

Research Degrees Handbook 2017 – 2018

This handbook provides information regarding the services available to research degree students, the policies that apply during registration, and advice about what to do at key points in the student journey.

This handbook has been prepared by the Research Degrees Office and the Business and Online Support Services unit of The Open University.

This handbook is available online from

www.open.ac.uk/research/research-handbook and from
www.open.ac.uk/students/charter/essential-documents

While The Open University has done everything possible to ensure accuracy, the information in this handbook may change during the life of this edition due to changes in regulations or policy or because of financial or other constraints. When regulations and policies are updated, the most current edition will apply to all students irrespective of when they registered, unless special provision is made for particular groups or cohorts of students.

The Open University reserves the right to record phone calls with students to make sure that it has carried out any instructions correctly and to help improve services through staff training.

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Introduction

Welcome to research at The Open University

The Open University's mission is to be open to people, places, methods and ideas and is reflected in its research which has the same openness and global reach. The research community comprises nearly 1,000 postgraduate research students, at the state-of-the-art research facilities on campus in Milton Keynes, online, or working in the University's Affiliated Research Centres (ARCs) around the world. 177 students were awarded research degrees by The Open University in the academic year 2016-17.

Our innovative research and development ranks in the top third of all UK universities and influences national and international policy and practice, and enriches the lives of ordinary people around the world.

In the Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2014, 72% of all Open University research submitted was graded as internationally excellent or world leading. The REF assessment of research impact on society has shown that our research makes a substantial contribution to the economy, policy making and quality of life in the UK and across the globe. Examples of these outstanding impacts:

- Space researchers built the instrument *Ptolemy*, part of the *Philae* lander, which landed on comet 67P in November 2014.
- Research on the climate fauna at the earth's poles featured in the BBC TV programme *Frozen Planet* which watched by over 10.8 million viewers per episode.
- Research into design of sustainable growth is influencing the development of transport technologies and systems in Milton Keynes.
- Innovation research has influenced government policies on the pharmaceutical industry in several African countries.
- Research by the Institute of Social Marketing on alcohol marketing led the British Medical Association to call for a ban on alcohol advertising and the introduction of minimum alcohol prices.

The Open University aims to ensure that its research continues to be recognised for excellence and impact, delivering substantial benefits to the University's mission and priorities.

The aims of the Open University's Research Plan, 'Research Shaping the Future', are to:

- Ensure that our research transforms lives by meeting the challenges of the twenty-first century and promotes social justice.
- Improve our national ranking in the next Research Excellence Framework.
- Achieve global influence for research through open and innovative forms of knowledge sharing, supported by digital technologies.
- Continue to use our research to inform our curriculum and underpin an outstanding learning experience for all students.
- Support, develop and value the research community in a sustainable environment that fosters creativity and collaboration.

How to use this handbook

This handbook should be read prior to registration and referred to throughout registration. Upon acceptance of an offer of registration, students will be bound by the Research Degree

Regulations, the terms and conditions described here, and relevant policies on the [Essential documents](#) website.

The Open University [Student Charter](#) sets out the responsibilities The Open University and its students have towards each other.

Contact details are provided in [Part 6](#).

This handbook is in six parts containing:

Part 1 Research degrees at The Open University

Research degree qualifications, mode and location of study, the organisational structure for delivering research degrees, administrative arrangements and equality and diversity.

Part 2 Essential information for registration including terms and conditions

The student record, the terms and conditions of registration, fees, financial support and grants.

Part 3 Studying for a research degree

Key milestones, facilities and services, the research community, professional development, participating in Open University life, help and support.

Part 4 Facilities and Services

Research facilities and support services available to students.

Part 5 Complaints and appeals

Procedures for making a formal appeal or complaint.

Part 6 Contact details

Online resources

Research website

A wealth of information about the University, the research degrees programmes, and student registration can be found online. Please visit the [Graduate School Network](#).

Graduate School Network (GSN)

The Graduate School Network is the gateway to online training and development resources. Forms and guidance notes that support student progress are available on the [GSN](#). All of the University's policies, statements and regulations can also be found on this website.

Part 1 Research degrees at The Open University

1.1 The Open University

The Open University is a world leader in modern distance learning, the pioneer of teaching and learning methods that enables people to achieve their career and life goals by studying at times and in places to suit them.

It promotes educational opportunity and social justice by providing high-quality university education to anyone who wishes to realise their ambitions and fulfil their potential.

Through academic research, pedagogic innovation and collaborative partnerships, the University is a world leader in the design, content and delivery of supported open learning.

The University's central headquarters is at Walton Hall, Milton Keynes, and it has 4 Student Recruitment and Support Centres and national centres located in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Over 1,000 academic and research staff are employed by the University, the majority of whom are based at Walton Hall which is the administrative and operational centre of the University and where most of the research is undertaken.

The University has over 20 Affiliated Research Centres around the world, within which approximately 250 students are engaged in research degree studies.

The Open University Graduate School launched in October 2016, and is a focal point for research degree community support. It facilitates the development of research degree community networks, partnerships and training pathways to support an open, engaged and digitally literate research student community. Research degree policies, regulations and services for research students are reviewed annually and are aligned with the [Quality Assurance Agency UK Quality Code for Higher Education \(2012\) Chapter B11: Research Degrees](#).

1.2 Research degree qualifications

The University's research degrees are:

- Master of Philosophy (MPhil) (full or part-time)
- Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) (full or part-time)
- Doctorate in Education (EdD) (part-time – please see Research Degrees (EdD) Handbook in [forms and guidance](#)).

MPhil

For the Master of Philosophy, a student must undertake a research programme leading to the submission of a thesis that is a distinct contribution to scholarship in the field. It needs to include a critical review of the literature and provide evidence of research ability. In order to be awarded the degree, students must demonstrate that they have met the expectations for the Master of Philosophy degree as specified in the [QAA Framework for Higher Education Qualifications](#) (see Appendix 1A of the [Research Degree Regulations](#)).

PhD

A thesis for the Doctor of Philosophy must be a significant contribution to knowledge, worthy of publication and demonstrate the ability of the candidate to undertake further research

without supervision. In order to be awarded the degree, students must demonstrate that they have met the expectations for the Doctor of Philosophy degree as specified in the [QAA Framework for Higher Education Qualifications](#) (see Appendix 1B of the [Research Degree Regulations](#)).

The Open University also offers the opportunity for a student to undertake a PhD by Published work which is a separate degree pathway that has specific eligibility criteria. Prospective students intending to submit a portfolio of published works rather than the more traditional monograph for consideration by the examiners must be registered on this degree pathway from the start. Students registered on the MPhil/PhD pathway may include published work as appendices but cannot submit published work in lieu of thesis chapters.

The entrance requirements for all research degrees can be found in the [Research Degree Regulations](#).

Taking another research degree

If a student has been awarded one research degree and wants to take another, they must reapply for admission to the University. The second research programme may build on the work from the first thesis, but the submission for the qualification must contain entirely new material. Clearly indicated references to the contents of the first thesis are permitted.

Collaborating organisations

The University encourages cooperation between educational establishments and industrial, commercial, professional and research establishments for the purposes of research leading to the award of a research degree. This cooperation is intended:

- to encourage outward-looking and relevant research
- to extend the student's experience
- to give access to a wider range of experience and expertise to assist the student in the development of their project
- to be mutually beneficial.

Formal collaboration usually means that the student may use facilities and other resources, provided jointly by the University and the collaborating organisation. The student is expected to be fully integrated into the University's research community, student training and pastoral systems.

A formal letter, confirming the agreed arrangements and details of the facilities available and the time to be spent at the collaborating organisation, is submitted to the University at the point of application for registration.

1.3 Organisational structure for supporting research students

Senate retains overall responsibility for the governance and award of research degrees at The Open University. It delegates responsibility for the development of research degree strategy, policy and regulations to the Research Committee and the Research Degrees Committee.

The management of the day to day operation of the research degree programme is the responsibility of the Graduate School and the Faculties.

The Research Degrees Office fulfils the registry function, providing quality assurance, managing student records and ensuring that student registration and progression is managed in accordance with the University's policies, regulations and legislation.

Research students are recruited into research groups within a School in one of the University faculties or institutes. Where a research project spans more than one School, one school/faculty will take the lead in all of administrative matters relating to the registration.

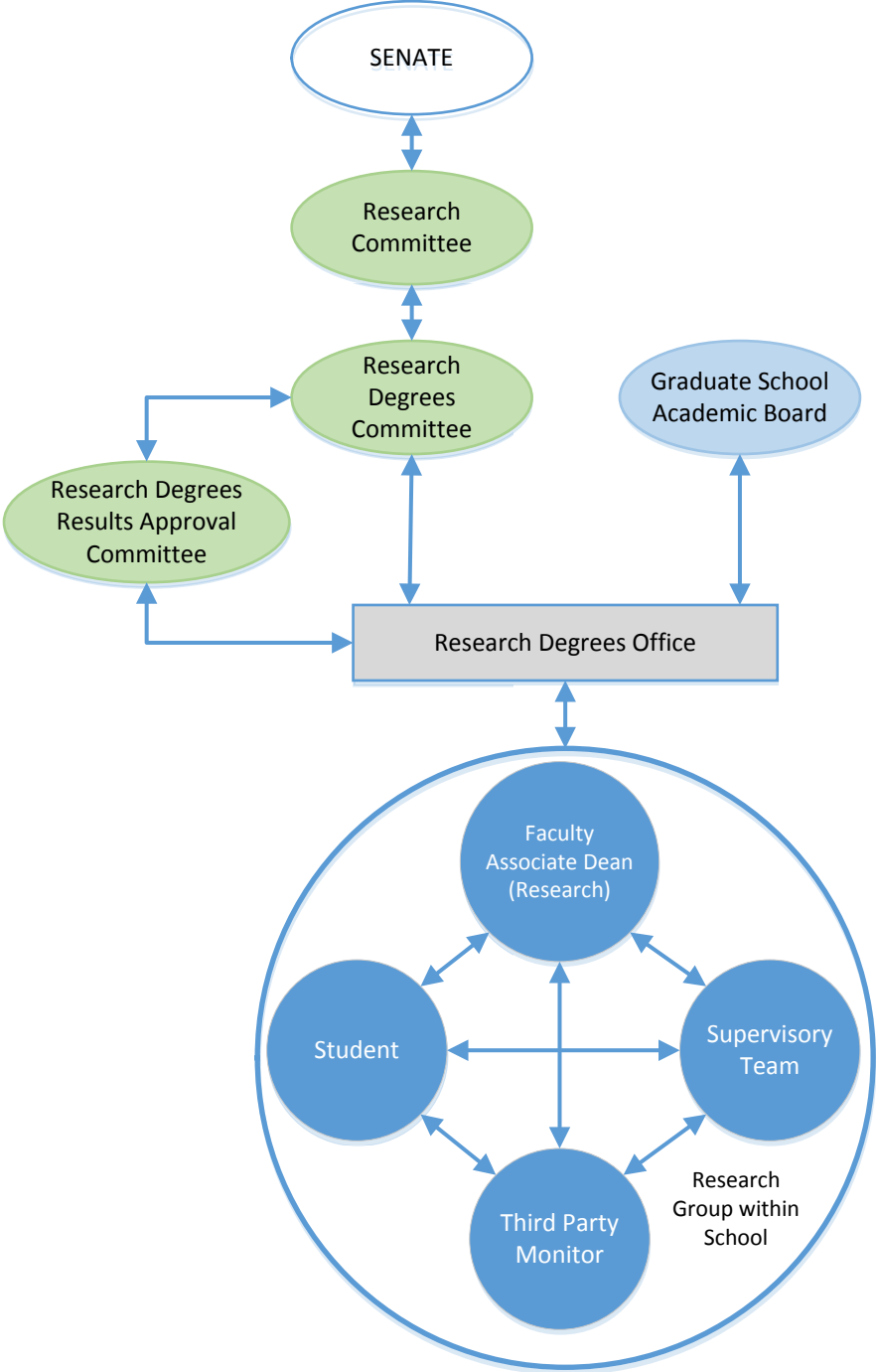
Upon registration, each student will be assigned a supervisory team. Further details regarding the role of a supervisor can be found in section 3.3.

Information regarding additional support for students from the third party monitor can be found in section 3.4.

The Associate Dean (Research) or Director of Postgraduate Studies has oversight of all research students in their faculty. This person(s) are responsible for ensuring students are supported and progressing well throughout their studies. They work with administrative staff within the faculty who help with the day to day management of research students.

Research degree policy is formulated by the University's Research Degrees Committee, which makes recommendations to Senate through the Research Committee. The Research Degrees Committee includes representatives of the University's faculties and research degree students - one full-time and one part-time.

Figure 1: Organisation of research degrees



1.4 Administrative arrangements

The Research Degrees Office will be the main point of contact with the University on administrative matters. The Office also implements policy developed by the Research Degrees Committee and plays a major role in enhancing the quality of the University's research degree provision and the experience of its research students.

The team of advisors will advise and guide on a wide range of topics at any point before, during or after a student studies. This includes information on registration and fees, payment of grants and expenses, financial support, key points in a student's studies such as probation, progress reporting and examination.

The Research Degrees Office can also provide letters in support of visa applications, transcripts, and stamps for railcard and Oyster card applications.

The Research Degrees Office is in the Charles Pinfold building and is open from 08:30 to 17:00, Monday to Thursday and 08:30 to 16:30 on Fridays. Contact details for can be found in [Part 6](#).

The Research Degrees Office is part of the Research and Academic Strategy unit, which is responsible for the Code of Practice for Research, which sets out the standards that govern the conduct of research at The Open University. The code is available on the [Research plan and policies](#) website.

The Research Career Development Team is responsible for providing the professional development framework for researchers at all stages of their career life cycle. There is more information about career development in [Part 4](#).

The Academic Strategy Office is responsible for the Code of Practice for Research, which sets out the standards that govern the conduct of research at The Open University. The code is available on the [Research plan and policies](#) website.

The Research and Enterprise Office at the Open University is a central office that supports academic staff, research staff and students with their endeavours in seeking external funding for research, and advice on intellectual property assignment and knowledge transfer.

1.5 Equality and diversity

For more than 40 years, The Open University has been promoting social justice and equality of opportunity which is core to our mission and is as important today as it was when The Open University was founded.

The Open University is creating an inclusive university community and a society:

- where people are treated with dignity and respect
- where inequalities are challenged
- where it anticipates and responds positively to different needs and circumstances.

The Open University's equality and diversity principles

1. The Open University values diversity and recognises that different people bring different perspectives, ideas, knowledge and culture, and that this difference brings great strength.
2. The Open University believes that discrimination or exclusion based on individual characteristics and circumstances such as age; disability; caring or dependency responsibilities; gender or gender identity; marriage and civil partnership status;

political opinion; pregnancy and maternity; race, colour, caste, nationality, ethnic or national origin; religion or belief; sexual orientation; socio-economic background; trade union membership status or other distinctions, represents a waste of talent and a denial of opportunity for self-fulfilment.

3. It is recognised that patterns of under representation and differences in outcomes at The Open University can be challenged through positive action programmes.
4. The Open University respects the rights of individuals, including the right to hold different views and beliefs. The Open University will not allow these differences to be manifested in a way that is hostile or degrading to others.
5. The Open University expects commitment and involvement from all its staff, students, partners and providers of goods and services in working towards the achievement of its vision.

For further details about equality and diversity at The Open University, including its Equality Schemes, please visit the [Equality and Diversity](#) website.

Student responsibilities

Students should:

- treat all members of the University community with dignity and respect for their rights and beliefs
- challenge or report incidents of discrimination and bullying
- respond positively and inclusively to individual differences.

For help or advice with an issue relating to equality and diversity, contact the Research Degrees Office in the first instance. The Research Degrees advisors will be pleased to help, all enquiries will be treated sensitively and confidentially.

Equality and diversity policy enquiries may also be addressed to The Open University Equality and Diversity office (email: strategy-equality@open.ac.uk). The office offers general information and guidance on University equality and diversity policy. However, it cannot normally take an active part in issues of an individual nature concerning cases involving staff or students where these are being handled by existing institutional complaints, appeals or grievance processes.

Part 2 Essential information or registration including terms and conditions

This section contains essential information for research degree registration with The Open University, including terms and conditions. The latest version of the terms and conditions as they apply to registration can be found on the [Graduate School Network](#).

Other documents such as the Code of Practice of Research at The Open University, Procedure for dealing with allegations of academic malpractice, The Code of Practice for Student Discipline, The Open University Student Computing Policy, the Student Charter, Plagiarism policy, The Open University Ethics principles for research involving human participants and other documents cited in this part of the handbook, apply to a student's registration and can also be accessed via the [Graduate School Network](#). Individual documents can be accessed using the following links:

- [Code of Practice of Research](#)
- [Academic Malpractice](#)
- [Student Discipline](#)
- [Student Computing](#)
- [Student Charter](#)
- [Plagiarism](#)
- [Ethics](#)

2.1 The student record and personal data

Personal identifier

Each student is provided with a 'personal identifier' (PI number) upon registration. Students will be asked to provide this unique PI number whenever they contact the University or complete any forms. Students can access information about their research degree registration on [StudentHome](#).

Change of personal details

If a student changes their name, address, phone number or email address they must tell the Research Degrees Office in writing. Any change of name must be supported by appropriate documentary evidence such as:

- a marriage certificate
- a birth certificate, or
- a deed poll.

Updates to University records for transgender student transitioning to a different gender, may be made upon receipt of a letter explaining that the student intends to undergo gender reassignment. However, the University requires evidence of legal name change before a degree certificate in the preferred name can be issued. Evidence may be in the form of:

- a statutory declaration of name change
- a birth certificate in the new name, or
- a deed poll.

The data held by The Open University

The Open University is committed to the principles of data protection and best practice in handling information. All personal information is held in secure files and will be processed only for the purposes identified at registration.

Within the University, information is transferred only to those who need it for the purposes of academic, administrative and support services. In addition, where a student is part of a Doctoral Training Partnership (DTP) The Open University will be sharing their details with other members of the DTP.

Some information will be sent to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA). Information will also be provided to other statutory bodies on request e.g. UKVI.

Further information about the use of data can be found in the [student privacy notice](#), and the postgraduate research student privacy notice. Please note that the policy covers taught students as well as research students so not all of it is relevant to research students.

Freedom of information

The University has a Freedom of Information Publication scheme that provides a general right of public access to many types of information. The scheme can be accessed through the [Freedom of Information](#) website.

Information on the Freedom of Information Act 2000 can be obtained from the [Information Commissioner](#).

How The Open University will communicate

The University keeps electronic records and will usually communicate with students and supervisors by email. During their studies students will be required to complete and submit forms electronically. Guidance notes for all the forms can be accessed on the Graduate School Network [Forms and Guidance](#).

Where a document cannot be found or where clarification is needed regarding forms and/or guidance, please contact the Research Degrees Office (contact details are in [Part 6](#)).

Giving feedback

The Open University welcomes feedback from students regarding any aspect of their time as an Open University research student, including any suggestions and ideas for improvements. Where appropriate, the feedback will be used to make improvements to services for students. Please email the Research Degrees Office (contact details are in [Part 6](#)) with any feedback.

Appeals and Complaints

Students can appeal against administrative and academic decisions of the University. For information on this and on the University's Complaints procedure please refer to [Part 5](#) of this handbook.

Public interest disclosure

The University has a statement setting out its [policy on Public Interest Disclosure](#) (informally termed 'whistleblowing'). It offers guidance for students and staff who want to raise reasonable suspicions they may have about irregularities in the running of the University or about the activities of colleagues within the University.

The policy statement is intended to incorporate the requirements of the Public Interest Disclosure Act, January 1998, but is broader in two respects – it applies to students as well as staff and its scope goes beyond that of protected disclosure as defined in the Act. It's not intended to replace the University's other policies and procedures in relation to grievances, harassment, disciplinary matters or students' complaints.

2.2 University regulations and codes of practice

Regulations:

The [Research Degree Regulations](#) should not be read in isolation. It's important they are read in conjunction with the University's general regulations, such as the Code of Practice for Student Discipline, this handbook, and other relevant documents referred to both in the regulations and the handbook (listed at the start at Part 2 of the handbook).

The Research Degree Regulations form part of a student's contract with the University and any questions about the Research Degree Regulations should be addressed to the Research Degrees Office.

Supervision:

The Code of Practice for Supervisors and Research Students is detailed in Section 5, Appendix 2, of the University's [Research Degree Regulations](#). This sets out guidelines for the conduct of the supervisors and students and serves as a standard for external audits of research degree provision and research degree appeals.

The Open University [Research Degrees Committee](#) reviews the regulations, codes of practice and policies periodically and would welcome any comments. Please email them to the Research Degrees Office (contact details in [Part 6](#)).

2.3 Registration

Students may register to start on 1st of October or 1st February and the main cycle of induction events begins after registration with further events throughout the year. Registered students will be given a 'maximum registration date' by which they must submit the thesis for examination which will be adjusted to take into account any periods of suspended registration or changes to mode of study.

On admission to the research degree programme, a student will be registered for the degree of Master of Philosophy (MPhil). Before the end of the probationary registration, the student will be assessed and a recommendation made about continuing registration and specific degree registration to the Graduate School Director.

If probationary registration is confirmed, registration will continue until submission of the final thesis or until the maximum registration date as set out in the offer letter (or further correspondence). This is subject to the proviso that the student maintains satisfactory academic progress and meets all fee liabilities.

UKVI (UK Visas and Immigration)

The Open University is a Tier 4 Sponsor, with the UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) and sponsors full-time students from outside the UK and EU to study in the UK on Tier 4 visas. Full details of the immigration regulations for students can be found at [UKVI](#).

A student needing a Tier 4 visa will be required to demonstrate that they can meet the UK Visas and Immigration requirements and The Open University's minimum English Language entry requirements (RD 2.4 in the [Research Degree Regulations](#)).

In order to fulfil its responsibilities as a Tier 4 Sponsor the University will need to copy and verify a student's passport and visa each year that they are registered as an Open University student. The University keep records of attendance/absence and monitoring them to ensure compliance and will be made available to the [UKVI](#).

A student studying on a Tier 4 visa must tell the Research Degrees Office immediately if:

- their contact details change at any point in their studies;
- if they are leaving the country;
- if they are going to be absent from studies for more than a week, including conference attendance and field study.

If a student needs to extend their student visa, they should scrutinise the guidance notes and application form on the [UKVI](#) website and then contact the Research Degrees Office.

The University reserves the right to withdraw sponsorship of a visa and refuse visa extension requests where a student is found to be in breach of national legislation and/or Open University requirements. Therefore it is imperative that a student ensures they are compliant with the up-to-date national requirements, as they may change from time to time.

Residence requirements

Students should be resident in the United Kingdom throughout their studies and full-time students normally study on campus and are required to live within easy commutable distance from Milton Keynes (approximately 40 miles or 40 minutes travelling time from Milton Keynes). If in exceptional circumstances, a student needs to live further away (e.g. due to domestic or childcare commitments), the faculty will need to request a residency waiver from the Graduate School Director at the point of application. Please note that residency waivers will not be accepted for Tier 4 students.

Part-time students are not required to live in the vicinity of Milton Keynes but are expected to engage fully with the University and their research community. In exceptional circumstances, the University may allow someone who is resident outside the UK to register as a part-time research student if it can be shown that adequate supervision and engagement with the research can be arranged. A student would be expected to visit the UK to complete probation activities, for supervision sessions, and for their examination at their own expense.

Exceptions to the residency requirements are considered to enable full-time and part-time UK students to undertake periods of fieldwork overseas if it is essential to the research and if it can be shown that regular and adequate supervision can be maintained.

Non-book components to thesis

A student intending to develop and submit a thesis with a non-book component in line with the [Research Degree Regulations](#) (RD 2.7 and 17. 7 – 17.9) should declare this at registration or at probation.

Study hours and other study

Full-time research students are required to spend a **minimum of 37 hours** a week on their studies.

Part-time students are expected to spend a **minimum of 18.5 hours** a week on their studies.

Full-time students may undertake a moderate amount of paid work, provided that the supervisors give consent and it does not interfere with the progress of their research nor delay the completion of their degree. Normally, this should be no more than six hours paid work per week, but exceptions can be made when this is compatible with the research programme and contributes to their training, subject to the agreement of the supervisors and the Associate Dean Research, and notification of the Research Degrees Office or Affiliated Research Centre as appropriate. Where a student, regardless of mode of study, is funded they must comply with the terms and conditions of their offer letter.

A student may not be registered for any other degree or qualification at any other institution, during their registration as an Open University student (this applies also to multiple registrations at The Open University).

Study periods

The UK funding councils set the benchmarks for the timely completion of research degrees. The minimum and maximum study periods permitted by the regulations are shown below.

Table 1: minimum and maximum study periods permitted.

	Qualification	Minimum	Maximum
Full-time students	MPhil	15 months	48 months
Full-time students	PhD	24 months	48 months
Part-time students	MPhil	24 months	72 months
Part-time students	PhD	36 months	72 months

In order to study for a degree, submit a thesis for examination and be awarded the degree, a student must be a registered research student of the University. Should registration lapse prior to submission, the student will be deemed to have withdrawn from the research degree programme. Any research or other work undertaken before registration will not count as part of the minimum period of study and may not be included in the thesis.

Change of mode

Students may apply to the Graduate School Director for a change of mode of study from full time to part time or *vice versa*. In such cases the minimum and maximum registration periods will be calculated *pro rata*.

Absences and other disruptions

A student must inform their supervisors and the Research Degrees Office if they are absent, or if their studies are disrupted for any reason including illness or injury for a week or more. A student who is absent for a month or more should request a suspension of their registration.

Supervisors and Associate Deans (Research)/Directors of Postgraduate Studies are required to notify the Research Degrees Office immediately of any unauthorised absences or if they have concerns about disruptions to a student's attendance or progress.

All information disclosed will be treated confidentially and sensitively.

Suspending registration

A Faculty or Institute may submit a request for suspension of a student's registration for consideration by the Graduate School Director since it is not an automatic right. Any request must be submitted with supporting evidence and made in advance unless circumstances are unforeseen in which case the completed paperwork should be submitted as soon as possible thereafter.

Registration can only be for a maximum of 12 months for full-time students and 24 months *pro rata* for part-time students. Periods of suspension do not count towards the maximum permitted periods of study. If suspended registration is approved the submission deadline will be extended accordingly and the University will confirm the revised deadline in writing.

A full-time student may apply for a suspension to their registration for a maximum of 12 months in total on the following grounds:

- a) Certified serious ill health of the student or a family member or dependent for whom the student is acting as a carer.
- b) Internship or placement.
- c) Maternity, paternity, adoption and shared leave.

A part-time student may request a suspension to their registration, for a maximum of twenty four months in total on the following grounds:

- a) Certified serious ill health of the student or a family member or dependent for whom the student is acting as a carer.
- b) Work related difficulties.
- c) Domestic commitments.
- d) Internship or placement.
- e) Maternity, paternity, adoption and shared leave.

Students wishing to suspend their registration must provide evidence for the grounds on which they are applying to suspend.

Students requesting a suspension after the submission of their thesis may only do so in exceptional circumstances.

Students requiring longer than the maximum permitted period of suspended registration will have to withdraw from their programme of study.

For a student in receipt of a stipend there are financial implications of suspension. There is no additional funding to cover the period of suspension, however, it is possible to stop the stipend payments until such a time as the student returns to study. Alternatively a student may wish to continue to receive payments for up to two months of the suspension. In this case, the total period of funding will *not* increase, even though the maximum registration date will be extended for the duration of the suspension.

Upon return students will be required to have a 'Return to Study' meeting with their supervisor(s).

Students who have entered the UK on a Tier 4 visa sponsored by The Open University, who are considering suspending registration, should consult the Research Degrees Office as it may affect the terms and conditions relating to their leave to remain in the UK.

Extensions

Exceptionally, the Graduate School Director may consider a request for an extension to the maximum period of study, for up to 12 months if it is supported by the supervisors and the Associate Dean (Research) or Director of Postgraduate Studies. The supervisors will need to submit a case to the Research Degrees Office with a plan for completion of the outstanding work. The length of time requested should be realistic because further extensions are unlikely to be granted.

Maternity, paternity and adoption leave

Subject to meeting a minimum period of registration¹ by the expected week of confinement, funded research students are entitled to maternity leave plus unpaid maternity leave, in addition to standard suspended registration entitlement. The same applies where a child is being adopted if the student is the primary carer. Two weeks unpaid paternity leave may be taken in addition to the standard suspended registration entitlement.

Self-funded students are not entitled to maternity pay but may take maternity, paternity or adoption leave.

Full details of maternity, paternity and adoption leave and stipend payments are available on the Graduate School Network ([forms and guidance](#)).

Any Tier 4 students considering taking maternity, paternity or adoption leave must consult the Research Degrees Office as it affects the terms and conditions relating to their leave to remain in the UK.

Withdrawal

Students who are considering withdrawing from the programme should contact their supervisors in the first instance to discuss options.

¹ Please contact the Research Degrees Office for further information on minimum registration periods.

Where a student decides to withdraw from the programme, the supervisor will need to submit a withdrawal form to the Research Degrees Office via the Associate Dean (Research) or equivalent and this can be found within Graduate School Network [forms and guidance](#).

Students who allow their registration to lapse without having submitted their thesis, or fail to return from a period of suspension, will be deemed to have withdrawn from their research degree registration.

New students who accept a place on the programme but withdraw before their start date, will receive a full refund of any fees paid. For students in receipt of a grant, further payments will be stopped once appropriate notification has been received from the faculty.

Assignment of intellectual property rights (IPRs)

Intellectual property law aims to safeguard intellectual property creators by warranting them certain time-limited rights to control and exploit their creations. IPRs can be registered, in the form of designs (registered and unregistered), patents and trademarks.

The distinction between the four categories is defined below:

- **Copyright:** protects original literary works, musical works, dramatic works, artistic works, performances and computer software / analytics and organised database; it is an automatic right which does not need registration in the territory of interest.
- **Designs:** protect the visual appearance or eye appeal of products.
- **Patents:** protect the technical and functional aspects of products and processes (you cannot patent an idea).
- **Trademarks:** protect signs that can distinguish the goods and services of one trader from those of another.

Whilst Copyright is protected on creation, designs, patents and trademarks need to be registered at a national [Intellectual Property Office](#).

Registered and un-registered IPRs are an important tool in using and exploiting research activities, as they can be transferred, sold, assigned or waived, allowing others to use the work but at the same time protecting the creators.

Postgraduate research student IP policy

Research students are required to assign any IPRs arising from their research to The Open University as set out in the Intellectual Property Policy found in the [forms and guidance](#) on the Graduate School Network.

IPRs includes:

- original inventions, design rights and copyright in all materials (written, broadcast, recorded, computer programs, research information on Open University websites, iTunes, videos and any other form of storage device) produced during the course of an Open University studentship or in work specifically assigned to a student.

Research IP that is excluded is as follows:

- copyright in books that are not part of a University course
- copyright in journal articles, and thesis work

- copyright in conference papers
- copyright in presentations
- students' personal notes (excluding laboratory notebooks)
- copyright in software, databases and questionnaires is owned by The Open University and should not be included in research papers / books, where the intention is to assign IP rights to a third party (i.e. publisher). Contact the University's [Enterprise Office](#) before any action is taken.

If the research is sponsored by a third party at the start of any collaboration, contractual arrangements must be in place to define The Open University's position on research IPR's before work commences. Such arrangement might involve third party ownership of IP arising from the research, and therefore students must assign the IP to The Open University so that it can comply with such terms.

For more information about IP with (regards to research only), contact the [Research and Enterprise Office](#).

Contact details for the Research and Enterprise Office can be found in [Part 6](#).

Copyrighted material owned by a third party

It is the responsibility of the student to ensure any copyrighted material owned by a third party has been cleared (i.e. permission to make it available on open access websites secured) prior to depositing the thesis in Open Research Online. More information on third party copyright can be found at [Open Research Online help](#).

2.4 Fees

The Open University Research Degrees Policy which includes information on sources of financial support can be found at www.open.ac.uk/students/charter/essential-documents/research-degree-regulations

All students should read the policy prior to registration.

The University will give reasonable notice of any changes to the policy and the date they take effect.

From 2018, the UK government will introduce new loans of up to £25,000, for study of doctoral programmes. The loans will provide a contribution towards the cost of study but they will not cover the full fees and living costs. Full details of the products and the eligibility criteria should be available shortly.

Part 3 Studying for a research degree

This section contains information about the key milestones in research degree registration and information on sources of support and guidance.

3.1 Key milestones

Figure 2: Key milestones during registration



When a student accepts an offer of registration, the University will send information on completing registration and beginning life as an Open University research student. The student will need to come on to campus to complete any outstanding paperwork and provide original proof of identity and original copies of qualifications for verification. Self-funded students will need to pay their fees but this part can be done over the phone.

There will be a number of induction events that newly-registered students are encouraged to attend including an introduction to The Open University, to skills development and student life, as well as more specific sessions. Separate events are organised by the faculty to familiarise students with key personnel, facilities and available support.

As part of induction students should consider their training needs with their supervisors and conduct a skills audit which should be updated regularly during studies. Skills training is available at University, Faculty and School levels to enable students to develop subject-specific and widely transferrable skills during their studies. Details are available via the [Graduate School Network](#).

At the start of studies students will discuss day-to-day arrangements with supervisors, including supervision meetings and key study milestones such as probation and progress monitoring, both of which are formally assessed in accordance with the regulations.

The key output of studies is a thesis and students are strongly encouraged to refer to the criteria for the award of the degree and discuss with their supervisors. The general criteria for the assessment of a MPhil and a PhD align with the [Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications](#) in Appendix 1 of the [Research Degree Regulations](#).

Details of all of these processes can be found below.

3.2 Induction

The Research Career Development Team organises the main induction events and will show students how to access training and development resources and book themselves on to further events throughout the year. Students coming to the UK for the first time will be invited to attend bespoke induction events to cover moving to the UK and getting settled in. The faculty will provide local induction activities to ensure students are settled and ready to begin studies.

Supervisors and faculty offices will make appropriate practical arrangements for students depending on mode of study e.g. office keys, security passes, library and computer access, health and safety training and any workstation assessment needed. Students will be introduced to staff and fellow students and will be able to build networks of contacts at The Open University and in the wider research community.

3.3 Supervision

All MPhil/PhD research students have two internal supervisors who are members of the University's academic staff and who are equally responsible for supervision. A lead supervisor is the primary contact for all paperwork relating to the student. Students may also have an external supervisor appointed from an institution of higher education or a research institute who can provide additional expertise.

In terms of supervision full-time students should have a minimum of ten formal meetings per year and part-time students should have a minimum of five. Students are expected to agree the outcomes of formal meetings with their supervisors and keep an agreed written record. At the first meeting supervisors and students should discuss the direction of the research project and the amount and nature of communication (meetings, correspondence, email and phone). Regular written reports and draft thesis chapters may be specified, or a student may spend a considerable period at the beginning of the project on a preliminary reading programme and literature survey before producing a significant piece of written work.

Supervisors will report regularly on their students' progress and students will regularly report on their progress and activities planned for the next reporting period. Students who have not made satisfactory progress will be provided with appropriate support but if sustained may have their registration terminated.

Further information about expectations of students and supervisors is in Appendix 2 of the [Research Degree Regulations](#).

3.4 Third-party monitoring

The student should have an opportunity at least once a year to discuss their studies with a third party – someone other than the supervisors or head of discipline. Within The Open University research degree programme, this opportunity is formalised through the appointment of a third party monitor by the Associate Dean (Research) (or delegate). The role of the third party monitor is to provide the student with independent support. The student should feel free to discuss with their third-party monitor, in confidence, any matters that might affect their studies. Any records kept should be agreed by both parties.

Students should be advised of the name and contact details of the third-party monitor during the first month of registration. The first third-party monitoring session should take place no later than the fifth month of registration. Third-party monitoring should then take place at least annually in the first quarter of each calendar year. Further details relating to third party monitors can be found in the [Research Degree Regulations](#).

3.5 Probation assessment

All research degree students are required to undertake a probation assessment and passing probation is a precursor to continued registration as MPhil students or progressing to PhD registration if students are studying for a PhD degree. Students are responsible for carrying out their probation assessments with the support and guidance of their supervisors and it is

important to note that if any ethics reviews are required for their studies this must be completed prior to probation and as set out in [Part 4](#).

The criteria for the probation assessment are outlined in detail in [Research Degree Regulations](#) RD15.3 - 15.4 for MPhil students and RD15.6 – 15.7 for PhD students.

In summary the probation assessment has four parts: a University report form, an oral presentation by the student, a written project report by the student which is then discussed by the student and two independent academics during a mini-viva.

The detailed reporting form that the University requires reviews the project and plans, assesses skills development, plagiarism training and makes a recommendation about degree registration. Within this form students are also required to give details of their skills audit and project development.

The written report by the student that is assessed during mini-viva should include a literature review, research questions, methodology, any preliminary results, bibliography and a project plan that may take the form of a Gantt chart.

The deadline for the completion of the probation process is as follows:

- full-time student – 12 months of the initial date of registration
- part-time student – 24 months of the initial date of registration.

It is imperative that the reports reach the Research Degrees Office in time for the process to be completed (i.e. 11 months for full-time students and 23 months for part-time students). The Research Degrees Office does not have the authority to accept late submissions and any extension can only be granted in exceptional circumstances, and requires prior approval, of the Graduate School Director.

Based on the evidence obtained at probation assessment the outcome will be one of the following:

- registration for the degree of Master of Philosophy (MPhil); or
- registration for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD); or
- probation should be extended to enable the student to complete any remedial work (extensions should not exceed two months beyond the end of the first year for full-time students or four months beyond the end of the second year for part-time students) probation; or
- registration should be terminated due to failure to make satisfactory academic progress.

Remedial work will be reviewed and further registration will depend on it having been completed to the satisfaction of the assessors and ARC research degree coordinator and confirmed by the Graduate School Director.

If, after probation is met, registration is confirmed and will continue until the submission deadline, subject to the student making sustained progress to the satisfaction of the supervisors, the Faculty/Institute and the Graduate School Director. The student must also comply with any non-academic conditions of registration.

If a student does not pass probation, they may decide to withdraw, or the supervisors may recommend deregistration.

3.6 Progress monitoring

Progress monitoring reports are required for all MPhil/PhD research students. The faculty determines the frequency of the reporting, normally this would be expected to take place at least twice per year. The progress reports should be submitted by the faculty/Institute to the Research Degrees Office on an annual basis and should encompass a student's progress throughout the previous year. A student is expected to have a meeting with their full supervision team to discuss the progress of their research during the period immediately before the report is prepared. If there are any concerns about a student's progress, they will be given an opportunity by the University to get back on track. The supervisors and the student should plan any remedial action. Please refer to the *Procedures for addressing failure to make satisfactory academic progress*, Appendix 3 of the [Research Degree Regulations](#).

Progress monitoring provides regular opportunities for a student and their supervisors to review work and plan for the next period. Progress reports are a key piece of evidence that a student is progressing well and it is a condition of registration that they are completed. Based on the content of the progress report, the faculty will make a recommendation to The Open University about continuing registration.

3.7 Examination

The [Research Degree Regulations](#) provide detailed information as to what is required during the examination process. Additional information is provided in The Open University Thesis Submission Guidelines and the Examination Guidelines which are available on the [Graduate School Network](#).

Students and supervisors should read the Regulations and the guidelines carefully. These include information on publication of papers, originality and joint work, the length and format of the thesis and non-book components. The thesis must take the form of a coherent and cohesive monograph. Any additional material e.g. non-book component, or appendices including publications, data etc. must be clearly presented in relation to the argument of the written thesis and the creative work should be set in its relevant theoretical, historical, and critical or design context.

A student must give the Research Degrees Office at least three months' notice of intention to submit the thesis for examination. This is to allow sufficient time to appoint examiners and make the practical arrangements for the examination. The student should also confirm the title of the thesis at this point and let the faculty/Research Degrees Office know if any adjustments are required on the day to accommodate a disability or additional need.

Theses can be submitted at any time during the year, although those submitted during the summer may be subject to some delay if examiners are not available for oral examinations.

When the notice is received, the Associate Dean (Research) (or delegate), in consultation with the supervisors, will nominate an examination panel for approval by the Research Degrees Committee. A minimum of two examiners is required. An Independent Examination Panel Chair will also be appointed. It is their role to make the examination arrangements and to ensure that the examination is run in accordance with the University's regulations, policies and procedures. Once the examination arrangements are finalised, confirmation of the date, time and place of the viva will be communicated to all relevant stakeholders.

The student is required to attend the examination in person and defend the thesis to the examiners. A supervisor may be present as an observer at the oral examination. However the invitation to attend is at the student's discretion.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is using the work (including text, images and ideas) of other people to gain some form of benefit without formally acknowledging that the work came from someone else. The Open University takes allegations of plagiarism very seriously and is making increasing use of plagiarism detection software.

It is expected that a student develops and maintains best practice in their writing throughout the research. In cases of suspected plagiarism, the University will follow the Procedure of dealing with allegations of academic misconduct and malpractice.

Should a case of plagiarism be proven, this is a serious offence and The Open University disciplinary procedures will be followed.

The plagiarism policy and the disciplinary procedures can be found in the forms and guidance section (A-Z) on the [Graduate School Network](#).

The student will be asked to acknowledge a statement to confirm that all the work submitted is their own before submitting the thesis for examination.

Results

The examiners will normally advise the student of the recommendation at the end of the examination. At this stage the outcome is only a recommendation. The recommendation must be approved by the Research Degrees Examination Results Approval Committee. At this point the Committee will confirm the outcome of the examination in writing.

Where further amendments are needed in order to meet the academic requirements of the award, the student will be informed in writing what these amendments are. Students will continue to receive advice from supervisors during the corrections period. For more information consult the [Research Degree Regulations](#).

Only one resubmission of a revised thesis for re-examination is permitted.

Award of degrees

If no corrections are required, the degree is awarded with effect from the date the examiners recommendations are approved by the University. Where corrections are required, the date of the award will correspond to the date the examiners approve the amended thesis.

When the Research Degrees Examination Results Approval Committee confirms that the thesis meets the requirements for the award of a degree, the student must submit copies (see [The Open University Thesis Submission Guideline](#)) before the degree can be conferred. The degree and title of Doctor or Master of Philosophy are conferred in absentia by Congregation. The student will receive confirmation in writing of completion of the degree. At this point the student may use the title 'Dr' if awarded a Doctor of Philosophy.

3.8 Degree ceremonies

The University holds an annual series of degree ceremonies for the presentation of graduates. These are held in March to June and September to November in towns and cities

across the UK. Graduates are presented to the Chancellor, the Pro-Chancellor, the Vice-Chancellor or one of the Pro-Vice-Chancellors or Executive Deans. The student may, if they wish, be presented at one of these degree ceremonies. They are always memorable and inspiring occasions. Details will be sent to the student when they becomes eligible.

More information about degree ceremonies can be obtained from the [Ceremonies](#) website or by contacting the Ceremonies Centre. Contact details are in [Part 6](#). Information about the accessibility of each venue and hiring academic dress at the ceremony is also available on the ceremonies website or by contacting the Ceremonies Centre.

3.9 Directory of graduates

Names (but not addresses) of graduates attending each degree ceremony (who have agreed to this) are produced and handed out as souvenir publications on the day of the ceremony. A full listing of all of the year's graduates is also compiled by the University but is not available in printed format. These lists are all public documents. The University may also release names (but not addresses) of graduates to be printed in national or regional newspapers and other publications.

A student who does not wish their name to appear in any of these publications must tell the University by writing to the Manager in the Ceremonies Centre.

Unless such notification is received the University will consider that it has consent to include a student's name.

3.10 What a student should do if they need help

Throughout a student's studies, the University strives to give the best support and guidance, to help him/her towards successful completion of the degree.

The University understands that sometimes a student may fall behind or have unexpected disruptions to their studies. Illness, bereavement, changes in domestic circumstances and financial difficulties can all impact on ability to study. A student may also find that the project is not progressing as well as hoped, or something has gone wrong with the data collection.

Whatever the reason, a student should talk to their supervisor or third party monitor about the difficulties. The supervisor(s)/third party monitor will help the student to find a way through the immediate problem and can sometimes renegotiate deadlines or ask for a period of suspended registration. The student may also address concerns to the Post-Graduate Research Tutor, Faculty Director Research Degrees or Associate Dean (Research) depending on the structure of the faculty.

If a student needs help because they feel a process has gone wrong, they may want to appeal against an academic or administrative decision or complain about a service, please see [Part 5](#) of this handbook covering appeals and complaints.

The University is committed to providing a high-quality service and will seek to resolve any problems as quickly as possible. The University considers all feedback to be an important source of information for improving services.

Students who need or wish to may contact the Research Degrees Office directly. Contact details can be found in [Part 6](#).

3.11 Prevent principles

As an institution of higher education, the OU has an important role in providing appropriate platforms to challenge extremist views and ideologies through the provision of learning and research and the protection of academic freedom and promotion of free speech, debate and liberal values. Preventing people from being drawn into terrorism is synonymous with our concern for student and staff welfare and wellbeing. These factors and other important aspects of our response are contained in a set of OU Prevent Principles agreed by The Council November 2015. For further details about prevent principles please visit [Prevent principles](#) in our Essential Documents.

Part 4 Facilities and services

For funded students the University provides research facilities (laboratories, computers, workstations). For studentships that are not stipended, arrangements for access to research facilities is in negotiation with the relevant Faculty and should be agreed prior to the University issuing an offer of registration.

4.1 Library facilities and services

Open University research students will need to make use of library resources as part of the research project. Library Services at The Open University provides students with access to high quality and trusted resources that will support the research by enabling the student to explore and keep up-to-date with the subject and undertake a structured literature review.

They include primary and secondary resources such as:

- academic journals
- newspapers
- academic books.

The Library also provides access to specialist resources e.g. statistical databases, legislation, conference proceedings and datasets.

The Open University Library's collection of resources is available from the [online library](#).

All research students can take advantage of the [document delivery service](#) which provides access to items that are not available in the Library's online and print collections.

[Reference management tools](#) enable you to store and organise your references and automatically generate in-text citations and bibliographies in a variety of styles.

Library Services offers a programme of [online training sessions](#), including an introduction to Library Services and an introduction to reference management tools.

There is also a programme of face-to-face training including EndNote Basic, Mendeley, getting to grips with research data management, social media for scholarly communications and networking. Details can be found via the [Graduate School Network](#).

The Open University's open-access database of peer-reviewed research publications, [Open Research Online](#) (ORO), shows the range and depth of recently published Open University research. Research students are required to upload an electronic copy of their [thesis](#) to ORO and are encouraged to [deposit](#) their publications. The Library Services Research Support team can give advice and guidance on where to publish, and dissemination of publications, email library-research-support@open.ac.uk.

[EThOS](#), a service from the British Library, provides free online access to a large selection of UK PhD theses from participating universities. There is also access to some Open University-awarded theses via [ORO](#).

These will give an insight into the structure of theses, different approaches to research, and how to develop a thesis. Library Services also holds a selection of printed theses which can be borrowed from The Open University Library in Milton Keynes when visited in person.

More information about the library services and resources available for research students can be found on the Library page of the [Graduate School Network](#).

Using the Library at Walton Hall

The Open University Library provides a modern, spacious environment for study, research and collaboration.

Access to other libraries

Library Services is a member of [SCONUL Access](#) which enables access to, and borrowing of, books at other libraries which belong to the scheme. The scheme covers most of the university libraries in the UK and some in Ireland. The [Libraries near you](#) webpage also give details of access to other libraries.

All Open University research students are entitled to apply for a free pass to use the [British Library's](#) St Pancras, London reading rooms.

The National Libraries of [Scotland](#) and [Wales](#) also welcome Open University students.

Managing research data

Doctorate projects can create large amounts of research data, and this may be the student's first experience of working with data on a large scale. The Library's [Research Data Management](#) service can help a student plan for the management of the data throughout the project and once it's complete; the Library offers an enquiry service and training on all aspects of data management, and [ORDO](#) (Open Research Data Online) a data storage service for secure storage of both live research data and material the student would like to keep available for the longer term.

Getting help

The [Library Helpdesk](#), which provides specialist information advice, is available to support students with all library needs, seven days a week. The helpdesk contact details can be found on every page of the Library website. An out-of-hours webchat service is also provided to support students when the main helpdesk is closed.

For enquiries about Open Research Online and Research Data Management please contact the library research support team: library-research-support@open.ac.uk

Conditions for use of Library facilities

Access to the University's Library Services described above requires students to be bound by a [copyright declaration](#).

4.2 Computers

Once a student has been registered, they will be given an Open University computer username (OUCU) and a pre-set password that allows him/her to access some OU systems. When a student first signs on to the systems they will be asked to change the pre-set password. It is their responsibility to keep the password secure and confidential. In particular the student must:

- never tell anyone else the password, even University staff
- use the password in line with accepted best practice. Advice on safe and secure computing is given in the [Help Centre](#).

If a student thinks that someone else knows the password, they should tell The Open University Computing Helpdesk by phoning +44 (0)1908 653972.

Students are expected to comply with the University's Computing Code of Conduct, which is published on the [Graduate School Network](#).

4.3 Statistics Advisory Services

Advice about statistical aspects of research is available to all registered Open University research students from the Statistics Advisory Service. A major aim of the service is to encourage students to learn to deal with the statistical aspects of their research effectively and efficiently, by providing statistical advice both at the planning and at the data analysis stages of research. At the planning stage statistical advice can help to:

- ensure that the research study is efficient from the point of data collection through to completion and beyond, and that the design enables the student to address the research objectives
- identify best practices for data management.

At the data analysis stage the service can help to:

- identify suitable statistical methods to properly address the research objectives
- understand outputs from statistical computing software
- ensure that evidence-based conclusions can be drawn from the analysis.

Students are advised to seek statistical advice as early as possible, preferably while planning the study and before collecting the data. Please visit the [Statistics Advisory Service](#) website for details or email: stats-advisory@open.ac.uk

4.4 Health and safety

The Open University is committed to ensuring the health, safety and welfare of all those involved in the discharge of its undertakings, both within its designated premises and at external locations. Risk assessment is one of the main tools used in order to ensure adequate control measures are in place to manage the safety of individuals, and is of particular importance when considering higher risk activities/environments such as laboratories or fieldwork.

The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 requires risk assessments to be completed to identify significant risks. The assessment must:

- identify significant hazards
- decide who might be harmed e.g. students, and how they might be harmed.
- evaluate the risks arising from hazards and decide if existing precautions are adequate or if more are needed
- record the significant findings if five or more people are employed
- review the assessment from time to time especially after a significant change or if there is reason to believe it is no longer valid and revise as necessary.

Risk assessments must be completed by supervisors prior to work/travel commencing. Any significant risks identified must be documented and the associated control measures identified. This may then require follow up with a documented Safe system of Work/Method statement. All of this information must be formally communicated to the students in order to

provide them with the relevant information and instruction to allow them to work safely in their particular environment ensuring the safety of both themselves and those around them.

The Open University laboratories are covered by a Safety Code of Practice which applies to all users, including students and their internal supervisors. Those responsible for the laboratories are responsible for ensuring that all users have been informed of the Code of Practice and the requirement to follow it.

The University has a specific duty under The Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002 (COSHH) to prevent exposure to substances hazardous to health or, if prevention is not reasonably practicable, to undertake an assessment to adequately control exposure. No work shall be commenced involving any activity likely to be hazardous to health until a suitable and sufficient assessment of the risks has been carried out. This process will identify the measures required to control any activity involving the potential to pose a hazard to health.

Students and supervisors are formally responsible for ensuring that a written COSHH assessment is prepared for all experiments involving the use of substances conducted within The Open University, at a host institution or in an external environment. They are expected to be familiar with, and ensure compliance with safety regulations applying to any laboratory and/or equipment used as well as the COSHH 2002 Regulations.

More information is available at [Health and Safety Executive](#) and also at the Open University Health and Safety website <http://intranet6.open.ac.uk/estates/main/health-and-safety>.

The Open University also requires risk assessment to be produced where fieldwork and international travel are involved. Guidance is available on both the Health and Safety intranet above and on the HR website at <http://intranet6.open.ac.uk/human-resources/policies-and-procedures?path=/travel-and-subsistence#documents>. It is standard practice within the Open University to consult the foreign Office website where international travel is involved as part of the travel Risk Assessment <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice>.

4.5 Ethics review

It is essential that directly registered research degree students (all research students apart from those registered through an Affiliated Research Centre), who plan to gather data or biological material from human participants, discuss the ethics aspects of their proposed research with their supervisors at an early stage to ensure that where required, their ethics application(s) is well prepared and made to the HREC at appropriate stages during their study. To evidence supervisor support, a supervisor's electronic signature and/or comments needs to be included in each HREC application (checklist and/or proforma). EdD (Doctorate in Education) students should note that where their research will involve human participants, it is mandatory for them to have contacted the HREC before any research is begun.

It is imperative that potential participants should not be approached to take part in any research until the checklist is submitted and, where required, a HREC review takes place. If research is not reviewed at the appropriate stage it may affect a student's studies as a retrospective review is not always possible

All research involving the collection of data or biological samples from human participants requires ethics review by the [Open University Human Research Ethics Committee](#) (HREC). An ethics review may not always be necessary, but if there is any doubt, the student should complete the [Human Research Ethics Committee Project Registration and Risk Checklist](#) and return it to

Research-REC-Review@open.ac.uk, so the level of ethics review can be assessed by the HREC Chair. If, after the checklist is submitted, it is judged that the research will need a full ethics review, the researcher or student should complete a HREC proforma and submit it with any relevant documents, for example, a consent form and participant information sheet. Full details of the ethics review process is available on the [Research Ethics](#) website with a set of frequently asked questions (FAQs), links to further sources of information and guidance and contact details for any queries.

Gaining a favourable review and opinion from the HREC on the ethics protocol for a research project is essential in supporting OU research, whilst protecting participants, researchers, supervisors, the institution and any funding bodies, and minimises the likelihood of legal action being taken against any parties involved.

Any research involving NHS premises, staff or patients will also be likely to require review by the [NHS Health Research Authority](#) (HRA). Please note that this will need careful consideration and sufficient time should be allowed in the project plan to complete this stage. The Open University is recognised as a sponsor for this type of research and more information on the application process is available on the website.

4.6 Indemnity insurance

The University has indemnity insurance for full-time and part-time directly supported students carrying out research related to their studies. (Note that this insurance is subject to the normal terms and conditions that apply to the University's other insurances.) An appropriate risk assessment should be carried out for all off-site field work.

4.7 International students

The University welcomes students from all over the world to its research degree programme. The University recognises that coming to the UK to start a degree programme is an exciting, but sometimes overwhelming, time. The University can help the student to settle in to the University and give help and support, including a dedicated induction session for students from overseas, documents in support of visa applications, help with finding accommodation and with opening a UK bank account. The Open University is a Tier 4 Sponsor under Tier 4 of the Points-based Immigration scheme.

For more information about visas see [Part 2](#) or contact the Research Degrees Office.

4.8 Studying with a disability or additional need

The University is creating an inclusive University community and welcomes as research students people with disabilities or other requirements.

Whether a student is studying full-time on campus or as a part-time student using their own research facilities, the University responds positively to the different needs and circumstances of the students. Where possible, The University will, for example:

- make reasonable adjustments that may be required for students with a disability, health condition, mental health difficulty or specific learning difficulty (such as dyslexia); and
- make reasonable accommodation for students with other requirements such as:
 - pregnant or breastfeeding students
 - students who have specific needs related to their religion or belief
 - students who are transitioning to a different gender
 - students who have caring or dependency responsibilities.

The student should inform The University as early as possible if support is needed as some services may take several months to arrange. The information the student provides will be used only to help the University to assist them in their studies.

Referral process

If the student has a disability or additional needs they should discuss with their supervisor how these might impact on their studies and inform the Research Degrees Office. Any information that they disclose will be confidential.

Some adjustments can be made immediately, such as making changes to the student's workstation, arranging meetings in particular rooms to take account of sensitivity to sound or light levels, producing printed information in large format, and so on.

If the student is likely to need equipment, personnel or services to support them, The University will ask them to apply for a Disabled Students' Allowance (Please see the [Fees policy](#)) to help with any costs arising from meeting their needs. Assuming they are eligible, the student will undergo an assessment and The University will discuss the recommendations with the student. The University will make reasonable adjustments to enable the student to study and The University will do so in consultation with the student.

If the student is not eligible for a DSA, the University may still be able to provide equipment, personnel and support – the Research Degrees Office will liaise with the student, the student's supervisor and Academic Services to discuss how best to support the student.

4.9 Professional development as a researcher

Research skills development

The [Vitae Researcher Development Framework](#) endorsed by Research Councils UK, informs The Open University's career development programme for research degree students. Vitae is an international programme dedicated to active career learning and development for researchers. The employability lens for the Researcher Development Framework provides an overview of the knowledge, behaviours and attributes most frequently desired by employers. Students, as early career researchers, can expect to acquire these over the lifetime of their research degree programme.

Professional development resources are intended to support and supplement the research skills training available in the faculty.

The [Graduate School Network](#) will be the gateway to online training and development resources. Students will be given login details upon registration.

It provides tools and learning resources to help students identify and tailor training requirements, covering a variety of generic research skills. A student can use these materials independently and in individual training sessions with their supervisors. Students should discuss their training needs with supervisors at the beginning of studies. The Vitae **Research Development Framework Planner** is licensed for use by all Open University research degree students. It supports skills audit at the beginning of registration, to help a student to identify their training needs. It enables a student to monitor their skills development, and provides a progress file to enable them to log all the skills they have acquired through the course of the degree. More information can be found at the [Researcher Development Framework](#).

Further resources are available through the [Vitae](#) website.

The Research Career Development Team at the University delivers a programme of face-to-face events aimed at enhancing research capabilities. Further details are available at the [Graduate School Network](#).

Career development

Students may access advice on all aspects of careers and employability planning and development via The Open University [Careers and Employability Services website](#).

Open University research students may access the careers section on the [Graduate School Network](#) for advice on:

- enhancing employability
- finding employment after a PhD
- CVs for PhD researchers
- applying for jobs in academia
- academic job interviews
- resources for PhD researchers.

There is also information on Knowledge Transfer Partnerships and internships.

The Research Career Development Team delivers a programme of events aimed at enhancing research capabilities. Within this programme are events focusing on aspects of career management.

Open University research students can contact the Research Career Development Team at research-training-development@open.ac.uk to request a one-to-one careers appointment.

As a member of The Open University research student community there are many opportunities to build networks and professional relationships. A student will normally join an established research group. This ensures that a student is placed within an appropriate, supportive environment from which to build and establish their identity as an independent researcher.

4.10 Participating in Open University life

The Open University Students Association is here to provide a voice for all OU students and provide a vibrant community to support you during your studies. All students are automatically a member of the Association and there are plenty of ways to get involved.

Student community

The Students Association exists to represent students and to ensure The Open University is more than just a place of learning – it's a student community. The Association has vibrant communities on:

- [Facebook](#) @OUstudents
- [Twitter](#) @OUstudents
- [Instagram](#) @OUstudentslive
- [A suite of online forums](#)

Societies

Over 20 student-led [societies](#) are currently affiliated to the Association. From Psychology to Change Bell Ringing – there's something for everyone and staff are welcome too!

The **Postgraduate Students' Society** is looking to restart its activities. If you are interested in getting involved, please [email us](#).

Meet OU students

Local coffee mornings and pub meet-ups are being organised by OU students. They are a great way to find out more about the Association and meet new friends. Find the [latest events](#) on our website.

Student voice

The Association enables students to influence how the University is run by representing the collective needs of OU students.

The OU Students Association provides many different opportunities for students to be involved in student voice activity – and we provide opportunities to be involved in Academic Representation through our volunteering roles.

These roles include our [Central Committee Representatives](#) and our [Learner Experience Representatives](#). There are many other ways to get involved in consultation and research projects and every two years, you have the opportunity to stand for election to become part of our [student leadership team](#).

Student support

Feeling in need of help or support? The Students Association takes student welfare seriously by providing and promoting services to ensure you get the support you need to have a positive student experience. To complement the University's support services, we offer the following:

Peer Support

Our [Peer Supporters](#) are current and past OU students who can offer some informal support or answer one off questions for students who are struggling with their studies.

Through the Gate Peer Support

[Through the Gate](#) is a Peer Support service specifically for students who have been released from a secure environment, are continuing their studies but might need some extra support.

Nightline

[Nightline](#) is a listening, emotional support service run by students for students. It's a confidential service that is available from 6pm to 8am through the night.

Disabled Students Group – Student Support Group

The Disabled Students Group are a support group for students with additional challenges that affect their studies. They support each other to attain their individual study goals through

closed online forums and a variety of other closed social media platforms. If you feel they can support you or your students please contact our [group administrator](#) or see the [website](#) for more information.

PLEXUS – LGBT+ Support Group

PLEXUS is the OU Students Association LGBT+ group. It is open to all students, whether they self-define as LGBT+ or are an ally of the LGBT+ community. PLEXUS provides a 'safe space' for members, with a tiered membership system which is designed to provide specific support and comfort for LGBT+ students. For more information, visit the [PLEXUS website](#).

Shop and Discounts

Our [OU Students Shop](#) sells a wide range of OU-branded clothing and merchandise. You can also get up to speed with your revision by [downloading exam papers](#) free-of-charge.

OU students are eligible for an [NUS Extra card](#) which gives you access to a wide range of discounts in the UK and abroad.

Open University Students Educational Trust

The Association's own students' charity helps students who are in financial need continue their studies. You can find out about [eligibility and how to apply on our website](#).

Volunteering

There are a variety of [volunteering opportunities](#) available – whether you've got a lot of time spare or just a few hours. It's a great way to gain new skills and experiences, improve your CV and meet new people. Roles range from helping at graduation ceremonies to moderating online forums.

STUDIO

Keep up-to-date with all things OU by listening to our STUDIO radio shows. Our team of hosts come from all walks of life and discuss issues important to distance learners. Like us on [Facebook](#), where you can listen to the next show!

Website and magazine

Keep up-to-date with all the latest news on the [OUSA website](#), which contains all the latest news, events and volunteering opportunities. We also have a quarterly magazine – OU Students – which you will receive by email.

The Open University Alumni Association

Joining The Open University is the beginning of a lifelong relationship. Even when not studying an OU qualification holder remains part of a vibrant learning community through The Open University Alumni Association, set up by the University and staffed by a professional team. All graduates (and everyone who has successfully completed an Open University qualification) have automatic free membership of the association.

Members will be sent communications including the regular email newsletter OpenNews which contains the latest Open University developments. Members will also have access to

the association's website: www.open.ac.uk/alumni with access to information on new courses, supporting The Open University, OpenLearn, The Open University on iTunes U and YouTube, member benefits, careers advice, updating personal details and various social networking sites including Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn.

All that's needed is the student's OUCU and password (if these have been lost or forgotten, please contact the alumni team below). Users will be able to access the site, set up groups, contribute in the forum areas, write blogs or simply look around at what's on offer.

To contact the team, please send the enquiry with name, address and Open University personal identifier to:

Alumni Relations
The Open University
Walton Hall
Milton Keynes
MK7 6AA,

Phone +44 (0)1908 653815

Email alumni@open.ac.uk
www.open.ac.uk/alumni

Association of Open University Graduates (AOUG)

The Association of Open University Graduates offers graduates the opportunity to keep in touch with other like-minded graduates with similar experiences. It is an independent, subscription-funded Association run by Open University graduates for Open University graduates. Members can maintain their links, while fostering new ones, and stay connected with The Open University. AOUG supports The Open University by giving awards to research students in faculties and research centres and to new graduates in each region and nation.

Members' benefits include:

- opportunities to network with Open University graduates in the UK and internationally
- a website and forum, Facebook and Twitter, AOUG's magazine OMEGA and local e-newsletters
- academic and social events including meetings, trips and weekends away.

To find out more, visit [AOUG](http://aoug.open.ac.uk) or contact the AOUG office

Association of Open University Graduates
The Open University
Walton Hall
Milton Keynes
MK7 6AA

Tel: +44(0)1908 653316

Email: aoug@open.ac.uk.

Part 5 Research degree complaints and appeals

The Open University aims to provide all students with an excellent learning experience that enables them to achieve their academic goals. The University recognises that sometimes things go wrong and, when they do, it welcomes the opportunity to put them right as soon as possible.

The Student Complaints and Appeals Procedures apply to all enquirers, applicants and research students.

Students can obtain this procedure in alternative formats and seek help, advice and guidance on making a formal complaint or appeal from the Complaints and Appeals area of the [Help Centre](#), the [Graduate School Network](#) and from either the Student Casework Office or the Research Degrees Office.

5.1 Administrative appeals

The University defines an administrative appeal as ‘a request for a review of a decision taken by an individual or body charged with making decisions about any aspect of a student’s access to learning or learning experience with the University which is not an academic decision’.

Decisions about registration processes, fee liability, financial support, exceptional arrangements and reasonable adjustment which are not academic in nature are covered by the Administrative Appeals Procedure.

More information on administrative appeals can be found in the [Help Centre](#).

5.2 Academic appeals

The University defines an academic appeal as ‘a request for a review of a decision of an academic body charged with making decisions on admission, assessment, student progression and awards’.

Decisions about entry requirements, reasonable adjustments for assessment for students with disabilities, progression rules, academic misconduct, thesis submission and the award of qualifications would be covered by the Academic Appeals Procedure.

More information on academic appeals can be found in the [Help Centre](#).

5.3 Complaints

The University defines a complaint as ‘an oral or written expression of dissatisfaction concerning the provision of a programme of study or related academic or administrative service, which is not an appeal against a decision’.

Concerns about the provision of a service or facility or the failure to provide a service or facility, where the standard of the service or facility has fallen below the standard that might reasonably be expected, or where there is a reasonable expectation that the service or facility would be provided, would be covered by the Complaints Procedure.

More information on the complaints procedure can be found in the [Help Centre](#).

5.4 Sources of advice

Advice is available from:

The Research Degrees Office

The Open University
Milton Keynes
MK7 6AA
Phone +44(0)1908 654882
Email research-degrees-office@open.ac.uk

The Student Casework Office

The Open University
PO Box 5155
Milton Keynes
MK7 6YJ
Phone +44(0)1908 659535
Fax +44 (0)1908 659536
Email studentcaseworkoffice@open.ac.uk

The Open University Students' Association

Central office at Walton Hall, Milton Keynes
Email ousa@student.open.ac.uk

The Office of the Independent Adjudicator

Second Floor
Abbey Gate
57 – 75 Kings Road
Reading
RG1 3AB
www.oiahe.org.uk

Casework Support Team: +44 (0)118 959 9813
(Calls to and from this office may be monitored for quality control and training reasons.)

5.5 Other policies and statements

A student can access the University's other regulations, policies and statements on the [Essential documents](#) website.

All policies and statements relevant to research students can be found on the [Graduate School Network](#).

5.6 The Open University's Research Degrees Supervision Policy

Introduction

This policy sets out the University's expectations and requirements for Postgraduate Research Student (PGRS) supervision; it applies to MPhil, PhD and EdD students directly registered and those who are registered through the Affiliated Research Centre programme.

Supervision of postgraduate research students is considered to be an integral and valued aspect of the academic role. It requires ongoing development and reflection in line with departmental, faculty and OU policies.

The policy adheres to the University's equality and diversity principles; it recognises and values diversity of individual students and supervisors. Equally, the policy recognises diversity of arrangements within disciplines. The purpose of the policy is to provide an environment in which research degree supervision takes place in a supportive, enabling and effective way for all but which articulates a set of minimum expectations for all supervisory arrangements.

Appointment of supervisors

Faculties, institutes and Affiliated Research Centres are required to have clear and consistent processes for the eligibility and appointment of supervisory teams. Directors of research degrees (or equivalent, including Research Degree Co-ordinators in Affiliated Research Centres) are responsible, in consultation with their colleagues, for recommending supervision teams to the Research Degrees Committee for approval.

Team supervision enables a breadth of experience and knowledge across the supervisory team. They will typically comprise two internal supervisors, one of whom is named as the main contact, who takes day-to-day responsibility for administrative issues and processes required for student registration, progression and completion. However it is the responsibility of both internal supervisors to provide supervision and to ensure that all administrative elements of the student's registration are completed in a timely manner until completion.

It is recognised that the EdD programme and Affiliated Research Centres will constitute supervision teams from a mix of internal and external supervisors, as appropriate.

Students are allocated to supervisors who have academic competence in their chosen area and should typically be active researchers involved in research in their chosen discipline. The expectation is that supervisors will have a research degree (usually a PhD or professional doctorate) or, for some disciplines, supervisors may not have a research degree but will have demonstrated significant engagement within their research or practice field. It is expected that, within the supervisory team, at least one supervisor will have a doctorate. Engagement in research is defined at the level of institute/faculty/discipline/unit, but needs to be clearly demonstrated, for example through outputs such as peer review articles, books, reports, etc.

Within the supervision team there needs to be experience of supervising at least one UK PhD to successful completion. In addition to this requirement, teams may also demonstrate experience of research degree supervision in a variety of ways including experience of broader research degree processes such as examination (either as an examiner or as an exam panel chair); engagement with the University's training programme for supervisors, or engagement with the University's research development programme for students.

The appointment of external supervisors is determined by the need of the student and any negotiated arrangements for their studies (i.e. co-funded by an external organisation/ industrial partner, or supervised through a DTC partnership) and in the case of Affiliated Research Centres, may be determined by institutional policy. Any external appointment would typically be in addition to the two internal supervisors.

Supporting students

The level and type of support required by students varies during their studies and across institutes/faculties/disciplines. Arrangements between the research student and supervisors may be kept flexible, as long as the team and the institute or faculty Director of Research Degrees are satisfied that adequate support is being provided for the research student and that progress is formally monitored.

The style and approach to supervision will vary by discipline and by the individual needs of the student and supervisors. However, full-time students should normally have a minimum of ten formal supervision meetings in an academic year. Part-time students should normally have five such formal supervision meetings as a minimum in an academic year, ideally with one supervision meeting face-to-face. Formal means that the meeting is scheduled and that there are jointly agreed notes of the meeting and with an agenda.

Meetings with full-time students will usually be face-to-face; however, other arrangements may also be used such as telephone, video conference and Skype. Supervisory meetings with part-time students should be arranged according to whatever means of communication is most appropriate.

Subject to this agreed minimum, the frequency of supervision meetings will vary during the course of a student's research programme especially at key times such as: during the first months of the PhD, prior to the Probationary Review; and approaching thesis submission. Supervisors may also choose to schedule additional meetings with students to help meet their individual learning needs.

Supervision in teams enables short absences to be managed by the supervisory team in consultation with the Head of School or line manager as necessary. Where there is a significant absence of a supervisor alternative support needs to be provided. An absence of over three months requires provision of alternative arrangements agreed within faculty and institute or Affiliated Research Centre.

Where supervisors have been on extended leave, discussions about the viability of returning to supervisory team need to take place. The decision is made based on student need, the stage of the student's studies and the supervisory team.

Supporting supervisors

This policy recognises that research degree supervision is a process that requires a thorough induction and continued ongoing professional development.

Faculties, Institutes and Affiliated Research Centres are responsible for allocating sufficient time for supervisors to carry out the duties required for quality supervision and support of students.

Supervisors are required to undertake initial training within the first 6-12 months of beginning the role within the University or within the Affiliated Research Centre. This includes experienced supervisors who are new to the University as well as newly qualified supervisors.

Training is provided within the University to support supervisors in the development of their role. Within the institute/faculty/unit the career development and staff appraisal (CDSA) process provides individual supervisors with the opportunity to discuss their training needs and workload concerning supervision with their line manager. This enables support and the

identification of ongoing development/training opportunities relevant for the role at a disciplinary level. Affiliated Research Centres are responsible for ensuring that supervisors have access to training to support the development of their role.

Development needs and performance issues are managed through the usual line management processes.

Where there are concerns about quality of supervision, directors of research degrees (or equivalent, including Research Degrees Co-ordinator in Affiliated Research Centres) can, where required, provide feedback to line managers.

Where supervisors have concerns about the quality or progress of a student's work, the relevant Director of Research Degrees (or Research Degrees Co-ordinator in an Affiliated Research Centre) supports the team through a number of actions including the procedure for managing unsatisfactory progress.

Part 6 Contact details

Research and Academic Strategy Unit

Research Degrees Office

The Open University
Walton Hall
Milton Keynes
MK7 6AA
Phone +44 (0)1908 654882
Email research-degrees-office@open.ac.uk

The Research Degrees Office is open from 08:30 to 17:00, Monday to Thursday and 08:30 to 16:30 on Fridays.

Research and Enterprise Office

Phone +44 (0)1908 659531
Fax +44 (0)1908 655477

For advice on intellectual property assignment and technology transfer:
Email enterprise@open.ac.uk

For advice on support for research funding:
Email research-support@open.ac.uk

Research Ethics

Phone +44 (0)1908 654858
Email research-ethics@open.ac.uk
Website www.open.ac.uk/research/ethics/

Research Career Development

Phone +44 (0)1908 653677
Fax +44 (0)1908 655477
Email research-training-development@open.ac.uk

Faculty offices

Contact details for all research areas can be found on the [faculties and institutes](#) section on our website.

Other areas of the University

Ceremonies Centre

The Open University
PO Box 123
Milton Keynes
MK7 6DQ
Phone +44 (0)1908 653003
Email ceremonies@open.ac.uk

Student Casework Office

The Open University
PO Box 5155
Milton Keynes
MK7 6YJ
Phone 01908 659535
Fax +44 (0)1908 659536
Email studentcaseworkoffice@open.ac.uk

Data Protection Coordinator

The Open University
PO Box 497
Milton Keynes
MK7 6AT
Email data-protection@open.ac.uk

The Open University Library

Walton Hall
Milton Keynes
MK7 6AA
Phone +44 (0)1908 659001
Fax +44 (0)1908 653571
Email Lib-help@open.ac.uk

Open University Computing Helpdesk

The Open University
Walton Hall
Milton Keynes
MK7 6AA
Phone +44 (0)1908 653972
Website www.open.ac.uk/students/helpdesk

Open University Students Association

The Open University
PO Box 397
Milton Keynes
MK7 6BE
Phone +44 (0)1908 652026
Email ousa@student.open.ac.uk

Open University Student Budget Accounts Ltd (OUSBA)

The Open University
PO Box 508
Milton Keynes
MK7 6BX
Phone +44 (0)1908 655777
Local rate (UK only) 0300 303 7444
Email ousba@open.ac.uk

Statistics Advisory Service

Department of Statistics
The Open University
Walton Hall
Milton Keynes
MK7 6AA
Email Stats-Advisory@open.ac.uk
Website http://statistics.open.ac.uk/advisory_service