

## Research Degrees Handbook 2021 - 2022

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This handbook provides information regarding the services available to research degree students, and advice about what to do at key points in the student journey. It should be read in conjunction with the [Research Degree Regulations](#) and the [Conditions of Registration for Postgraduate Research \(PGR\) Students](#).

This handbook has been prepared by the Graduate School and the Business and Online Support Services unit of The Open University.

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.

The Open University is incorporated by Royal Charter (RC 000391), an exempt charity in England & Wales and a charity registered in Scotland (SC 038302). The Open University is authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority in relation to its secondary activity of credit broking.

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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 this is reflected in its research which has the same openness and global reach. The research community comprises nearly 1,000 postgraduate research students, based at the state-of-the-art research facilities on campus in Milton Keynes, offsite, or working in one of the University's 20 Affiliated Research Centres (ARCs) around the world. 161 students were awarded research degrees by The Open University in the academic year 2019/20.

Our innovative research and development ranks in the top third of all UK universities and influences national and international policy and practice; it 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 together with the [Conditions of Registration for PGR Students](#) and the [Research Degree Regulations](#) prior to registration and subsequently referred to throughout registration. Upon acceptance of an offer of registration, students will be bound by the [Conditions of Registration for PGR Students](#), the [Research Degree Regulations](#) and relevant policies on the [Forms and Guidance section](#) of the Graduate School Network website.

### **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. The [GSN](#) has links to all of the University's policies, statements and regulations.

## **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 faculty-aligned Student Recruitment and Support Centres (SRSC's) 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 Open University Graduate School launched in October 2016, and is a focal point for research degree community support. It leads on the development of research degree community networks, partnerships and training pathways to support an open, engaged and digitally literate research student community. It promotes wellbeing and personal development and widening access to postgraduate opportunities.

#### **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
- extend the student's experience
- provide access to a wider range of experience and expertise to assist the student in the development and execution of their project
- 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.

One form of collaboration is undertaken through Affiliated Research Centres that are independent research institutions undertaking that register research degree students through The Open University. The University has 19 Affiliated Research Centres around the world, within which approximately 230 students are engaged in research degree studies.

## **1.2 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
- inequalities are challenged
- 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 Graduate School in the first instance. The Research Degree Student Administrators will be pleased to help, and 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](mailto: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.

### **1.3 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)
- Professional Doctorate e.g. Doctorate in Education (EdD) (part-time) and Doctorate in Health and Social Care (DHSC) (part-time).



## **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, be 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 staff members to undertake a PhD by Published work. This is a separate degree pathway and any staff member intending to submit a portfolio of published works 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](#).

## **Professional Doctorate**

Professional doctorates are work-based programmes and studied part time. They offer you the chance to enhance your professional career to doctoral level enabling you to make a unique contribution to your profession, while continuing to work and progress in your field.

Professional doctorates aim to equip practitioners with the research skills, expertise and confidence to advance their practice and become champions of change within their areas of professional practice. The programmes promote the creation and interpretation of new professional knowledge and practice, contributing to the development of new ideas, methods or approaches.

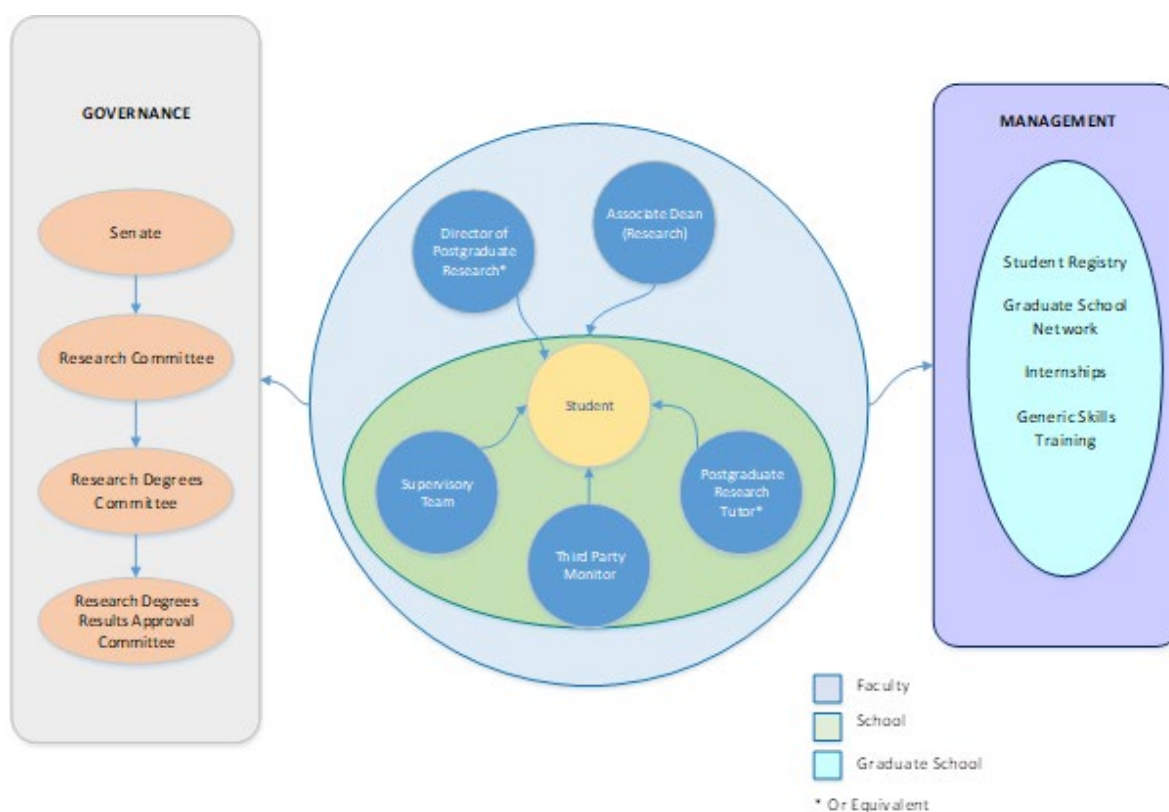
A Professional Doctorate may be awarded to a candidate who has demonstrated, through the presentation and defence of a thesis, to the satisfaction of the examiners, that the expectations outlined in Appendix 1B of the [Research Degree Regulations](#) have been met.

### 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.

## 1.4 Organisational structure for supporting research students

Figure 1 Organisation of research degrees



### 1.4.1 Governance

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. Research degree policies, regulations and services for research students are reviewed annually and are aligned with the [UK Quality Code For Higher Education](#).

The Research Degrees Committee includes representatives of the University's faculties and research degree students (one full-time and one part-time).

### **1.4.2 Management**

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 Team within the Graduate School 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 regulations, policies, 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 and a third party monitor.

The Associate Dean (Research) or Director of Postgraduate Studies<sup>1</sup> has oversight of all research students in their faculty. This person is 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 the research student journey.

### **1.4.3 Supervision and Third-party monitoring**

#### **Supervision**

MPhil/PhD research students have two internal supervisors who are members of the University's academic staff and who are equally responsible for supervision. One of the supervisors will be the lead supervisor and will take day to day responsibility for the administrative issues and processes required for student registration, progression and completion. Students may also have an external supervisor appointed from an institution of higher education or a research institute who can provide additional expertise.

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<sup>1</sup> Or equivalent

Supervisors and faculty offices will make appropriate practical arrangements for students depending on the 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 at induction and will be able to build networks of contacts at The Open University and in the wider research community.

At the beginning of their studies students and supervisors should discuss, and come to agree the day-to-day arrangements, including supervision meetings and key study milestones such as upgrade and progress monitoring, both of which are formally assessed in accordance with the regulations.

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 these formal meetings with their supervisors and keep an agreed written record, which is uploaded onto the PGR Manager system. 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/skype). 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. All are uploaded onto the PGR Manager system under Supervision Meetings.

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

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

## **Third-party monitoring**

All students 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). 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 and following this sessions should be at least annually. Further details relating to third party monitors can be found in section 6 of the [Research Degree Regulations](#).

### **1.5 What a student should do if they need help**

Throughout a student's studies, the University strives to provide the best support and guidance, in order to help towards the successful completion of their 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 the ability to study. A student may also find that the project is not progressing as well as hoped.

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 ask for a study break and sometimes renegotiate deadlines. The student may also address concerns to the Post-Graduate Research Tutor, Faculty Director of Research Degrees, Deputy Associate Dean (Research) 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. [Part 5](#) of this handbook explains the processes for 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 Graduate School directly. Contact details can be found in [Part 6](#).

## **1.6 Administrative arrangements**

The Research Degree Team within the Graduate School will be the main point of contact within the University on administrative matters. The Graduate School plays a major role in enhancing the quality of the University's research degree provision and the experience of its research students and develops and implements policy that is approved through the governance structure. The Graduate School can also provide letters in support of visa applications, transcripts, and stamps for railcard and Oyster card applications.

The team of Research Degree Student Administrators provides advice and guidance on a wide range of topics before, during or after a student registers. This includes information on registration and fees, payment of grants and expenses, financial support, key points in a student's studies such as upgrade, progress reporting and examination.

The Research Degree Team within the Graduate School 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 Graduate School is part of the Research, Enterprise and Scholarship 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 Academic Professional Development (APD) team and the Graduate School are responsible for providing the professional development framework for researchers at all stages of their career. The Graduate School organises training to meet the development needs of pre-upgrade students, while APD's focus is on later-stage PGRs, ECRs and academics. 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.

## 1.7 The Graduate School – Student Opportunities

### Entrepreneurship

The Open University organise an annual entrepreneurship competition seeking the top ideas from within the university's student population. Postgraduate students are encouraged to enter an idea, especially if there is the possibility of commercialising an element of their research. The OU can provide feedback on business models and expert advice on intellectual property. Postgraduate students are also encouraged to take advantage of unique entrepreneurial skills training at various points throughout the year.

Internships - The Open University offers postgraduate research students three month full-time paid internships with small to medium sized organisations (SMEs). The SMEs can be charitable or social enterprises as well as commercial/industrial organisations. This is an exciting opportunity for students to enhance their employability by developing additional skills and gaining work experience that will prove invaluable for their future careers.

This scheme is sponsored and co-funded by Santander Universities and places students with SMEs from any sector. There may be opportunities to undertake an internship with larger organisations, but these would not be eligible for the funding from Santander.

The programme is suitable for Open University students who are either in the middle of their research degree or are near completion/have recently completed their degree.

### Teaching

The Open University partners with the charity 'The Brilliant Club' to provide its postgraduate researchers with opportunities to gain teaching experience. Through working as a tutor with The Brilliant Club, you will:

- Join a community of over 1200 researchers working to make access to university fair for school pupils from underrepresented backgrounds
- Develop teaching experience through small group tutorial delivery
- Receive high-quality training and support
- Enhance your employability skills
- Disseminate your research to a unique, non-expert audience in the local community
- Be paid £500 per placement.

## **Research Poster Competition**

The Open University runs an annual Postgraduate Research Student Poster Competition which offers a unique way to engage the wider university community with your research. 21<sup>st</sup> century researchers need to be able to convey their research ideas to a broad audience. This competition, judged by senior staff representing major activities across the Open University, provides students with the opportunity to practice these skills.

The competition provides students with the opportunity to meet other students from across the University and make useful contacts whilst raising their own profile. Students will gain useful experience in creating and presenting a poster to a non-specialist audience and when the competition is finished the posters can be used at further networking events, conferences and displayed within schools.

## **Social Interaction**

The Graduate School operate a lively social media network of over 1000 members. Postgraduate Researchers are encouraged to join the Twittersphere and share their research degree experience with the Graduate School. There are also Facebook groups for postgraduate research students researching at a distance and regular social events at our campus in Milton Keynes.



## Part 2 Essential information

This section contains essential information for research degree registration with The Open University.

### 2.1 University regulations, policies and codes of practice

#### Regulations

The [Research Degree Regulations](#) should not be read in isolation. It is important they are read in conjunction with other documentation including the University's general regulations, the Conditions of Registration for PGR Students, the Code of Practice for Student Discipline, this handbook, and other relevant documents referred to therein. Below is a non-exhaustive list of the documents that students should refer to:

- [Code of Practice of Research](#)
- [Fee Rules \(Postgraduate Research\) 2021/22](#)
- [Student Privacy Notice](#)
- [Complaints and Appeals Procedure](#)
- [Procedure for Dealing with Allegations of Research Malpractice or Misconduct \(PDF, 126KB\)](#)
- [Code of Practice for Student Discipline](#)
- [Student Computing Policy](#)
- [Open University Student Charter](#)
- [Plagiarism](#)
- [Research Ethics](#)
- [Fitness to Study Policy](#)

The [Research Degree Regulations](#) form part of a student's contract with the University and any questions about them should be addressed to the Graduate School.

### **2.1.1 Attendance and Residence requirements**

Attendance and residence requirements are outlined within section 8 of the [Research Degree Regulations](#).

Exceptions to the residency requirements can be considered where a student needs to be based at a distance from the University campus in order to undertake their research, or to fulfil work or caring responsibilities. In such cases it is imperative that the Faculty can demonstrate that regular and adequate supervision can be maintained and that the student remains fully integrated into the research environment.

### **2.1.2 Study hours, annual leave and paid work**

Section 8 of the [Research Degree Regulations](#) provides information on the expectations regarding minimum study hours, annual leave entitlement and paid work.

Please note, however, that regardless of mode of study, where a student is funded they must comply with the terms and conditions of their offer letter.

### **2.1.3 Absences and other disruptions**

A student must inform their supervisors and the Research Degrees Team in the Graduate School if they are absent, or if their studies are disrupted for any reason including illness or injury for a week or more and a study break request should be submitted as soon as possible thereafter. A student who knows in advance that they are going to be absent for a month or more should request a study break ahead of time. Overly late requests for study break are not assured.

Supervisors and Associate Deans (Research)/ Deputy Associate Deans/Directors of Postgraduate Studies are required to notify the Research Degrees Team in the Graduate School 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.

### **2.1.4 Study Break**

A student may submit a request for a study break to suspend their registration in accordance with section 9 of the [Research Degree Regulations](#). Suspensions of registration are not punitive but are designed to provide the student with a break in studies during times of need e.g. to cover a period of ill health.

For a student in receipt of a stipend there are financial implications of taking a study break. There is no additional funding to cover the period of the study break, 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 study break. 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 study break.

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

### **2.1.5 Extensions**

In exceptional circumstances a student may extend their registration in accordance with section 10 of the [Research Degree Regulations](#) though extensions to registration are not an automatic right. Where study has been disrupted students are expected to have requested a study break at the point of need. Students and supervisors are responsible for managing the research within the registration time frames and for flagging any issues to the Graduate School in a timely fashion.

### **2.1.6 Maternity, paternity and adoption leave**

Subject to meeting a minimum period of registration<sup>2</sup> by the expected week of confinement, funded research students are entitled to maternity leave plus unpaid maternity leave, in addition to standard study break entitlement. The same applies where a child is being adopted if the student is the primary carer. Two weeks of unpaid paternity leave may be taken in addition to the standard study break 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](#)).

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<sup>2</sup> Please contact the Research Degrees Team in the Graduate School for further information on minimum registration periods.

### **2.1.7 Withdrawal**

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

Where a student decides to withdraw, the supervisor or student will need to submit a withdrawal request and input it onto the PGR Manager system under change requests, withdrawals where they are reviewed by the Graduate School Director for approval.

Students who allow their registration to lapse without having submitted their thesis, or fail to return from a period of study break, 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.

### **2.1.8 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.

### **2.1.9 Feedback**

The Open University reviews the regulations, codes of practice and policies periodically and would welcome any comments. It also 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 Graduate School (contact details are in [Part 6](#)) with any feedback.

## **2.2 Prevent principles**

As an institution of higher education, the Open University has an important role in providing appropriate platforms to challenge extremist views and ideologies. It achieves this 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 Open University Prevent Principles agreed by The Council November 2015. For further details please visit [Prevent Principles](#).

## 2.3 International Students

### 2.3.1 UKVI (UK Visas and Immigration)

The Open University welcomes students from all over the world to its research degree programme. It recognises that coming to the UK to start a degree programme is exciting, but can sometimes be overwhelming. The University can help the student to settle in, and provide 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 Student Route Visa Holder 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 Student Route visas. Full details of the immigration regulations for students can be found at [UKVI](#).

A student requiring a Student Route visa will need 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 Student Route Sponsor the university will need to copy and verify a student's passport and visa for each year that they are registered as an Open University student. The university keep records of attendance/absence and monitors these to ensure compliance and make them available to the [UKVI](#).

A student studying on a Student Route visa must tell the Graduate School immediately if:

- their contact details change at any point in their studies;
- they are leaving the country;
- 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 Graduate SchoThe 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 that they are compliant with the up-to-date national and Open University requirements, as they may change during the registration period.

### **2.3.2 Residency Waivers**

Please note that residency waivers will not be accepted for Student Route students at any stage of their study. This includes the writing up period.

### **2.3.3 Study Break**

Students who have entered the UK on a Student Route visa sponsored by The Open University, who are considering suspending their registration as a study break, should consult the Graduate School as it may affect the terms and conditions relating to their leave to remain in the UK.

### **2.3.4 Maternity, Paternity and Adoption Leave**

Any Student Route students considering taking maternity, paternity or adoption leave must consult the Graduate School as it affects the terms and conditions relating to their leave to remain in the UK.

## **2.4 Fees**

The Fee Rules (Postgraduate Research) 21/22 which includes information on sources of financial support can be found at [Fee Rules](#). All students should read the policy prior to registration.

The university will provide reasonable notice of any changes to the policy and the date that they will take effect.

From 2018, the UK government has introduced loans of up to £25,700, 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 product and the eligibility criteria are available on the [Graduate School Network](#).

## **2.5 Information**

### **2.5.1 Manual of Operational Procedures (MOP)**

Within the [Forms and Guidance](#) section of the Graduate School Network there is a tab for the Manual of Operational Procedures (MOP). The MOP contains information and links to policies on a wide range of issues relating to the student journey, codes of practice and University policies (e.g. Public interest disclosure).

### **2.5.2 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](#).

## 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





### **3.1.1 Offer and Acceptance**

Prior to acceptance of an offer of registration students are expected to familiarise themselves with the [Conditions of Registration for PGR Students](#), the [Research Degree Regulations](#) and the [Fee Rules \(Postgraduate Research\)](#). Once a student accepts an offer of registration, the University will send information on completing registration and beginning life as an Open University research student.

### **3.1.2 Registration**

Students may register to start on either 1 October or 1 February each year. Students must come on to campus to register, to complete the relevant paperwork and to provide original proof of identity and original copies of qualifications for verification. Self-funded students will need to pay their fees prior to registration which can be done by phone.

Full time students are registered for a maximum of four years, whilst part-time students are registered for a maximum of eight years. Upon registration all students will be given a 'maximum registration date' by which they must submit their thesis for examination. A student who fails to submit their thesis by this date will be deemed to have withdrawn from the course. The maximum registration date will be adjusted to take into account any periods of suspended registration or changes to mode of study. Minimum periods of study can be found in section 7 of the [Research Degree Regulations](#).

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).

### **Upgrade assessment**

Upon admission to the research degree programme, regardless of the qualification aim, all students are registered for the degree of Master of Philosophy (MPhil).

Student registration at this stage is probationary. Continued registration beyond year 1 for full-time students and beyond year 2 for part-time students intending to read for a PhD is dependent on the student passing upgrade. This requires the student to be assessed (see section 3.1.4) and a recommendation made about continuing registration and specific degree registration to the Chair of Research Degrees Committee. Students who do not pass upgrade will not be eligible for continued registration.

## Continued registration

For those students whose aim is to obtain an MPhil, confirmation of continued registration must be completed within the following time frames:

- a) 7 months for a full time student
- b) 14 months for a part time student

This will follow the upgrade process for students intending to read for a PhD.

Where a student successfully completes upgrade or has confirmed continuation of registration, registration will continue until submission of the final thesis or until the maximum registration date as set out in the offer letter (or any subsequent correspondence from the Graduate School). This is subject to the proviso that the student continues to maintain satisfactory academic progress, adheres to the [Conditions of Registration for PGR students](#), the [Research Degree Regulations](#) and the Codes of Practice listed therein and in section 2.2.

### 3.1.3 Induction

There will be a number of induction events that newly-registered students are expected to attend.

APD and the Graduate School work together with other Faculties and Units to organise induction events in October and February for each new intake of PGRs. At Induction, students are shown how to access the Graduate School Network pages (GSN), assess their training needs, and book places on relevant training courses.

International students who are new to the UK are invited to attend bespoke induction events to help them get settled in the UK, direct them towards sources of support and information, and ensure that, where appropriate, they are supported to meet visa requirements.

In addition, Faculties and Schools will provide local induction activities to ensure students are settled and ready to begin their studies. For example, supervisors and faculty offices will make appropriate practical arrangements for students depending on mode and place of study e.g. any keys, security passes, library and computer access, health and safety training and any workstation assessment needed. Students will be introduced to the Graduate School network, staff and fellow students and will be able to build networks of contacts at The Open University and in the wider research community.

In addition and 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 and forms a requirement for passing probation.

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](#).

Many Faculties have their own peer-mentorship or 'buddy' systems for new starters. The Graduate School also operates a university-wide student "buddy" scheme, through which new PGRs can be put in touch with student mentors.

#### **3.1.4 Upgrade assessment**

Upgrade is a precursor to progression to PhD registration. Students are responsible for carrying out their upgrade assessments within the appropriate time frames with the support and guidance of their supervisors. If any ethical reviews or approval is required for the research study the expectation is that this will be completed prior to upgrade ([see section 3.1.4.1](#)). As part of the upgrade process students are asked to confirm that they have undertaken plagiarism training ([see section 3.1.4.2](#)) and completed a skills audit.

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

#### **Deadlines**

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

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

It is imperative that the upgrade reporting forms reach the Graduate School in time for the process to be completed (i.e. by the 11th month for full-time students and by the 23rd month for part-time students). The Research Degrees Team 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.

## Outcomes

Based on the evidence obtained during the upgrade assessment the outcome will be one of the following:

- registration for the degree of Master of Philosophy (MPhil);
- registration for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD); or  
revisions will be reviewed, and further registration will depend on it having been completed to the satisfaction of the assessors and confirmed by the Graduate School Director.
- or
- registration should be terminated due to failure to make satisfactory academic progress and a failure to meet the upgrade criteria.

### 3.1.4.1 Ethics review/approval

All research degree students planning any research involving human participants, data gathered from human participants or human tissue, must carry out a thorough assessment of any ethics implications associated with their research, in discussion with their supervisors. As an integral part of this process students should complete the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) Project Registration and Risk Checklist and return it to [Research-REC-Review@open.ac.uk](mailto:Research-REC-Review@open.ac.uk). The HREC Chair/Deputy Chair will assess the checklist to determine whether a full ethics review is required.

Where it is clear, from the answers to the checklist, that a research proposal contains inherent risks e.g. participants include children or vulnerable adults, then the checklist should be bypassed and the research student should apply for a full ethics review by completing the HREC application form.

All HREC forms (both the checklist and the application form) must be signed by the student's supervisor and the student.

It is imperative that no potential research participants are approached to take part in any research until formal ethics approval has been granted by the Human Research Ethics Committee, so the ethics review must take place before the data collection phase of the research project commences.

More information about the human research ethics review process can be found on the [Human Research Ethics](#) website.

### **3.1.4.2 Plagiarism**

Plagiarism is the use of the work of other people (including text, images and ideas) 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 and undertakes plagiarism training. In cases of suspected plagiarism, the university will follow the 'Procedure of dealing with allegations of academic misconduct and malpractice'. 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 probation report of the thesis for examination.

### **3.1.5 Progress monitoring**

Progress monitoring provides regular opportunities for a student and their supervisors to review work and to make plans on the future direction of the research. It also provides an opportunity for the student and all of the supervisory team to reflect on academic progression. Re-registration is conditional on a student maintaining academic progress. If there are any concerns about a student's progress, they will be given the opportunity by the university to get back on track via support from the Faculty and School support network. The supervisors and the student should plan any remedial action with reference to the Procedures for addressing failure to make satisfactory academic progress, Appendix 3 of the [Research Degree Regulations](#).

Progress monitoring reports are required for all MPhil/PhD research students. Progress is formally monitored once per year. A single report should be submitted to the Research Degrees Team with oversight of progress by the Research Degrees Committee. The progress reports should be submitted by the faculty/Institute to the Graduate School on an annual basis and should encompass a student's progress throughout the previous year.

The regulations relating to academic progression can be found in section 16 of the [Research Degree Regulations](#).

### **3.1.6 Writing Up**

A funded student will be encouraged to complete their thesis within their period of funding. Prior to starting to write the thesis, which should take the form of a monograph, students and supervisors should refer to the Open University Thesis Submission Guidelines which provide information on the presentation of the thesis. These guidelines are available in the [A-Z forms and guidance](#) section on the Graduate School Network.

Reference may also be made in documentation (e.g. Fee Rules (Postgraduate Research)) to the 'writing up' period. This is a time limited period in which the student is solely engaged in writing their thesis and is not undertaking any substantive research. The 'writing up' period normally coincides with the final year of registration and may incur a reduced fee liability. For full-time students this may be year four of registration. For part-time students the 'writing up' period may be year eight of registration. For any student to be designated as being in the 'writing up' period the student and the supervisor must confirm that the student will submit the thesis within that year.

### **3.1.7 Thesis Submission**

Section 17 of the [Research Degree Regulations](#) provide detailed information as to what is required for thesis submission. Additional information is provided in The Open University Thesis Submission Guidelines which are available on the [Graduate School Network](#).

Thesis 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 to submit is received, normally in advance of submission by three months, the supervisors will nominate an exam panel which is assessed by the Associate Dean (Research) (or delegate) and if meets the criteria will be submitted to the Research Degrees Committee for approval. 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.

### **3.1.8 Examination**

Section 19 of the [Research Degree Regulations](#) provide detailed information as to what is required during the examination process. Additional information is provided in 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 the publication of papers, originality and joint work, the length and format of the thesis and any 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.

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. Invitation to attend is at the student's discretion and should form part of the Examination Panel Nomination process.

### **3.1.9 Results Approval**

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 and must be approved by the Research Degrees Examination Results Approval Committee (RDRAC). 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 as to what is required. Students will continue to receive advice from supervisors whilst undertaking any corrections and amendments. Details are outlined in section 19 of the [Research Degree Regulations](#).

### **Award of degrees**

If no corrections are required, the degree is awarded with effect from the date the examiners' recommendations are approved by RDRAC. Where post-examination corrections are required, the date of the degree awarded will correspond to the date that the examiners approve the corrected thesis.

When RDRAC confirms that the thesis meets the requirements for the award of a degree, the student must submit copies (see [The Open University Thesis Submission Guidelines](#)) 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.

## 3.2 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 become 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.

## 3.3 Directory of graduates

The names of graduates attending each degree ceremony 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 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.**



## Part 4 Facilities and services

For funded students the University provides research facilities (laboratories, computers, workstations). For studentships that are not covered by a stipend, arrangements for access to research facilities is by 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 their research by enabling them 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](#).

The [document delivery service and inter-lending library service](#) 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](#) which is open to all students. This includes an introduction to Library Services and Smarter searching with Library databases.

There is also a programme of face-to-face training and online training for research students. 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](mailto:library-research-support@open.ac.uk).

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 Research Support team provide advice, guidance and support in the [management of research data](#). [Open Research Data Online](#) (ORDO) is The Open University's research data repository.

[EThOS](#), a service from the British Library, provides free online access to a large selection of UK PhD theses from participating universities. [ORO](#) provides access to a growing collection of Open University-awarded theses. These will give an insight into the structure of theses, different approaches to research, and how to develop a thesis. 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 including National Libraries.

### **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](mailto: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 including the PGR Manager system. 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](#).

### 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](mailto: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 with 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](#).

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](#). 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.

#### **4.5 Indemnity insurance**

The University has indemnity insurance for full-time and part-time directly supported students carrying out research related to their studies on University premises or carrying out University business (specifically on behalf of the University) elsewhere. (Note that this insurance is subject to the normal terms and conditions that apply to the University's other insurances.) This insurance does not cover off-site field work. An appropriate risk assessment should be carried out for all off-site field work.

#### **4.6 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),

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 a student has a disability or additional needs they should discuss with their supervisor how these might impact on their studies and inform the Graduate School. 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, for example.

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 and the School and Faculty.

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

## 4.7 Professional development as a researcher

### Research skills development

The [Vitae Researcher Development Framework](#), (RDF) 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 professional researchers. In addition to supporting Postgraduate Researchers (PGRs) who are looking to pursue careers in research or academia, the Framework emphasises employability and transferable skills, and its employability lens provides an overview of the knowledge, behaviours and attributes most frequently desired by employers of doctorate holders. Students, as early career researchers, can expect to acquire these over the lifetime of their research degree programme.

The Vitae RDF is licensed for use by all Open University (OU) PGRs and supports a skills audit at the beginning of registration, to help the student to identify their training needs. The planner then enables researchers to monitor their skills development by providing a progress file log of all the skills they have acquired through the course of their degree. More information can be found at the [RDF website, and further resources](#) are also available through the [Vitae](#) website (alternative methods of auditing and logging progress are also accepted and encouraged at the OU).

The [Graduate School Network](#) (GSN) and Academic Development Team (APD) form the gateway to online training and development resources at the OU. Together they co-ordinate a wide range of professional development resources which are intended to support and supplement the research skills training available in the Faculties. They offer a wide range of face-to-face and online research training events and provide tools and learning resources to help students identify their training requirements, and work with their supervisors to build a personalised training programme which meets their development needs. Further details of resources and training events are available at the GSN website and on [My Learning Centre](#) website. PGRs can also contact the Academic Professional Development Team (APD) at [academic-professional-development@open.ac.uk](mailto:academic-professional-development@open.ac.uk) to request information on the programme.

## **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 can also access the careers section on the [Graduate School Network](#) for specific advice on:

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

You can also [request a consultation with the Career Team](#).

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](mailto: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.

### **4.8 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 bell ringing – there's something for everyone and staff are welcome too! More recently we've also begun encouraging students to set up more informal, common interest groups that we call [Clubs](#).

Our [Community team](#) are the best people to contact if you're interested in meeting other postgrads at events or as part of the Postgraduate Students Society.

## Meet OU students

Local coffee mornings and pub meet-ups are being organised by OU students across the country. They are a great way to find out more about the Association and meet new friends. [Find out about meet-ups](#) on our website or why not contact us and we can help you set up your own Meet-up?

## 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 routes for research students to be involved in student voice activity and have their voice heard. You can apply to be a [student member of an OU research committee](#).

There are many other ways to shape the work of both the Students Association and The Open University and every two years, you have the opportunity to stand for election to become part of our [student leadership team](#).

For other volunteer roles check out the [volunteering](#) pages of oustudents.com.

## **Student support**

Studying can be hard, and we know that OU students have a lot of commitments to juggle as well as study. Sometimes you need an extra bit of support to help you along your academic journey. The Association offers a variety of support services and works with external support providers to help you. To complement the University's support services, we offer the following:

### **Peer Support**

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

### **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.

### **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 a [TOTUM](#) 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 online roles such as Forum Moderators and Library Study Volunteers, to student facing ones such as Meet-up Hosts and Graduation Volunteers, to representative roles such as Central Committee Representatives and members of the student leadership team!

## **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!

## **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](#) 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](mailto:alumni@open.ac.uk)

[www.open.ac.uk/alumni](http://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](#) 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](mailto: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 Graduate School.

### **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 Team**

The Open University

Milton Keynes

MK7 6AA

Phone +44(0)1908 653806

Email [research-degrees-office@open.ac.uk](mailto: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](mailto:studentcaseworkoffice@open.ac.uk)

#### **The Open University Students' Association**

Central office at Walton Hall, Milton Keynes

Email [ousa@student.open.ac.uk](mailto: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](http://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 [Student Policies and Regulations](#) 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 Professional Doctorate students directly registered and those who are registered through the Affiliated Research Centre (ARC) 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 Open University 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 ARCs 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-coordinators 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 ARCs 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 ARCs, 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 ARC.

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 ARCs 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 ARC. 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. ARCs 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-coordinator in ARCs) 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-coordinator in an ARC) supports the team through a number of actions including the procedure for managing unsatisfactory progress.

## **Part 6 Contact details**

### **Research Enterprise and Scholarship Unit**

#### **Graduate School**

The Open University  
Walton Hall  
Milton Keynes  
MK7 6AA

Phone +44 (0)1908 653806

Email [research-degrees-office@open.ac.uk](mailto:research-degrees-office@open.ac.uk)

The Graduate School 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](mailto:enterprise@open.ac.uk)

For advice on support for research funding:

Email [research-support@open.ac.uk](mailto:research-support@open.ac.uk)

#### **Research Ethics**

Phone +44 (0)1908 654858

Email [research-ethics@open.ac.uk](mailto:research-ethics@open.ac.uk)

Website [www.open.ac.uk/research/ethics/](http://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](mailto:research-training-development@open.ac.uk)

#### **Faculty offices**

Contact details for all research areas can be found on the [research 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](mailto: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](mailto:studentcaseworkoffice@open.ac.uk)

### **Data Protection Coordinator**

The Open University

PO Box 497

Milton Keynes

MK7 6AT

Email [data-protection@open.ac.uk](mailto: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](mailto: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](http://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](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto:Stats-Advisory@open.ac.uk)

Website [www.mathematics.open.ac.uk/research/research/statistics/advisory-service](http://www.mathematics.open.ac.uk/research/research/statistics/advisory-service)