

## The Academic Dress of Doctors of Philosophy at the University of London

By Bruce Christianson and Philip Goff

Universities in the UK were latecomers to the party in terms of the PhD degree, which finally arrived in the UK from Germany, via America, towards the end of the Great War. The iconic ‘modern’ Doctor of Philosophy degree consists of an oral defence of a written dissertation embodying the results of a piece of original research carried out (under supervision) by the candidate, on a topic never previously examined.<sup>1</sup>

This modern form of the PhD emerged in the German-speaking world towards the end of the eighteenth century and became immensely popular there, assisted greatly by the post-1808 Humboldt reforms. The new degree spread to France (1810); the Netherlands (1815); Switzerland (1833); and then the USA (starting with Yale, in 1861).<sup>2</sup> By the end of the nineteenth century, the PhD had become the sine qua non for university teachers in the USA,<sup>3</sup> and many Americans continued to visit Germany in order to study for one there.

In the UK the Commissions into Oxford and Cambridge of 1850 were rather taken by the developments in German universities, but there was resistance to change at the time. Nevertheless, some research-based degrees were introduced in the UK during the nineteenth century, and in 1881 the University of London updated their DSc regulations to allow the degree to be obtained by submitting a thesis demonstrating original work.<sup>4</sup>

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1 The term ‘Doctor of Philosophy’ had, on the continent, previously been an alternative name for the Master of Arts degree awarded at the conclusion of the second half of a fixed syllabus in liberal arts, much as the term ‘Doctor of Divinity’ replaced the older term ‘Master of Theology’. See W. N. Hargreaves-Mawdsley, *A History of Academical Dress in Europe until the End of the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), p. 3. In contrast, such ‘Doctor of Philosophy’ degrees as existed in the UK prior to the arrival of the modern PhD in 1917 were higher doctorates, paralleling the Doctorates in Science and Letters.

2 The full story is told in Renate Simpson, *How the PhD Came to Britain: A Century of Struggle for Postgraduate Education* (Guildford, Surrey: Society for Research Into Higher Education, 1983). An alternative account is given by David Bogle, ‘100 Years of the PhD in the UK’, *Proceedings of Vitae Researcher Development International Conference 2018, Birmingham UK* (Careers Research and Advisory Centre (CRAC), 2018), available at <discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/10068565/1/Bogle\_History%20of%20PhD.pdf> [retrieved 18 June 2023].

3 William James, ‘The PhD Octopus’, *Harvard Monthly*, March 1903, see <la.utexas.edu/users/hcleaver/330T/350kPEEJamesOctopusTable.pdf> [retrieved 18 June 2023]

4 Some of them were rather thin by today’s standards. One of them, on electricity, consisted of just four pages published in the *Philosophical Magazine*; Bogle.

In 1903 the Allied Colonial Universities Conference favoured the introduction of supervised research degrees, and this stimulated discussion on the subject. But a major push to introduce the PhD came during the Great War from the Foreign Office,<sup>5</sup> which expressed concern about the extent of German influence on opinion in the USA via the large number of prominent Americans who had studied as graduate students in Germany, where the PhD was available, rather than in the UK, where it was not. The United Kingdom Universities Conference in May 1917 recommended the introduction of the PhD as a ‘lower’ doctorate, ‘for the encouragement of advanced work by graduate students from abroad.’<sup>6</sup>

Oxford was the first of sixteen UK universities to adopt the new research doctorate in the period immediately following the conference, with its DPhil instituted in 1917,<sup>7</sup> and London was the last. Indeed, at a meeting of the Academic Council in March 1917, the University of London initially determined to take no action on the issue, for fear of undermining their DSc and DLit. But prompted by a letter later that month from the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Toronto, keen for Canadian postgraduates to further their studies in the UK rather than Germany or America, and a revised recommendation in favour of the PhD from its Imperial Studies Committee in June 1918, the Senate finally approved the PhD on 22 October 1919.

The introduction of the Doctor of Philosophy degree led to the need for appropriate academic costume. The Senate was formally responsible for regulating the academic dress of the University, but Convocation<sup>8</sup> traditionally took the lead in the matter, and prepared reports for consideration by the Senate.<sup>9</sup> Accordingly, the Establishment and General Purposes Committee<sup>10</sup> of the Senate wrote to the Standing Committee of Convocation, requesting that Convocation make recommendations to the Senate for the academic costume of the PhD.<sup>11</sup>

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5 Foreign Office, ‘German Educational Influence in America’, FO 395/11 (London: Public Record Office, 1916).

6 Simpson, p. 134. In fact, during the period from 1920 to 1946, over half of the PhDs awarded by UK universities would be to UK students; Simpson p. 162.

7 And first awarded in 1919, see Alan Ross, ‘Togas gradui et facultati competentes: The Creation of New Doctoral Robes at Oxford, 1895–1920’, *TBS*, 10 (2010), pp. 47–70. Ross (p. 64, n. 98) points out a rare error in Simpson.

8 Convocation, which consisted of those graduates of the University of sufficient seniority who chose to join, was established by Charter in 1858, and abolished with effect 1 September 2003. The academic dress reforms of 1861 took place at the instigation of Convocation. See Bruce Christianson, ‘Coloured Velvet is too Gaudy’, *TBS*, 21 (2021), pp. 103–43, 160; subsequent to this the academic dress of graduates depended on their membership (or not) of Convocation—and, in particular, the scarlet full-dress robe for doctors was permitted only to members of Convocation, non-members being confined to the black gown.

9 It is fortunate that this was the case, as the Convocation Minute Books are not indexed. However, in the 1990s, one of us (PG) was given a copy of a document comprising a mixture of typescript and manuscript, compiled by an unknown author, and dated 12 June 1956, which collates a list of references to academic dress in the Senate minutes. It is relatively straightforward to locate the events in Convocation by working backwards from the corresponding Senate minute.

10 The EGPC was shortly to be renamed the Finance and General Purposes Committee (FGPC).

11 As well as the PhD, the EGPC letter also requested recommendations for the new de-

The Standing Committee considered the request at its meeting on 26 March 1920, and passed a resolution proposed by one of its members, who happened to be the Vice-Chancellor.<sup>12</sup> The minutes for the Standing Committee meeting<sup>13</sup> record the following:

That the Academic Costume for Doctors of Philosophy be a black silk or stuff Gown of the same shape as for the Master of Arts.

That Doctors of Philosophy who are Members of Convocation shall also be entitled to wear a Gown of claret-coloured cloth of the same shade as that worn by Doctors of Medicine of the University of St. Andrew's [*sic*], faced with silk of a lighter shade of the same colour.

That the Hood shall be of claret-coloured cloth, with a lining of silk of a lighter shade of the same colour.

That the Hat shall be of the same shape as for the other Doctorates, but shall be made of black cloth instead of velvet.

The report of the Standing Committee to the OGM of Convocation held on 11 May 1920 sets out the following preamble to the resolution:<sup>14</sup>

With regard to the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, your Committee is of the opinion that, as this is a lower Doctorate than those already existing, its holders who are members of Convocation should not be entitled to the scarlet gown which is worn by all the other Doctors of the University, but that some distinction should be made to indicate this fact.

The report concedes that possession of the PhD degree did not entitle its holders to become members of Convocation as the rules currently stood, but goes on to point out the desirability to prescribe their attire in the event of future admission. It also observes that some PhD holders would anyway be entitled to membership of Convocation by virtue of holding some other degree.

Convocation passed the resolution but, according to the minutes,<sup>15</sup> in a form that omitted the words 'of the same shade as that worn by Doctors of Medicine of the University of St. Andrew's'. No explanation for this deletion is apparent, but it was permanent: the words do not appear in the report of Convocation sent to the Senate meeting later that month, or in the version of the resolution adopted by the Senate<sup>16</sup> and incorporated in the University Calendar.

London's choice of 'claret' as the base colour for the PhD robe and hood is interesting. Of the sixteen UK universities that instituted the PhD degree before 1925,

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grees in Commerce.

12 Sir Sydney Russell-Wells, 1869–1924. BSc, London 1889; Vice-Chancellor, 1919–22; MP for London University 1922–24. He trained as a physician at St George's Hospital, and was physician at the Seamen's Hospital, Greenwich, and the National Hospital for Diseases of the Heart. He was a staunch proponent of the wearing of academic dress on all possible occasions.

13 UoL/CN/1/1/13, p. 109, minutes 6, 7. The same wording occurs on the agenda paper for the OGM of Convocation of 11 May 1920, in the form of a resolution proposed for adoption by Convocation on the recommendation of the Standing Committee, *loc. cit.*, p. 143, item IV; and also in the report of the Standing Committee to the OGM, see below.

14 *Op. cit.*, pp. 148–50, item III.

15 *Op. cit.*, p. 145, minute 6 (1).

16 UoL/ST/2/2/36, p. 81, minutes 3266–68.



Courtesy of Dr Nicholas Jackson



Chris Williams/Burgon Society Archive

**Fig. 1.** The robes of Dr Isabel Soar (later Turnadge), who graduated PhD in 1921, the first year in which London University awarded the degree. She had graduated BSc in 1916, and so was already a member of Convocation. The robes are beautifully made by Ede & Ravenscroft from heavy superfine wool lined with shot crimson, Oxford MA silk. The use of shot silk for the London PhD facings was a continuing practice: in 1966 Northam were using a plum silk shot with bright red. The facings are broad, and the robe would have reached the ankle, as all robes did until the mid-twentieth century. Note the rounded corners to the hood cape, and the lack of any binding on the edge. Dr Isabel Soar's robes were bequeathed to the University of London. Philip Goff came across them in the Senate House Muniments Room several years later and, realizing their significance, arranged for them to be curated by the Burgon Society.

eight (half) would put them into scarlet along with their other doctors.<sup>17</sup> At the other extreme, Cambridge and Glasgow gave them a black undress-pattern gown with coloured facings; and Edinburgh gave them no dress robe at all. St Andrews put them into blue, a new faculty colour created for the PhD along the lines of the faculty-coloured robes used for their existing doctors;<sup>18</sup> but Leeds put them into green, even though their other doctors wore scarlet.<sup>19</sup> However, London, Wales, and Birmingham

<sup>17</sup> Aberdeen, Belfast, Bristol, Durham, Liverpool, Oxford, Sheffield, and Victoria Manchester.

<sup>18</sup> Blue is also the traditional PhD faculty colour in America and Germany. See Bruce Christianson 'Lined with Gold: London University and the Colour of Science', *TBS*, 5 (2005), pp. 80–89 (pp. 86, 87). The BPhil and MPhil at St Andrews still use gold, the colour of the DPhil (a higher doctorate) that the PhD superseded there.

<sup>19</sup> For a potential rationalization of this decision, see the last paragraph of Bruce Chris-

specify a doctor's full-dress pattern robe but in a darker shade of red than scarlet.<sup>20</sup> It is currently an open question whether and in what direction these three universities influenced one other.

The rubric for the PhD hat is at this point in time the only mention of hats in the published version of the University's academic costume regulations.<sup>21</sup> The regulation makes no mention of the headdress to be worn with the black gown, and implies that in practice the other doctors were by 1920 wearing velvet bonnets with their scarlet Convocation robes, rather than the black cloth trenchers still officially prescribed for them.

If, as seems most likely, doctors were already wearing their bonnets with cords and tassels of the faculty colour, to match the facings of their robes, then it would appear that the PhD initially wore a claret cord and tassel, to match their facings, rather than the faculty colour cords they adopted later.<sup>22</sup>

Indirect support for this view comes from an abortive development several years later: at its meeting on 7 December 1926 the Standing Committee 'proceeded to consider the desirability of indicating in the Academic Costume of holders of the Degree of Ph.D. the Faculty in which it is taken.'<sup>23</sup> After debate, it was resolved 'That it is not desirable that any change be made.'

The matter was not permitted to rest there. At the OGM of Convocation on 13 May 1930, on a motion put forward by two PhDs,<sup>24</sup> it was resolved 'That it is advisable the Faculty in which the degree of Doctor of Philosophy is obtained be indicated in the Academic Costume'. An attempt to refer the matter to the Standing Committee for consideration and report was defeated, and instead Convocation passed a supplementary motion:<sup>25</sup>

That the most suitable means of indicating the Faculty in which the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy is obtained is by a piping of the Faculty colour of not less than eighth [*sic*] of an inch in width between the cloth and silk of the hood.

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tianson, 'Doctors' Greens', *TBS*, 6 (2006), pp. 44–48; and correction: *TBS*, 7 (2007), p. 9.

20 As well as adopting crimson robes for them, Wales, Birmingham, and London (later, see below) were also the only universities of the original sixteen ever to differentiate their PhD robes by faculty. We are indebted to Dr Nicholas Groves for these observations. The warm red shade used for PhD robes at Wales and Birmingham has always been called 'crimson' there, and it remains unclear why London would choose the word 'claret' to refer to a shade known at St Andrews as 'Medici crimson'. Today the 'claret' shade used at London is considerably darker than crimson, but it is unlikely that this was the case in 1920; see the photographs of Dr Isabel Soar's London PhD robes in Fig. 1.

21 In 1861, the Senate had prescribed square caps for doctors in their scarlet robes, and this regulation was still in force, at least in theory. But, by an editorial oversight, the rubric for hats had never been included in the version of the regulations published in the London University Calendars, and so had passed out of memory. See Christianson, 'Coloured Velvet', pp. 138, 140, n. 85.

22 It is conceivable that the doctors' bonnets were initially worn without cords, but this would be very odd.

23 UoL/CN/1/1/14, p. 181, minute 13.

24 *Op. cit.*, pp. 268, 269, item IV, minutes 6–8. The PhDs were Dr H. E. Barlow BSc (Eng), PhD; and Canon J. A. Douglas BA, BD, PhD (Athens).

25 Proposed by Dr Barlow and seconded by Miss M. C. Hildyard, BA.

And thus began an extraordinary series of bureaucratic fumbles. At its meeting on 21 May 1930, the Senate received the report<sup>26</sup> of the motions from Convocation, in which the wording of the second motion had somehow become altered to ‘... a piping of about one third of an inch of the Faculty colour between the cloth and silk of the hood.’ The Senate referred the recommendations of Convocation for altering the academic costume of the PhD to the Finance and General Purposes Committee for consideration and report.

The FGPC duly reported back, and at the Senate meeting on 18 June 1930, the Senate resolved:<sup>27</sup> ‘That the Faculty in which the degree of Doctor of Philosophy is obtained be indicated in the Academic Costume by a piping, about one third of an inch wide, of the Faculty colour between the cloth and silk of the hood, and that a pattern hood be prepared and approved by the Chairman of Convocation<sup>28</sup> and the Principal<sup>29</sup> and, after approval, sealed.’

Alas for the authority of the Senate. When the 1931–32 University Calendar appeared, the Academic Costume section for the PhD<sup>30</sup> has appended to the description of the hood the words: ‘and with an edging, one inch wide of silk in the colour of the Faculty in which the Degree is conferred’, thus widening the faculty piping on the hood, and the same words are appended to the description of the facings of the full-dress PhD robe.

The confusion deepens the following year. At the OGM of Convocation held on 20 January 1932, the Chairman invites the House to recall the resolutions passed at the OGM on 13 May 1930, and states the second resolution<sup>31</sup> in the following remarkable form:

That the most suitable means of indicating the Faculty in which the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy is obtained is by a piping of the Faculty colour between the cloth and silk of the hood and by a cord of the Faculty colour on the cap.

The piping, with no width specified, is confined to the hood, but a Faculty coloured cord has appeared from nowhere on the hat.

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26 UoL/ST/2/2/46, pp. 92, 93, minutes 3870–73.

27 *Op. cit.*, minutes 4043, 4044. These Senate minutes make no mention of any faculty edging on the facings of the robe, nor do they say anything at all about the cord and tassels on the hat.

28 Sidney Luxton Loney, born Chevithorne Devon, 1860, BA Cambridge (Third Wrangler 1882), BA London 1884, Fellow Sidney Sussex College Cambridge 1885–91, Professor of Mathematics Royal Holloway College 1891–1920, Mayor of Richmond Surrey 1920–21, Chairman of Convocation from 1923 until his death in 1939; E. C. Higgins, ‘Obituary Notices’, *Nature*, 143 (17 June 1939), pp. 1011, 1012.

29 Sir Edwin Deller, born Paighton 1883, LLB London 1911, LLD by thesis London 1916, Secretary to the Academic Registrar 1912–20, Academic Registrar 1921–29, Principal 1929–36, Chevalier of the Legion of Honour 1932, Honorary Bencher of the Inner Temple 1933, Knighted 1935, died 1936 after being struck by a falling skip while inspecting the new University buildings in Bloomsbury. *TFS*, 19 December 1936, ‘Obituary’, *Nature*, 138 (1936), pp. 1043, 1044. Black gowns (and not Convocation robes) were worn at his memorial service.

30 ‘Regulations for Academic Costume’, p. 237. The Calendar entry also makes it clear that the option of wearing old-style robes is available only to those who graduated before the change.

31 UoL/CN/1/1/14, pp. 281, 282, minute 5.



Courtesy of The Revd Philip Goff

**Fig. 2.** The robes of Dr (later Professor) Vincenzo Ferraro, who graduated PhD in 1930, the year in which unsanctioned faculty edgings were added to the robe and hood: in this case gold representing Science. These robes were made by Ede & Ravenscroft ten years after the Soar robes—the calligraphy on the parchment (name tape) visible above the E&R label appears to be by the same hand for the two sets of robes—and both cloth and shot silk are already of a darker hue. The hood edgings (and they really are edgings, not bindings) are on the silk side of the cowl, and on the cloth side of the cape; oddly, the cape has square corners. The cloth bonnet has a gold cord and tassels. While this article was being prepared for publication, Professor Ferraro’s robes fortuitously appeared on eBay. They were promptly acquired by Philip Goff, and donated by him to the Burgon Society.

The Chairman of Convocation continues, ‘These Resolutions were duly communicated to the Senate, when the principles embodied in them were approved and the Chairman of Convocation and the Principal were empowered to settle the details, which they have done as follows’. He then proceeds to read out the text of the Calendar entry,<sup>32</sup> which includes the one-inch edging on the robe, as well as on the hood, but omits the coloured cord on the hat. Dr C. A. H. Franklyn, who is in the audience, calls attention to the use of the word ‘hat’, and suggests that the proper word to use was ‘bonnet’. The Chairman, missing Franklyn’s point entirely, possibly in self-defence, undertakes to see that the word ‘cap’ is substituted for ‘hat’ in the regulations.

Although Convocation appears to be oblivious to the manifest inconsistencies with the resolution that they had actually passed in May 1930, the Chairman’s confidence gives a clear indication that faculty-coloured cords were in use for the round hats of PhDs by January 1932, and that they were a relatively recent innovation.

However, someone on FGPC smelled a rat, and at the Senate meeting in March 1932 the routine report from FGPC draws attention to the regulations for Official and Academic Costume in the 1931–32 Calendar and observes,<sup>33</sup> ‘So far as your Committee can ascertain, these regulations have never been approved by the Senate.’ Now of course most of the regulations had been so approved, but the Faculty edgings on the PhD robe had not, nor had the widening of the piping on the hood, and the dark suspicion may have occurred to the FGPC that perhaps other inconsistencies had crept in over the course of time.

In any event, the FGPC settled the matter in typical no-nonsense fashion by taking the regulations from the Calendar, presenting them to the Senate as the schedule to a resolution, and inviting the Senate to declare that they were, at least from now on, the regulations of the University. However, the FGPC took the opportunity to change the description of the PhD hood back to the wording Senate had originally agreed, with a narrow piping instead of an inch-wide faculty edging.

The Senate duly adopted these new regulations at its next meeting in May 1932,<sup>34</sup> and the section dealing with the PhD reads as follows:<sup>35</sup>

PhD. — A black silk or stuff Gown of the same shape as for the Master of Arts.

Doctors of Philosophy who are members of Convocation shall also be entitled to wear a gown of claret-coloured cloth, faced with silk of a lighter shade of the same colour and with an edging, one inch wide of silk of the colour used in the Faculty in which the degree is conferred.

The Hood shall be of claret-coloured cloth, with a lining of silk of a lighter shade of the same colour. The Faculty in which the Degree is obtained will be indicated by a piping about one-third of an inch wide of the Faculty colour, between the cloth and silk of the Hood.

The Cap shall be of the same shape as for the other Doctorates, and shall be made of black cloth instead of velvet.

[Note. — Any graduate is, however, entitled, should he so prefer, to wear the costume prescribed at the date of his [*sic*] graduation.]

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32 Although weirdly, where the Calendar has the word ‘cap’, the Chairman is minuted as reading out the word ‘hat’. This is the only difference between the text in the Calendar and that of the Convocation minute.

33 UoL/ST/2/2/48, p. 12, minutes 1855, 1856.

34 *Op. cit.*, p. 31, minutes 2271, 2272.

35 *Op. cit.*, Appendix FGPC 1, p. 2.



Although the 1932 regulations specify the same narrow piping as had the 1930 regulations, we can find no evidence that PhD hoods were ever made in this fashion. Instead, the robemakers seem to have changed the unauthorized one-inch faculty edging into a binding, with half an inch on each side.<sup>36</sup>

The 1932 regulations still did not explicitly sanction the use of round hats (or bonnets) for doctors,<sup>37</sup> and Franklyn raised this issue once again in June 1939.<sup>38</sup> However, on 5 December 1939 Franklyn informed the Standing Committee (of which he was a member from 1927 until 1961) that he had received a letter from the Secretary to the Senate informing him that further consideration of any resolutions on academic costume would be deferred until after the war. 'After debate, it was agreed that the Chairman of Convocation be asked to inform the Senate that in the view of the Committee such postponement was undesirable.'<sup>39</sup>

The Senate did not resume consideration of the matter until July 1946,<sup>40</sup> when it approved new academic costume regulations drafted by the FGPC. Amongst other changes and clarifications these specified velvet bonnets with faculty-coloured cords for higher doctors in full dress, and the use of the square cap with the black gown for all doctors including PhDs. The section for the PhD reads:

#### Doctors of Philosophy

Hood. — The hood shall be of claret-coloured cloth, with a lining of silk of a lighter shade of claret. The Faculty in which the Degree is obtained will be indicated by a piping of the Faculty colour about one-third of an inch wide between the cloth and silk.

Gown. — A black silk or stuff gown of the same shape as for M.A.

Convocation Gown. — Doctors of Philosophy who are members of Convocation shall be entitled to wear a gown of claret-coloured cloth, faced with silk of a lighter shade of claret and with an edging, one inch wide, of silk of the colour used for the Faculty in which the Degree was obtained.

Cap. — With the black gown a black cap as for Masters.

With the Convocation gown, Doctors of Philosophy shall wear a round cap of black cloth of the same shape as for other Doctorates.

For higher doctors the new regulations read, 'With the Convocation gown Doctors shall wear a round cap of black velvet, with cord and tassels of the colour of the Faculty.' Although the 1946 revision still does not make explicit the use of faculty colour cords with the cloth PhD bonnet, their continued use is implicit in the response to the sequel. The following year, in July 1947, the FGPC put before the Senate a number of unsolicited representations received from the Standing Committee of Convocation,<sup>41</sup>

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36 The regulation for the faculty trim on the PhD hood continued to specify a  $\frac{1}{3}$  inch piping until 1966, when it became a  $\frac{1}{3}$  inch 'edging'. In the 1975 revisions, the description changed to 'bound  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch each side', thus at last aligning with the reality.

37 The description of the PhD 'Cap' is the sole mention of headwear in the 1932 regulations.

38 UoL/ST/2/2/55, pp. 123, 124, minute 4396.

39 UoL/CN/1/3/1. The authors are working from the Secretary's pencilled notes here, as the typed minutes of the December 1939 Standing Committee meeting appear to have been a casualty of the bombing.

40 UoL/ST/2/2/62, pp. 17–19, minutes 3737, 3538.

41 Charles Franklyn had drafted the proposals.

to whom FGPC had referred the entirely separate matter of an optional soft cap for women. One of these<sup>42</sup> proposes that the PhD's round black cloth cap should be worn 'with claret-coloured cord and tassels.' In response, the FGPC recommend, and the Senate resolve, 'that the existing practice whereby Doctors of Philosophy, who are members of Convocation, in full dress wear caps with cords and tassels in the colour of their Faculty, as do higher doctors, should remain unchanged.'

But Franklyn would get his wish. In spite of the Senate's firm stance, the faculty coloured cords and tassels were already a dead letter, and ten years later the FGPC threw in the towel. The report of the FGPC to the June 1957 meeting of Senate on 'the question of the colour of the cords and tassels of the round cap worn by Doctors of Philosophy with a Convocation gown' conceded:<sup>43</sup>

That on some occasions Doctors of Philosophy have worn cords and tassels of Faculty Colour as do higher doctors. The general practice, however, for many years has been to wear claret-coloured cords and tassels. In 1947 the Standing Committee of Convocation suggested that this colour should be authorised, but no action was taken by the Senate at that time. Your Committee are of opinion that the colour should now be prescribed in the Regulations.

And so, for the first time, the cords and tassels of the PhD bonnet received official mention in the academic dress regulations, with the Senate appending the words 'with claret-coloured cords and tassels' to the description, a stipulation which has remained ever since.

The black gown for the PhD was the next prescription to change. In 1964 the Standing Committee constituted an Academic Dress sub-committee, under the chairmanship of Dr James Pryor, to sort out various anomalies, and during 1965 representations were made<sup>44</sup> to this committee that PhDs should have the same black gown as that worn by higher doctors in their faculty. The Senate agreed to this proposal the following year.<sup>45</sup> The change particularly affected PhDs in Law, Medicine, Music,<sup>46</sup> and Theology, who had hitherto been constrained to wear the MA gown, and meant that from then on masters, PhDs, and higher doctors all wore the same black gown if they were in the same faculty.<sup>47</sup>

In 1997 London University abolished their Faculty administrative structure, and the Head of Public Affairs<sup>48</sup> took the opportunity to replace all faculty coloured edgings on the PhD robes and hoods with a uniform shade of blue. It would have been more logical to remove the edgings altogether, as by then the PhD and MPhil were the only remaining degrees where the robes depended on the actual subject studied, rather

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42 UoL/ST/2/2/63, pp. 13, 14, minute 4650 2 (d).

43 UoL/ST/2/1/42, June 1957, p. 46, minutes 3501-03.

44 UoL/CN/1/4/1, particularly paper SC 872.

45 UoL/ST/2/1/60, Feb. 1966, minutes 2411-13.

46 Music was omitted, apparently by accident, from the recommendation sent via Convocation to the Senate, and restored, apparently accidentally, by the FGPC drafting.

47 London had been the first UK university to commit the solecism of awarding a master's degree in the same faculty as a doctorate, with their MSc in 1914, but fifty years later and the practice was general.

48 At that time Mrs Barbara Anderson.

than the title of the degree.<sup>49</sup> The straightforward remedy was therefore to treat claret simply as the lining colour for degrees with Philosophy in the title.

A number of other reforms took place at the same time: black gowns for doctors were officially abolished;<sup>50</sup> all doctors were permitted to wear the full-dress robes, not merely those who were members of Convocation; and all doctors, including PhDs, were given velvet bonnets.<sup>51</sup>

It would be fair to say that the new blue edgings did not meet with universal approval from those required to wear them. In 2021 the University celebrated the centenary of the first award of the London PhD,<sup>52</sup> and one of us (PG) saw this as an appropriate opportunity to campaign for the robes to be restored to their original form. Happily, the Vice-Chancellor<sup>53</sup> endorsed the proposal and the Collegiate Council formally approved the change the following May.<sup>54</sup> The wheel has thus come full circle: all that remains is for London's PhD graduates to prevail upon the University's robemakers, to restore the claret of the robes to the original bright warm crimson<sup>55</sup> in place of the dull shade of maroon too often encountered today.

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49 For example, the MA in Education is lined with russet brown for Arts. The situation at London parallels the tensions in the later developments of the USA Academic Costume Code; for an excellent account of the latter, see Kenneth L. Suit, Jr, 'Reaping the Whirlwind: American Degree and Subject Colours (1962–Present)', *TBS*, 20 (2020), pp. 107–42. Dr Nicholas Groves informs us that Birmingham likewise removed faculty distinctions from their PhD robes in 1997.

50 Although they continue to be worn by custom.

51 Quite right too, in our opinion. Cloth bonnets were at the ancient universities worn by non-graduates.

52 Lillian Margery Penson (1896–1963); see <[blogs.bbk.ac.uk/bbkcomments/2020/03/04/lillian-penson-first-phd-uol/](https://blogs.bbk.ac.uk/bbkcomments/2020/03/04/lillian-penson-first-phd-uol/)> [retrieved 6 June 2023].

53 Professor Wendy Thomson.

54 At the time of writing, the timetable for implementation of this reinstatement is yet to be published.

55 As still seen at St Andrews for Doctors of Medicine.