could learn from guides for social scientists and humanities researchers, they did not capture the unique nature of the law doctorate. Law cannot be pigeon-holed as a social science or arts and humanities discipline—while it borrows from both it cannot be considered a sub-discipline of either. It was our own difficulty in obtaining good advice on the process of getting a PhD in law which more than anything else sparked this book into life.

A PhD in law is, naturally, unique. We have written this book to address that experience undertaken by hundreds of doctoral candidates across the world every year. While the experiences we have drawn on are largely from those in universities in Britain and Ireland we believe there are lessons here for doctoral researchers throughout the common law world and even farther afield. We use a wide range of anecdotes throughout this book to illustrate the points we make. These have been gleaned from our own experiences and those of colleagues, from the many doctoral students we've met at conferences and seminars and through various online and offline communities. We've changed facts here and there to protect identities and in places we've combined two tales into one. But at the heart of each anecdote is the story

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of someone else's problem or solution—we hope you find inspiration or at least comfort in dealing with your own. If you have a story that we haven't told then be sure to get in touch! We continue to be interested in the whole doctoral research experience and it is through sharing experiences that the whole process can be demystified for those still undergoing it. The anecdotes are marked out by italicised text throughout the book and are intended to help you appreciate that you are not the first person to experience the challenges of the doctoral research process.

We have covered the PhD experience from the initial idea of undertaking the degree right through to publication and early career building. As a result, while we hope the book makes an interesting cover-to-cover read, it is likely that some chapters will become more relevant than others at different stages of the research degree process. The first, second and tenth chapters provide some useful background information and guidance on the PhD process and early career issues that will be helpful throughout your degree. At the outset of your research project you may find it useful to read these chapters in detail and skim through the book to get an idea of what advice can be found in which chapters. Then, as you approach different points in your progress, you can re-read those chapters as appropriate. Chapters three to seven deal with the heart of the law PhD experience from design through to research and writing and the problems you might encounter along the way. Chapter eight addresses the PhD viva; chapter nine the questions about what and where to publish during and after the PhD. In the appendices we have gathered together some resources and information about funding bodies which we hope you will find useful.

We wish you the very best as you embark on your research degree. It is an incomparable experience but one which, if successful, will be amongst the most rewarding in your life. We hope this book helps a little with the ups and downs that lie ahead. Good luck!

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