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Summary of policy

- This document sets out the University's policy on setting and charging fees for directly registered postgraduate research students. It covers fee liability, including Upgrade revisions, write up, continuation and resubmission fee policy. There are also sections on grant extensions, refunds, debt, and support for study related costs.
- This information applies to you if you are registering as a research student supported directly by The Open University (OU). If you are a student supported through an Affiliated Research Centre (ARC), please refer to the separate [Post Graduate Research Students \(Associate Research Centres\) Fee Rules](#)
- The purpose of this policy is to ensure that you are aware of the financial commitment you are making when registering to study. It sets out how the University will act if you fail to meet your commitments.

Summary of significant changes since last version

There have been no policy changes since the previous version published.

Policies superseded by this document

This document replaces the 2023-24 Fee Rules for directly registered students.

Scope

What this document covers

This document applies to you only if you are a post graduate research student supported directly by The OU. If you are a student supported through an ARC, you should refer to the separate [Post Graduate Research Students \(Associate Research Centres\) Fee Rules](#).

The policy applies to all registrations from 1 August 2024. It is reviewed every year and re-published.

Please read through this policy to familiarise yourself with the matters covered. You should refer to this document if, for example, you think you may be unable to pay your fees, if you think you are owed a refund or if you think you may be eligible for an extension to your grant.

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Should you have any questions about how this policy applies to you please contact the Graduate School Fees team (Research-Degrees-Fees@open.ac.uk).

What this document does not cover

This document does not apply to you if you are a student supported through an ARC, if you are studying a taught postgraduate module, if you are an undergraduate, or if you are on an apprenticeship.

ARC supported students should follow the link given under the Summary and Scope sections above. All others should refer to their student support service for guidance.

Related Documentation

Refer to the following documentation in conjunction with this document:

- [Conditions of Registration for Postgraduate Research Students](#)
 - Research [Degrees](#) Handbook
 - [Research Degrees Regulations](#)
 - [Fees and funding](#) (this lists current fees for different postgraduate research degrees and contains a little more information on possible financial support)
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The Open University Student Charter Principles

This policy aligns with the following [Open University Student Charter](#) Principles

- Principle 1: We treat each other with dignity and respect
- Principle 2: We aim to inspire and enable learning
- Principle 3: We share the responsibility of learning
- Principle 4: We work together to secure the University's mission and to promote the University's values

Introduction

This document is a University-approved statement expressing the position on an issue of institution-wide importance and explains how the University intends to conduct its services, actions, or business.

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It includes guiding principles, values, requirements, and restrictions, and establishes standards, rights, and responsibilities.

We have produced this document to help you understand your rights and responsibilities and to set out our expectations of you when you register for a postgraduate research degree. Separate documents referred to earlier (see Related Documentation above) set out the conditions of registration and indicate the annual fees for various research degrees.

A glossary of terms section at the end of this document contains definitions of some of the terms used.

For specific guidance on how this policy may relate to your personal circumstances, please contact staff at the Graduate [School](#) who are specially trained to advise on the implementation of this policy.

Policy

Purpose

We have produced this document to help you understand your rights and responsibilities and to set out our expectations of you when you register for a postgraduate research degree.

The objectives of this policy are:

- To make clear why we set and change fees.
- To make clear your fee obligations and what will happen if you do not pay your fees.

Section A: Setting and changing fees

- A1. Fees are set by the Council of The OU and are published in the course information in the online prospectus.
- A2. The OU may charge different fees for students in different countries, for different levels of study, for different disciplines and for students who start their studies at different times. This is because the way in which higher education is funded may be different; the costs of providing educational services may be different; or because The OU is providing a different range of services.

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A3. The OU provides its students with the opportunity to study towards qualifications over an extended period and it may therefore be necessary to make changes in fees and charges and the rules relating to liability, payment, and refunds during that time. The OU may amend fees and the information pertaining to the 2024-25 fee rules, or the way in which it is applied from time to time in order to:

- Pass on efficiency gains and cost savings to you
- Increase fees to cover increased costs to The OU, taking into account market conditions, competitor pricing and The OUs strategic approach to fees
- Ensure the efficient, economic and equitable use of OU resources
- Comply with changes in legal or regulatory requirements
- Take into account changes in the public funding of higher education or The OU
- Support or enhance your ability to secure financial support for your studies
- Correct errors or improve clarity and accessibility of fee information
- Take advantage of new technologies, methods, ideas, and opportunities.

A4. The OU sets registration fees and other charges on an annual basis. Registration fees are revised each year in line with inflation, The OU's strategic approach to fees and recommendations of fee-paying bodies such as UK research councils. Consequently, the annual registration fee shown in your Offer letter may be subject to an increase in future years. When you re-register to continue your studies in subsequent years, the fee information in place at the time of that re-registration will apply to that period of study.

A5. Where such changes are to be made The OU will follow its rules for governance approval of those changes including, where appropriate, consultation with and informing students or their representative bodies.

A6. The OU will give reasonable notice of changes to fees and fee information, and the date that they will take effect.

Section B: Fee Liability

Registration Fees and Charges

B1. The [Conditions of Registration for Postgraduate Research Students](#), which you agree to when you register to study with The OU, set out your obligation to pay fees.

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B2. There may be other expenses which must be met, in addition to the registration fees and other costs paid to the OU. These include the costs of materials (e.g. chemicals, access to specialist software, books and journals, stationery, computers and printing) and travel to and from the place of study. It is your responsibility to establish which costs will be covered by the Faculty and which you are responsible for. By applying to study at The OU and agreeing to the offer of registration, you expressly agree to meet these additional expenses.

Payment of Registration Fees and other Charges

B3. Prior to registration you will be provided with information about available payment methods. [Postgraduate Fees](#).

B4. A list of the current fees is available on the postgraduate research student [postgraduate fees](#) web page.

B5. Upon registration and re-registration, as per the conditions of registration for Postgraduate Research Students, you agree to pay your registration fees and any other costs relating to your studies.

Liability for fees – all students

B6. It is your responsibility to ensure that all arrangements relating to the payment of your registration fees are in place prior to the payment due date in order for you to be permitted to register or re-register each year. By registering to study with the Open University you agree to pay the whole of your fee set out in your Offer Letter or registration of confirmation.

B7. In the first year, the registration fee is payable as a single payment on initial registration (see paragraph B16 for 'pay as you go' options). In subsequent years the registration fee is due annually, to be paid in advance, by the anniversary of the date of initial registration (see your invoice letter for details). It is payable every year, for the duration of study, up to and including the year in which you submit your thesis for examination (or re-submission and re-examination).

B8. Should any fees remain unpaid ten working days after the relevant fee liability date, you will be in debt to The OU (see paragraphs C11-C14).

B9. If you do not make arrangements to pay any registration fee debts The OU may cancel your registration or refuse to re-register you.

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Funded students

B10. If you are funded by The OU or other funding body (registered on a studentship) the registration fee will either, be met by the OU for the period specified in your Offer letter or paid by the funding body for a designated time period. Should the funded period end prior to your thesis submission, you will be liable for registration fees for any further period of registration.

B11. If your grant period changes for any reason you will be notified of this.

Sponsorship

B12. You may receive sponsorship for your registration fees from your employer or other third party. You should complete a Sponsorship Agreement form which must be completed each year, which can be downloaded from the [Graduate School Network Forms and Guidance A-Z page](#).

B13. You should return as part of your agreement each year the completed Sponsorship Agreement form, along with the Acceptance form attached to your Offer letter, to the address given on the Acceptance form.

Staff fee waivers

B14. If you are a part-time student and also a member of salaried OU staff or an OU associate lecturer, you can apply for a staff fee waiver on an annual basis whilst you are employed by The OU, subject to current staff fee waiver policy. Details and application forms are available on the [Graduate School Network Forms and Guidance A-Z page](#). Please note it is the responsibility of the student to provide a signed Staff Fee Waiver form to the Graduate School on a yearly basis. If this is not provided the student will be liable for any outstanding fees.

Self-funded students

B15. If you are paying your own registration fees you must pay your registration fees upon acceptance of your offer of registration.

B16. The OU accepts payment by an approved payment method such as a credit card, cheque, grant or studentship, or payment by a sponsor. If you are self-funded, you are required to have secured the finances to pay your fees before your registration will be allowed by The OU.

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Pay as you go

B17. You may pay for your study in instalments using an Open University Student Budget Account (OUSBA). OUSBA is a wholly owned subsidiary of The OU and has been giving OU students financial access to OU modules and qualifications since 1998. When you charge your fees to OUSBA Ltd, the company pays The OU on your behalf, allowing your registration to be completed. This is a secure, quick, and easy way to fully pay fees as each period of study is completed. It is a convenient pay as you go option.

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B18. These are legally binding credit agreements between you and OUSBA Ltd. In agreeing to the terms and conditions of the loan, you personally will remain liable for the repayments and are bound by its terms and conditions. Further information can be found on the [fees and funding section of The OU website](#) and on the [OUSBA website](#).

Write up, continuation and resubmission fees for PhD and MPHIL ONLY

B19. Upon entering the fourth year of your study as a full-time student, the eighth year as a part-time student, you will become liable for either a write up fee or a continuation fee instead of the full registration fee.

B20. This does not apply to Professional Doctoral students who pay the same fees throughout their studies.

Write up fee

B21. Where a student enters their fourth year (full time), or eighth year (part time), of study and is no longer engaged in the acquisition of new data and is predominantly concentrating on writing up their thesis prior to submission, they will be classified as 'writing up students'. A writing up student must be in a position to submit their thesis within 12 months, or by their thesis submission date, whichever is sooner.

B22. The supervisor will need to formally confirm to the [Graduate School](#) when a student should be classified as writing up.

B23. The write up fee is available for a maximum of one year. Regardless of mode of study, should you fail to submit your thesis within the 'write-up year' you would become liable for any continuation fee (see paragraph B25), should you be granted an extension to registration.

B24. The writing-up fee is invoiced at the start of the final year but will be due halfway through the year. If you are not writing up, you will be re-invoiced with a continuation fee.

Continuation fee

B25. Upon entering your fourth year as a full-time student, or eighth year as a part-time student, if you are still acquiring new data and have not completed your substantive research you will be liable for a continuation fee at the point of registration for that year.

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Resubmission fee

- B26. Resubmission fees are charged if you are required to resubmit your thesis following examination even if you were previously funded. The charge is made to cover costs of re-examination and additional supervision.
- B27. If you are awarded a degree subject to corrections and modifications or substantial amendment, but are not required to resubmit for re-examination, you will not be liable for a resubmission fee. When undertaking such corrections and modification you are not liable for any additional registration fee to cover that period.

Refunds

- B28. If you are a self-funded student and you submit your thesis or withdraw from your studies within the first six months of your registration, you will be entitled to have 50% of your registration fee for that year refunded. If you withdraw in subsequent years, you will not be eligible for a refund.

Section C: Failure to pay and debt

Failure to pay fees and charges

- C1. Should any fees remain unpaid ten working days after the relevant fee liability date, you will be in debt to The OU.
- C2. Where you are in debt to The OU, The OU will:
- i. Notify you that you are in debt, including the amount and the payment mechanism. Reasonable opportunity will be provided to enable you to pay the debt before any further action will be taken.
 - ii. Notify you of any action that you may take to limit any liability for further charges that may become due.

Consequence of non-payment of fees

- C3. When you are in debt to The OU you will not be permitted to re-register for the following academic year and will have any current registration cancelled.
- C4. The submission of your thesis will not be processed until your academic fees have been paid.

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C5. The OU may take all reasonable steps including legal action to recover any outstanding fees or charges.

NOTE: Should you be unable to pay any fees, you should contact the [Graduate School](#) to find out if arrangements can be made to help safeguard your registration.

C6. The OU may, at its discretion, allow registration or re-registration before an approved payment method has been secured. The exercise of this discretion will be conditional upon you having taken or agreed to take all steps The OU considers reasonable in the circumstances to secure that payment method within a reasonable time. The Graduate School will inform you of the timeframe for these steps to be taken.

NOTE: Failure to secure payment within the timeframe stipulated may lead The OU to cancel registration as set out in paragraphs C6-C9 below.

C7. If you are permitted to register or re-register under the process at paragraph C5, but you subsequently fail to secure an approved payment method within the reasonable time provided, your registration will be cancelled even where you have started studying or have continued to study. You will be given notice by The OU of its intention to cancel your registration and will be given a final opportunity to secure the payment or to pay by a different method.

C8. If The OU has allowed your registration or continued registration and, for any reason, the payment method The OU has accepted is cancelled or withdrawn, The OU will cancel your registration even if you have started studying or are continuing to study. You will be given notice of The OU's intention to cancel registration and provided with a final opportunity to secure the payment or to pay by a different method.

C9. If registration is cancelled on the grounds set out in paragraphs C6-7 it will be reinstated in the following circumstances:

- i. you contact The OU within seven working days of the date of cancellation having secured an agreed payment method or to provide payment by a different method;
or
- ii. you contact The OU more than seven working days after the date of cancellation having secured an agreed payment method or to provide payment by a different method, and

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- The OU records that it has provided you with advice on the impact any gap in studies may have on your academic progress, and
- you confirm that you have received that advice and wish to be reinstated.

C10. If registration is cancelled on the grounds set out in paragraphs C6-7, you will remain personally liable to The OU for all of the fees which are due by the date of the cancellation. If the fees are not paid, you will be in debt to The OU.

Liability for charges other than registration fees

C11. If you are required to pay any other charges in connection with your studies and you do not pay those charges when due, you may not be provided with the services or facilities to which those charges relate. If, at The OU's discretion, the services or facilities are provided and the charges remain unpaid, you will be in debt to The OU.

What happens when you are in debt to The Open University for your Research Degrees Fees?

Restriction on further study

C12. Further study, for which any annual registration fee or other charges may become due, will only be permitted if all your outstanding debt to The OU and any additional fees for further study are paid in advance. Alternatively, The OU may accept another secured means of payment for those fees or charges, which you have put in place.

Action to recover debt

C13. If you do not pay your outstanding fees or other charges, including any further fees and other charges that may fall due, The OU will take all reasonable steps including legal action to recover those fees and other charges.

C14. Before The OU takes legal action, it will:

- Notify you of what action you may take, if appropriate, to limit any liability for further fees and other charges that may become due and give you a reasonable opportunity to take that action before any further liability will be incurred.

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- ii. Notify you that you are in debt, the amount of the debt and how you may pay that debt. It will also give you a reasonable opportunity to pay any outstanding fees or other charges before taking any further action.

Discretion to postpone action

C15 If The OU continues, at its discretion, to provide you with supervision, facilities or services or to allow further study whilst you are in debt to The OU, it reserves the right to take the actions in paragraphs C3-12 at a later date.

Section D: Financial Support

Support for study related costs

D1. Please contact the [Graduate School](#) for more information.

Dependants Fund

D2. If you are a full-time student whether you are self-funded or funded, with dependants who are resident in the UK and have a household income of less than £25,000 per year, you may apply for financial support from the Dependants Fund. Applications must be made on an annual basis. The fund is limited, and awards are not guaranteed. For more information and an application form contact the [Graduate School](#).

D3. This fund is unable to support you if you are in receipt of a Faculty funded grant extension (see paragraphs D25-29).

Crowther Fund and Beevers Fund (Open University graduates only)

D4. The Crowther Fund is intended to help OU graduates build upon their OU degrees, either by formal study or research or by generally broadening their experience through a period of voluntary work.

D5. OU graduates awarded a degree with honours can apply for funding from the Robert Beevers Memorial Fund, to undertake research towards an OU research degree. An award from this fund can be used for payment towards fees or study related costs such as books or travel.

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D6. The Beevers Fund is administered via The Crowther Fund. Further information, application forms and guidance notes on both funds can be downloaded from [The OU Funding page](#).

D7. The closing date for award applications to both funds is 28 February each year.

Disabled Students' Allowances (DSAs)

D8. Disabled Students' Allowances are government grants for students in higher education who incur additional study-related costs because of a learning difficulty, health problem or disability.

D9. Details vary depending upon where in the UK you live, so please check with the appropriate local authority for their eligibility criteria. [Please contact the Disability Support Team](#).

Students in England

D10. To confirm eligibility, check allowances available and to apply for a DSA, students based in England should visit the [Gov.uk website](#).

Students in Northern Ireland

D11. To confirm eligibility, check allowances available and to apply for a DSA, students based in Northern Ireland should visit the [student finance NI website](#).

Students in Scotland

D12. To determine eligibility and to apply for a DSA students based in Scotland should either:

- email: scotland@open.ac.uk or
- call The OU in Scotland's Disability and Additional Requirements Team on +44 (0)131 226 3851 (Monday to Friday 08:30 to 17:00 GMT).

Students in Wales

D13 To confirm eligibility, check allowances available and to apply for a DSA, students based in Wales should visit the [student finance Wales website](#).

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Stipend rate

- D14. The standard OU (full-time) stipend for academic year 2024-25 is £19,237 per year. Payments for less than a year and for part-time students are reduced pro-rata. Some students will have a different rate due to the specific terms and conditions of their studentship.
- D15. Students in receipt of a stipend must be resident in the UK. The OU is unable to make stipend payments to you if you are resident overseas. There are exceptions for limited periods of fieldwork.
- D16. Questions should be directed to the Graduate School research-degrees-fees@open.ac.uk

Residential address

- D17. Stipend payments will not be made unless the Graduate School has a current UK bank account, residential address and telephone numbers (mobile and landline).
- D18. You should notify the Graduate School of any change of address, email address or telephone number. This includes temporary residence elsewhere in the UK or overseas for the purpose of field trips. Failure to provide your current address and telephone numbers is a breach of the terms and conditions of registration, to do this contact Research-degrees-office@open.ac.uk.
- D19. If you are studying on a Student Route Visa and you fail to update your contact details, you may have your sponsorship withdrawn and payment of your fees and stipend will be stopped.

Absences and disruptions

- D20. If your studentship is based on OU terms and conditions (as opposed to an externally funded studentship with its own set of terms and conditions):
- you are entitled to retain registration and stipend payments for the first two months of certified ill health within any 12-month period i.e. if a student has more than one study break (but with a gap) within 12 months

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- your studentship stipend payments and registration will be suspended if you are unable to study for more than two months because of ill health within any 12-month period
- if you decide to apply for a Study Break of registration this must be done via approval of the appropriate parties
- your stipend payments will usually cease whilst on a study break unless due to ill health
- your stipend payments will resume when you re-engage with your studies following a study break and will continue until you have received three years' funding allocation as outlined in your offer letter
- Students are not liable for fees whilst on an approved study break.

D21. If your studentship is from a Research Council, stipend payments will be made in accordance with their rules. Please refer to the terms and conditions in your offer letter.

D22. If your break relates to maternity, please contact the Graduate School (research-degrees-management@open.ac.uk)

D23 If you withdraw your studies before the end of your funded period, The OU will stop making stipend payments. You may be asked to repay any overpayments made to you after your withdrawal/submission date.

Early Submissions

D24 If you submit before the end of your funded period, the maximum payment you will be entitled after submission would be one month, unless internally funded and your faculty have made an exception to this.

D25 If you are funded by a research council stipend payments would be made according to your funding council rules.

Grant Extension Process

D26. The Open University has a small fund available to provide grant extensions for students who are approaching the end of their funded period and are still actively studying. Please contact your faculty for information relating to timeframes.

D27. To be eligible to apply you should be approaching the end of your funded period and should have:

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- had your progress interrupted due to your own ill health, or that of a close family member and/or
- experienced serious personal problems which have interrupted your progress.

D28. Awards will not be made to you if you have already submitted your thesis for examination or are in your post viva period.

D29. If you have been in receipt of a grant extension and submit prior to the end of that period the funding will stop.

D30. No award can normally be made which would take your total period of publicly funded postgraduate research above your maximum registration date.

Research Training Support Grants

D31. Funds for Research Training Support for full time PhD students are available from the faculties, and information can be obtained from Supervisors.

Income tax and National Insurance

D32. Grants and other payments made for research studentships are not usually regarded as income for income tax purposes by the HM Revenue and Customs.

D33. For information about the position of research students in relation to benefits under the National Insurance Acts, telephone The Department for Work and Pensions on 0800 1412075. For information about contributions and further information about National Insurance you should contact your local tax office.

Further clarification

If you have any queries around the content provided within this document and how to interpret it, please contact staff at the [Graduate School](#) who are specially trained to advise on the implementation of policy.

If you have any comments about this policy document and how it might be improved, please submit these to <mailto:SPR-Policy-Team@open.ac.uk>.

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Alternative format

If you require this document in an alternative format, please contact the [Graduate School](#).

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