

*Doing a PhD in the Social Sciences:  
A student's guide to postgraduate research and writing*

Frances Jegede

London, Routledge, 2021, 284 pages

ISBN: 9780367519414 (pbk) £24.99

Also available as hardback and ebook

*Reviewed by Jean Gordon*

*Doing a PhD in the Social Sciences* does exactly what it says on the tin. This is an accessible, comprehensive guide for anyone navigating their way through a social sciences PhD. Its author, Francis Jegede, is Associate Professor in International Relations and Diplomacy at the University of Derby. The author's long-standing experience in supervising and managing doctoral students is made evident in the book's focus on the practicalities as well as academic aspects of undertaking a PhD. Its aim is to enable readers to navigate their way through their doctoral journey, from application through to successful completion of their research.

The book's chapters take a sequential approach, starting with an explanation of what a PhD is, and inviting the reader to consider why they might want to embark on a doctoral journey. Successive sections tackle the PhD application process, available support, working with supervisors, literature review, ethical issues, fieldwork, analysis, writing up and preparing for the viva voce (oral examination) at the end. A final chapter provides guidance and suggestions about ways in which to 'make the most of your PhD': an important acknowledgement that a doctorate is not an end in itself, but a foundation for future learning as well as practice-based application of enhanced knowledge and skills.

There are many guides to doing a PhD which take a more generic approach, so Jegede's specialist focus is likely to be especially attractive to readers with a social science background. A further strength of this book is its easily searchable mix of information, practical strategies, flow charts and advice for potential PhD applicants. The guide is likely to be particularly helpful for those who may be tentatively contemplating embarking on doctoral study and looking for a steer on what's involved. Once fully in the swing of a PhD, the book can perhaps best be seen as an informative handbook to dip into periodically as required, perhaps to seek the helpful advice about issues with their support or supervision.

The differences between so-called 'traditional' PhDs and Professional

or Practice-based Doctorates (DProf) are well explained using UK and global examples from different institutions. This careful attention to the value and process of undertaking a professional doctorate may be of particular interest to experienced health and social care practitioners contemplating further study at postgraduate level. Jegede also briefly refers to another 'non-traditional' route, a PhD by Research Publications which involves the submission and assessment of previously published research articles, books etc that collectively demonstrate significant contribution to a field of study. Having successfully negotiated this particular (and much cheaper!) route myself after a long career in social work practice, education and research, I was disappointed to find little further reference to this route in the book. Although, as Jegede points out, some universities reserve this route for ex-students and staff, PhDs by Research Publications are commonplace in Europe and North America and growing in popularity and accessibility in the UK.

If you've sometimes toyed with the idea of undertaking a doctoral qualification by whatever route but decided that this was unattainable or a pipe dream, then Jegede's guide is definitely worth a read. It will give you an opportunity to think through your motivation for further study and weigh up the potential benefits and challenges involved. This short excerpt jumped out at me when I was reading the book:

'When successfully completed, a PhD stands as a symbol of personal success. It offers you an opportunity to produce something special and worthwhile and that means something to you and the academic community working in your area of study' (p.xxi)

This was certainly my experience, though I appreciate that I was fortunate to be at a stage of life that gave me the time and support I needed to pursue my own PhD journey. At the risk of a bit of cheerleading, I would love to see practice and field educators, many of whom have a wealth of experience and knowledge to draw on, afforded more opportunities to conduct research and contribute to our understanding of health and social care practice and practice education itself.

Dr Jean Gordon  
BSc., BA, MSc., PhD (research publications)  
Social Researcher and Open University Social Work Tutor  
Fortrose, Highland, UK  
Jean@jeangordon.co.uk