Department of Philosophy

Philosophy

PhD
Vibrant Research Community

Sheffield is a great place to do a PhD. We have a large and friendly postgraduate community (approximately 75 postgraduates), with students from across the globe.

Our department has a vibrant research culture: Our staff offer expertise in a wide range of areas and embrace a pluralist attitude toward philosophical research where a broad range of approaches to the subject matter are actively encouraged. There are weekly departmental seminars, numerous local workshops and conferences, and up to a dozen reading groups going at any given time (mainly student-led). Students present work in progress at weekly postgraduate seminars and at the annual reading weekend.

We have a very strong placement record for our graduates (in postdoctoral research fellowships and academic lectureships). Our building in Victoria Street has lots of study space dedicated to postgraduates, as well as a kitchen, lounge area, and garden shared by postgraduates and staff.

Many PhD students are involved in Philosophy in the City, an award-winning project that is entirely student-run. Philosophy in the City brings philosophy into local schools, homeless shelters, and other places through teaching, mentoring, and other means.

Research Excellence

In the recent Research Excellence Framework (REF2014) assessment, the Sheffield Philosophy Department came 2nd in the country for the quality of our research outputs (books, articles etc.). This carries on our tradition of excellent results in research assessment exercises, where we came joint third in the previous assessment (RAE2008). This REF result is especially gratifying since we included research from all eligible members of academic staff, thereby demonstrating our research strength across the board.

I returned to Sheffield, where I studied for my BA, after completing an MPhil in Development Studies at Cambridge. There was never any question that I wanted to return to the department for my PhD, in no small part thanks to the faculty who, quite apart from representing a broad and fascinating range of expertise, help create an atmosphere that is at once invigorating and stimulating but also genuinely friendly and down to earth. Since returning I have found the extra facilities and opportunities I am afforded as a graduate student extremely helpful in making the transition from Masters to Doctoral student.

— Charlie Crerar (PhD student)
Doing my PhD at Sheffield has been a thoroughly fantastic experience. The graduate community is extremely friendly and close-knit, which made moving here to begin the PhD really easy. The weekly graduate work-in-progress seminars mean you get a feel for what other people are working on, and whenever I’ve presented my own work I have always received stimulating and helpful comments. My primary and secondary supervisors are both wonderful: I see my primary supervisor very regularly, around once a month, and my secondary supervisor a couple of times a semester. They help me keep my work moving forward, and offer plenty of encouragement and advice about my development as an academic. Whenever I’ve encountered difficulties with my work, my primary supervisor has seamlessly stepped up her support until everything is going smoothly again. They have helped me to find opportunities to present at various international conferences, which has greatly added to the development of my research. All in all, at Sheffield, I always feel supported and encouraged by peers and staff, which makes for a thoroughly enjoyable and rewarding PhD experience.
—Katharine Jenkins (PhD Student) Katharine has been offered a Junior Research Fellowship at Jesus College, Cambridge, for after her studies, after which she will take up a permanent lectureship at the University of Nottingham.

Requirements

You’ll normally need an MA or equivalent at distinction level before you start—but do contact us if you have any questions about your qualifications.

Being a postgraduate researcher in Sheffield was a terrific experience overall. The staff have always been extremely helpful and supportive, in so many ways. Not only my supervisors, but also other members of the department have helped me, e.g. giving feedback on papers and job or funding applications, assisting with mock interviews, etc. The staff at Sheffield are extremely friendly and accessible, they very much care about teaching, and they’re top researchers, too. I am really grateful for the support I received while doing research, and – towards the end of the PhD – while being on the job market: it made a difference. The postgraduate community is very lively, and active. It’s been easy, and great, to organize and participate in reading groups. There are also quite a few international students, which is obviously important for someone who moved to Britain to study and work like myself.
— Julien Murzi (Lecturer, University of Kent)
I spent five years as a graduate student in Sheffield, starting with my MA, and then completing my PhD in 2011. I immediately took up a two year ‘Teaching Fellow’ position at the University of Edinburgh, and I’m now a lecturer there. It was a real privilege to study philosophy at Sheffield and to be part of such a fantastic, friendly department. I gained as much from informal chats and reading groups with faculty and other graduate students as I did from my PhD research and supervision. My primary research area is Social Cognition, which involves examining different accounts of how we understand others in social contexts. It is strongly interdisciplinary, drawing on data from psychology, anthropology and neuroscience to support and critique philosophical accounts of social interaction. The Hang Seng Centre for Cognitive Studies, based in Sheffield, provided the ideal forum for me to pursue my research in an inter-disciplinary context, and I worked as an assistant to the director of the centre, Stephen Laurence, throughout my time as a graduate student. I also had the opportunity to teach my own Philosophy of Mind course at second year level. These experiences gave me such a confidence boost when I went on the job market, and set me in good stead for university life as a lecturer.

— Suilin Lavelle (Lecturer, University of Edinburgh)