

Research Degrees in Affiliated Research Centres Handbook – 2021 - 2022

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

This handbook has been prepared by the 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.

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Introduction

Welcome to research at the The Open University

The Open University's mission is to be open to people, places, methods and ideas. This is reflected in its research which has the same openness and global reach. The research community comprises nearly 1,000 postgraduate research students, at the state-of-the-art research facilities on campus in Milton Keynes, offsite, or working in the University's Affiliated Research Centres (ARCs) around the world. 161 students were awarded research degrees by The Open University in the academic year 2019 - 2020.

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

In the Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2014, 72 percent of all Open University research submitted was graded as internationally excellent or world leading. In music, 94 percent of research was assessed as internationally excellent and above, ranking it 8th in the UK in its field. 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 was used for the BBC TV programme, Frozen Planet, which was 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, supporting 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. Online training resources that support student development are available on the [GSN](#). All of the University's forms, guidance, policies, statements and regulations can also be found on this [website](#).

Part 1 Research degrees at The Open University

1.1 The Open University

The Open University is a world leader in modern distance learning, the pioneer of teaching and learning methods that enable people to achieve their career and life goals 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 partnership the University is 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 (SRSCs) and national centres located in Scotland, Wales, the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland.

Over 1000 full-time academic and research staff are employed by the University, the majority of whom are based at Walton Hall which is the administrative and operational centre of the University and where most of the research is undertaken.

The University has 19 Affiliated Research Centres around the world, within which approximately 230 students are engaged in research degree studies.

The Open University Graduate School launched in October 2016, and is a focal point for research degree community support, facilitates 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.

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

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). 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 awards three higher degrees by research:

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

The Open University also offers the opportunity for a 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 The Affiliated Research Centre (ARC) programme

The ARC Programme enables leading research institutes who do not have their own degree awarding powers, to provide doctoral training with the support of The Open University. ARCs may register students across the full range of areas of The Open University academic excellence for a UK postgraduate research degree.

Standards

The Open University will ensure that the research degrees awarded to students at ARCs are consistent and comparable in standard with similar degrees throughout higher education in the United Kingdom in accordance with the requirements of the [Quality Code for Higher Education](#).

The University conditions

Full-time and part-time students may undertake an Open University research degree at an ARC that has met the conditions set by the University, which are available on request. The University needs to be satisfied that the research environment of an ARC is a suitable one in which to undertake research leading to a research degree.

Formal agreement

Approved ARCs have entered into a formal agreement with The Open University. In the agreement the organisation has confirmed that it accepts responsibility for:

- the general arrangements under which each student's research is carried out, including arrangements for academic supervision and the provision of adequate facilities and training to enable the student to conduct and complete the research programme efficiently and safely
- proposing examination arrangements to the University for approval
- the conduct of examinations.

The agreement requires ARCs to undergo periodic reviews, and to produce an annual report.

Outside the UK

In addition to fulfilling the criteria set out above, organisations outside the UK will have been approved as ARCs provided that:

- the students can be prepared for a UK research degree
- the students have sufficient command of English to produce and defend their theses in English
- the supervisory teams have had experience of supervising UK research degree students to successful completion
- the examiners have had experience of examining UK research degree students
- the students are required to undertake viva voce examinations in English.

Research Degrees Coordinators

ARCs appoint a member of staff who coordinates the arrangements for the operation of The Open University research degree programme within the ARC. This person is known as the Research Degrees Coordinator and is the main point of contact between the ARC and The Open University.

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. The ARC may set up formal cooperation with one or more other bodies, known as collaborating establishments. This cooperation is intended:

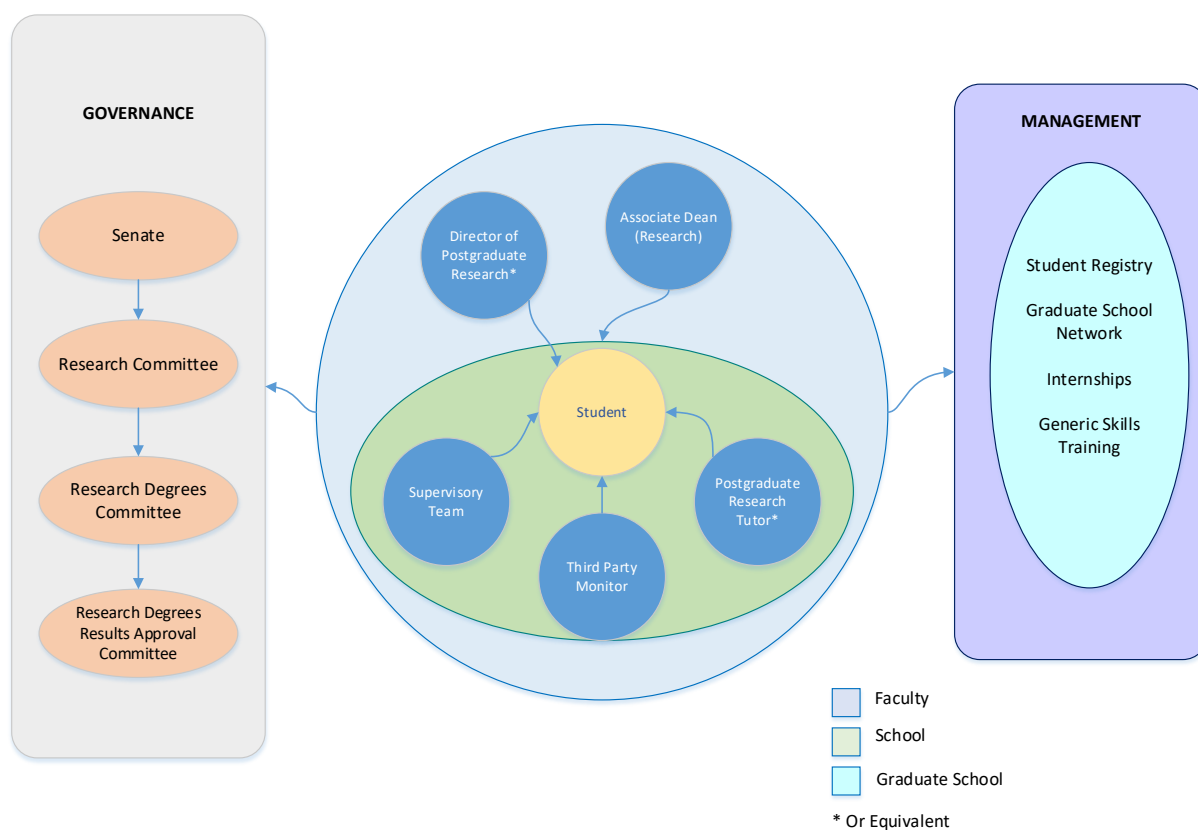
- to encourage outward-looking and relevant research
- to extend the student's experience
- to give access to a wider range of experience and expertise to assist the student in the development of their project
- to be mutually beneficial.

Formal collaboration usually means that the student may use facilities and other resources, including supervision, provided jointly by the ARC and the collaborating establishment. The student is expected to spend at least half their time at the ARC and be fully integrated into the ARC's research community, student training and pastoral systems.

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

1.5 Organisational structure for supporting research students

Figure 1 Organisation of research degrees



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).

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 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 Research Degrees Coordinator has oversight of all research students in their ARC. This person is responsible for ensuring students are supported and progressing well throughout their studies. They work with administrative staff within the Graduate School who help with the day to day management of the research student journey.

1.6 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 Research Degrees Coordinator at their ARC.

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](#).

1.7 Administrative arrangements

Student administration of the ARC programme is handled by the Graduate School at Walton Hall. Decisions about the admission, registration and progress of individual students are taken on the basis of recommendations from the ARC.

The Graduate School is open from 08:30 to 17:00, Monday to Thursday and 08:30 to 16:30 on Fridays.

Whilst the Research Degrees Coordinator in the ARC is the main point of contact for queries relating to research degrees at The Open University, if students and their supervisors wish to contact the Graduate School directly for any reason, contact details for the Graduate School 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 is 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.

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's 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 \(PDF 176KB\)](#)
- [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.

Study hours, annual leave and paid work

Section 8 of the [Research Degree Regulations](#) provides information on the expectations regarding minimum study hours.

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.

Absences and other disruptions

A student must inform their supervisors and the ARC Research Degrees Coordinator if they are absent, or if their studies are disrupted for any reason including illness or injury for a week or more and a request for a study break 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 a study break are not assured.

Supervisors and the Research Degrees Coordinators are required to notify 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.

Study Break

A student may request a study break in accordance with section 9 of the [Research Degree Regulations](#). Study breaks 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).

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 Research Degrees Coordinator and the Graduate School in a timely fashion.

Maternity, paternity and adoption leave

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

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

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

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 will need to submit a withdrawal request via the PGR Manager system for the approval of the Graduate School Director.

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

¹ Please contact the Graduate School for further information on minimum registration periods.

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 Research Degrees Coordinator.

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.

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

UKVI (UK Visas and Immigration)

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 monitoring 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 School.

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

Study Break

Students who have entered the UK on a Student Route visa sponsored by The Open University, who are considering 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.

2.4 Fees

Agreement to pay fees

Upon registration, a student of the University agrees to pay the fees and other charges which are due in respect of their studies. The fee is payable on initial registration as a single payment and then, in advance, on 1 October each year. It is payable every year or part-year throughout registration, up to and including the year in which the student submits their thesis for examination.

The fee due is shown in the offer letter. This fee may be subject to an annual increase. The amount is the same for full-time and part-time students. A list of the current fees is sent to the ARC Research Degrees Coordinators every year and available on the [Graduate School Network](#).

The ARC annual student fee constitutes the University registration fee, which covers the student's registration with The Open University. Please note that in addition to the University registration fee payable to The Open University, the student may have to meet additional local costs of study, as determined by the ARC Student Agreement.

If the student registers part-way through the academic year, they will be liable for a proportion of the University registration fee as follows:

Table 1 Fee in year of registration

Period of registration	Fee liability as a percentage of the University registration fee
1 October – 31 March	100%
1 April – 30 September	50%

In each year of continuing registration, the student will be liable for the whole year's University registration fee and they should pay this within 30 days of receiving the invoice even if they are intending to submit their thesis part-way through the academic year.

A student who submits their thesis part-way through an academic year, may be entitled to a proportional reimbursement of the University registration fee as indicated in the following table.

Table 2 Proportional fee reimbursement

Period of submission	Refund as a percentage of the University registration fee
1 October – 31 March	50%
1 April – 30 September	No fee reimbursement

A student will only be eligible for reimbursement if:

- a. the Graduate School has received a satisfactorily completed Candidate Declaration form via the PGR Manager system within one month of the stated thesis submission date (otherwise the University registration fee will be reimbursed at the rate relevant to the quarter in which the completed Candidate Declaration form was received); and
- b. they have been invoiced for the full year's University registration fee for that academic year.

The University registration fee is not refundable to students who withdraw from registration.

Fee liability during a study break

The student is liable to pay the University registration fee unless University approval has been obtained for a study break for a period of more than 12 consecutive months. There is no reduction for a period of less than 12 consecutive months (see [Section 2.4](#)).

Resubmission fee

If following examination the student is registered to resubmit the thesis for re-examination following major revision, they will be required to pay the University registration fee, after notification of the result and until they resubmit the revised thesis for re-examination. Students who are awarded a degree subject to corrections and modifications or substantial amendment but are not required to resubmit for re-examination, will not be liable for further fees.

Responsibility for payment

The student is responsible to The Open University for their Open University registration fee. The method of payment is for the student to pay the ARC and for the ARC to forward the payment to The Open University. The method of payment and the arrangements for collecting it will be specified in the ARC Student Agreement.

If the ARC fails to send the student's University registration fee to The Open University

If the ARC does not send the student's University registration fee to The Open University by the date the payment is due, the student remains liable for the University registration fee and the University may cancel the student's registration, even if the student has started studying or is continuing to study.

NOTE: If a student is experiencing difficulties with payment of fees, they should contact the Graduate School to find out if arrangements can be made to help safeguard their registration.

If their registration is cancelled for this reason, it will be reinstated in the following circumstances:

- i if the student contacts the University within 7 days of the date of cancellation with an undertaking to provide payment and providing payment within 5 working days of their initial contact; or
- ii if the student contacts the University more than 7 days after the date of cancellation and less than 28 days undertaking to provide payment and providing payment within 5 working days of the initial contact, and:
 - the ARC records that it has provided the student with advice on the impact any gap in studies may have on the student's academic progress, and
 - the University records that it has provided the student with advice on the impact any gap in studies may have on the student's registration, and
 - the student confirms that they have received that advice and wishes to be reinstated.

If a student's registration is cancelled for this reason, they will remain personally liable to the University for all of the fees which are due by the date of the cancellation. If the student does not pay those fees they will be in debt to the University.

Liability for charges other than fees

If a student is required to pay any other charges in connection with their studies (for example residential weekends, library charges) and they do not pay those charges when they become due, they may not be provided with the services or facilities to which those charges relate. If, at the University's discretion, the services or facilities are provided and the charges remain unpaid, they will be in debt to the University.

What The Open University will do if a student is in debt to the University?

Restriction on further study

The student will only be permitted to undertake further study for which any further annual registration fee or other charges may become due if the student pays in advance or has in place some other secured means of payment for those tuition fees or charges, which the University has accepted.

Action to recover debt

If the student does not pay outstanding fees or other charges, including any further fees and other charges that may fall due, the University may take all reasonable steps including legal action to recover those fees and other charges from the student.

Before doing this the University will:

- a. Notify the student of what action they may take, if appropriate, to limit any liability for further fees and other charges that may become due and give the student a reasonable opportunity to take that action before any further liability will be incurred;
- b. Notify the student that they are in debt, the amount of the debt and how they may pay that debt, and give the student a reasonable opportunity to pay any outstanding fees or other charges before taking any further action against the student;

Discretion to postpone action

If the University continues, at its discretion, to provide academic oversight of the student's registration, tuition, facilities or services or allows further study by a student who is in debt to the University, the University reserves the right to take the actions shown above at a later date.

Financial support

From 2018, the UK government has introduced loans of up to £25,000, for study of doctoral programmes. The loans will provide a contribution towards the cost of study but they will not cover the full fees and living costs. Full details of the product and the eligibility criteria are available on the [Graduate School Network](#).

These loans will be available to students based at UK ARC's only.

2.5 Information

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).

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

Key milestones during registration

Registration as an Open University research degree student within the ARC programme begins once the student has accepted the formal offer of registration from the Open University, on the date specified in that letter.

The ARC will induct the student into research student life, skills development opportunities, and introduce them to their research group.

Before starting a research degree, and at regular points in a student's studies, they should, with the help of the supervisors, consider their training needs. Students will be asked to conduct a skills audit as part of induction. Students can register for the VITAE Researcher Development Framework planner through the [Graduate School Network](#) to assist with this process. The ARC will provide research and transferable skills training. The [Graduate School Network](#) has a wealth of supplementary on-line skills training resources.

When a student first registers, their supervisors will discuss day-to-day arrangements with them, including supervision meetings and key study milestones. The arrangements for assessing the upgrade period are given below. Progress will be formally assessed by The Open University in accordance with the regulations. ARC arrangements for monitoring progress will be communicated to students and supervisors by the Research Degrees Coordinator. If any changes are made to the registration, such as a study break, the Graduate School will notify the Research Degrees Coordinator of the revised deadline.

When writing the thesis students are strongly encouraged to refer to the criteria for the award of the degree. The general criteria for the assessment of an MPhil and a PhD align with the [Quality Code for Higher Education](#). in Appendix 1 of the Research Degree Regulations.

The thesis must be submitted for examination prior to the maximum registration date. Details of all of these processes can be found in the following sections.

3.2 Induction

The ARC will organise student induction programmes.

3.3 Supervision

Each research degree student in an ARC has at least two and usually not more than three supervisors. One supervisor, the Director of Studies, has the responsibility for day to day supervision. Students may also have an external supervisor appointed from an institution of higher education or a research institute who can provide additional expertise.

Supervisors report regularly on their students' work. It is on the basis of these reports that the University continues registration. Students who have not made satisfactory progress may have their registration terminated.

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

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

3.4 Third-party monitoring

The student should have an opportunity at least once a year to discuss their studies with a third party – someone other than the supervisors or Research Degree Coordinator. Within The Open University research degree programme this opportunity is formalised through the appointment of a third party monitor by the ARC Research Degrees Coordinator. 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 told the name and contact details of the third-party monitor during the first month of registration. The first third-party monitoring session should take place no later than the fifth month of registration. Third-party monitoring should then take place at least annually in the first quarter of each calendar year.

Further details relating to third party monitors can be found in the [Research Degree Regulations](#).

3.5 Upgrade assessment

All research degree students are required to undertake a upgrade assessment and passing the upgrade assessment is a precursor to continued registration as MPhil students or progressing to PhD registration if students are studying for a PhD degree. Students are responsible for carrying out their upgrade assessments with the support and guidance of their supervisors and it is important to note that if any ethics reviews are required for their studies this must be completed prior to upgrade and as set out in [Part 4](#).

The criteria for the upgrade assessment are outlined in detail in [Research Degree Regulations](#) RD15.3 - 15.4 for MPhil students and RD15.6 – 15.7 for PhD students, and PD 13.2 – 13.5 for Professional Doctorate students.

For a summary of the upgrade process for Professional Doctorates, please refer to the Research Degrees Professional Doctorate Handbook.

For MPhil and PhD students, the upgrade assessment has four parts: a University report form, an oral presentation by the student, a written project report by the student which is then discussed by the student and two independent academics during a mini-viva.

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

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

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

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

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

The arrangements for the upgrade assessment are made by the ARC.

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

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

Revisions will be reviewed and further registration will depend on these having been completed to the satisfaction of the assessors and ARC Research Degrees Coordinator and confirmed by the Graduate School Director.

After the upgrade criteria are met, registration is confirmed and will continue until the submission deadline, subject to the student making sustained progress to the satisfaction of the supervisors, the ARC and the Graduate School Director. The student must also comply with any non-academic conditions of registration.

If a student does not pass the upgrade assessment, they may decide to withdraw, or the supervisors may recommend de-registration.

3.6 Progress monitoring

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

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

3.7 Examination

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

Students and supervisors should read the regulations and the guidelines carefully. These include information on 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.

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

The notice to submit can be submitted at any time during the year, although those submitted during the summer may be subject to some delay if examiners aren't available for oral examinations.

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

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

Plagiarism

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

It is expected that a student develop and maintain best practice in their writing throughout the research. In cases of suspected plagiarism the University will follow the [Procedure for dealing with allegations of research malpractice or misconduct](#).

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

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

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

Results

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

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

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

Award of degrees

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

When the Research Degrees Examination Results Approval Committee confirms that the thesis meets the requirements for the award of a degree, the student must submit copies (see [Thesis Submission Guidelines](#)) before the degree can be conferred. The degree and title of Doctor or Master of Philosophy, or Doctor in Education or Doctor in Health & Social Care, 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 or Professional Doctorate.

3.8 Degree ceremonies

The University holds an annual series of degree ceremonies for the presentation of graduates. Most of these are held in March to June and in September to November in towns and cities across the UK. One ceremony is held in mainland Europe. Graduates are presented to the Chancellor, the Pro-Chancellor, the Vice-Chancellor, 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.

3.9 Directory of graduates

Names (but not addresses) of graduates are printed in an official Directory of Graduates, with the degree awarded. The directory is produced each autumn, and includes all graduates whose qualifications have been conferred in the preceding twelve months. Abridged lists are produced for the presentation of graduates at each degree ceremony. The directory itself and the lists are all public documents. The University may also release names (but not addresses) of graduates, to be printed in national or regional newspapers and other publications.

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

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

Part 4 Facilities and services

How to access the research facilities and support services available to an ARC student.

4.1 The Graduate School

The Graduate School is responsible for the administration of the ARC programme and for implementing policy developed by the Research Degrees Committee. The Graduate School is the main point of contact for the Research Degrees Coordinator in the ARC.

Its main areas of activity are arranging academic approval of:

- registration of research students
- supervision arrangements
- research students' progress (the annual progress monitoring exercise and the upgrade assessment reports)
- research degree examination panels

- research degree examination results. This includes advising the Qualifications Centre that the research degree can be awarded. The Graduate School working with the Academic Strategy Office also provide administrative support for the quality assurance framework for the research degree programme delivered in partnership with Affiliated Research Centres.

The Graduate School can be contacted for matters that the Research Degrees Coordinator in the ARC is unable to answer. It can also refer queries to other parts of the University if necessary.

Graduate School colleagues, plays a major role in events, projects and initiatives to enhance the quality of the University's research degree provision and the experience of its research students. It welcomes suggestions and comments about its role and how it can help to improve the quality of Open University research degree study. Contact details are in [Part 6](#) of this handbook.

4.2 Research facilities

Laboratory, computing and library needs must be explored when preparing the degree proposal, and the application should clearly demonstrate how the research needs will be met. The expectation is that the student will be using facilities provided by the ARC. The application should demonstrate that adequate access to facilities is granted so that the proposed research project can be completed. The University does not provide laboratory or computing facilities for students registered through an ARC.

4.3 Library facilities

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

They include primary and secondary resources such as:

- academic journals
- newspapers
- academic books.

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

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

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.

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

Conditions for use of Library facilities

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

4.4 Computers

Once a student has been registered they will be given an Open University computer username (OUCU) and a pre-set password that allows them to access some OU systems.

To use the PGR Manager system ARC student can gain access by using their institution emails.

ARC students may also request an Open University @open.ac.uk email address. Please contact the Graduate School to request an OU email address. Contact details are in [Part 6](#) of this handbook.

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 the student thinks that someone else knows the password 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](#).

4.5 Statistics Advisory Service

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, the statistics advisory service can help to:

- Ensure that the research study is efficient from the point of data collection through to completion and ensures that the design enables the student to address the research objectives.
- Identify best practices for data management prior to the start of data collection.

At the data analysis stage, the service can help to:

- Identify suitable statistical methods to properly address the research objectives.
- Understand outputs from statistical computing software.
- Ensure that evidence-based conclusions can be drawn from the analysis.
- Students are advised to seek statistical advice as early as possible, preferably while planning the study and before collecting the data. Please visit the [Statistics Advisory Service](#) website for details or email: stats-advisory@open.ac.uk

4.6 Health and safety

Students undertaking laboratory work outside of the University will be bound by the Safety Code of the host institution. It is the ARC's responsibility to make students fully aware of the ARC's Health and Safety policies and protocols at registration or shortly thereafter.

The health and safety of all persons on-site and off-site, for the purposes of field work for example, is of paramount importance. To comply with legislative requirements, the work the student will be undertaking in laboratories must be risk assessed in accordance with legislation currently in force.

The risk assessment must be completed by the supervisor prior to any work commencing.

Students must be informed of any significant risks which have been identified, what controls have been put in place and any specific instructions/procedures they must follow whilst working in the laboratory to prevent causing harm to him/herself or others.

Any questions concerning safety whilst working, should be addressed to the supervisor immediately.

Students and supervisors whether based inside or outside the UK, must make sure that they are aware of, and adhere to, the health and safety legislation in force in that country.

Students should consult the supervisor and the ARC Research Degrees Coordinator if unsure about how Health and Safety applies to their place of study.

4.7 Ethics review

All research involving the collection of data or biological samples from human participants and research with non-human animals requires ethics review, with the exception of research where 'any reasonable judgement would suggest that no harm could arise to any person, living or dead'. If a student plans to gather data or tissue material from human participants as part of the research project they should discuss the ethics aspects with their supervisors at an early stage and where required ensure that well prepared applications are made at appropriate stages. Applications for ethics approval need to be endorsed by the Director of Studies and the ARC Research Degrees Coordinator.

Gaining a favourable opinion from an ethics committee on the ethics protocol for a research project is important as a means of protecting participants, researchers, supervisors, the institution and any funding bodies, and minimising the likelihood of legal action being taken against any parties involved.

Students at ARCs should obtain ethics approval from the appropriate ethics committee within their ARC, or workplace if applicable to the research to be undertaken. If there is no ethics committee at the ARC, the student must gain ethics approval from [The Open University Human Research Ethics Committee](#).

Any research involving NHS premises, staff or patients will also be likely to require review in the [National Research Ethics Service](#) as well as agreement from the NHS locale(s) in which the research is to be conducted. This is often a lengthy process so the student should allow sufficient time in the project plan to complete this stage. The Open University is recognised as a sponsor for this type of research and a favourable opinion from the HREC can help to provide support for NRES reviews.

4.8 Indemnity insurance

The Open University does not have indemnity insurance for ARC students carrying out research related to their studies. If a student requires indemnity cover (e.g. to fulfil the conditions of an ethics committee), they will need to arrange this themselves or ensure that it is available through the ARC. An appropriate risk assessment should be carried out for all off-site field work.

4.9 Studying with a disability or additional need

The Open University has an inclusive University community and welcomes as research student's people with disabilities or who have other requirements.

Students should contact the ARC Research Degrees Coordinator for further information about the services available, or if a student has any concerns about how the disability or additional requirements may affect their ability to study. Provision from the ARC may vary according to the law of the land in which the student is studying.

If the student is in a UK-based ARC they may be in a position to benefit from a Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) to help with extra study-related costs that arise as a direct result of the disability.

Students are encouraged, no matter what the circumstances, to tell the Research Degrees Coordinator as early as possible if they need support.

4.10 Professional development as a researcher

Research skills development

The [Vitae Researcher Development Framework](#) endorsed by UKRI, informs The Open University's career development programme for research degree students. Vitae is an international programme dedicated to active career learning and development for researchers. In addition to supporting 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.

Professional development resources provided by The Open University are intended to support and supplement the research skills training available in the ARC.

The Graduate School collates and co-ordinates a wide range of professional development resources which are intended to support and supplement the research skills training available in the Faculties. It also organises a wide range of face-to-face and online research training events. Further details are available at the [Graduate School Network](#).

The Vitae Research Development Framework Planner is licensed for use by all Open University research degree students. It supports skills audit at the beginning of registration, to help a student to identify their training needs. It enables a student to monitor their skills development, and provides a progress file to enable them to log all the skills they have acquired through the course of the degree. More information can be found at [Researcher Development Framework website](#), and further resources are also available through the [Vitae](#) website.

The Academic Professional Development Team (APD) at the University delivers a programme of face-to-face events aimed at enhancing research capabilities. Further details are available at the [Graduate School Network](#) and Open University research students can view the programme of events on [My Learning Centre](#). You can also contact the Academic Professional Development Team (APD) at academic-professional-development@open.ac.uk to request information on the programme.

Career development

Students may access advice on all aspects of career planning and development via The Open University [Careers and Employability Service](#).

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 on [Contact a careers adviser](#).

There is also information on Knowledge Transfer Partnerships and internships.

Open University research students can contact the Research Career Development Team to request a one-to-one careers appointment. Contact details are in [Part 6](#).

As a member of The Open University research student community in an ARC, 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.

4.11 Participating in Open University life

The Open University Students Association (OUSA) is here to provide a voice for all Open University students and provide a vibrant community to support you during your studies. All students are automatically a member of OUSA 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.

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

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.

Part 5 Research degree appeals and complaints procedures

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.

Local arrangements for research degree registration are managed by the ARC and are covered by the ARC's complaints policy.

The Open University's Student Complaints and Appeals Procedures apply to all enquirers, applicants and research students. They cover academic and administrative decisions made by The Open University, and services provided by The Open University. A student may also refer to the University's Student Complaints and Appeals Procedures if they have made a formal complaint which the ARC has been unable to satisfactorily resolve through its student complaints procedures. 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 which have been made by The Open University and are not academic in nature are covered by the University's 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.’

Academic decisions which have been made by The Open University 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.

A student who experiences problems with any aspect of the academic or administrative services in the ARC should discuss them with their supervision team, the third party monitor and the ARC Research Degrees Coordinator as soon as possible and if necessary initiate the student complaints procedure in the ARC.

If a problem remains after the ARC’s internal procedures have been exhausted, the student may address the complaint to The Open University. The University will seek a resolution which is fair to both the student and the ARC and that preserves the standard of the University’s research degrees.

A student who experiences a problem with any aspect of the University’s academic or administrative services should contact the Graduate School in the first instance. Contact details are in [Part 6](#).

Whatever the problem it is essential that a student acts immediately if there is a possibility that their studies will be affected by any problem experienced.

In most cases, a letter, phone call or email to the Graduate School will elicit help and advice to resolve the problem.

The University cannot accept responsibility for problems that affect the outcome of a student's studies if they delay informing the University until it is too late to put things right.

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

5.4 Sources of advice

Advice is available from:

The Graduate School

The Open University

Milton Keynes

MK7 6AA

Phone +44(0)1908 653806

Email research-degrees-ARC@open.ac.uk

The Student Casework Office

The Open University

PO Box 5155

Milton Keynes

MK7 6YJ

Phone +44(0)1908 659535

Fax +44 (0)1908 659536

Email studentcaseworkoffice@open.ac.uk

The Open University Students' Association

Central office at Walton Hall, Milton Keynes

Email ousa@student.open.ac.uk

The Office of the Independent Adjudicator

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

Casework Support Team:

+44 (0)118 959 9813

(Calls to and from this office may be monitored for quality control and training reasons.)

5.5 Other policies and statements

Students can access the University's other regulations, policies and statements on the Universities [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 and ARCs are required to have clear and consistent processes for the eligibility and appointment of supervisors. Directors of Research Degrees (or equivalent, including Research Degrees Coordinators in Affiliated Research Centres) are responsible, in consultation with their colleagues, for recommending supervision teams to the Graduate School Director.

Supervision teams will typically comprise of 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 ensure that all administrative elements of the student's registration are completed in a timely manner.

It is recognised that the Professional Doctorate programmes and ARCs will constitute supervision teams from a mix of internal and external supervisors as appropriate.

Team supervision enables a breadth of experience and knowledge across the supervisory team. The team jointly share responsibility for the full range of supervisory activities required to support a student from initial induction to completion of their studies.

Students are allocated to supervisors who have academic competence in their chosen area. Supervisors 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 have demonstrated significant engagement within their research or practice field in the absence of a research degree. 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 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 supervision of 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 experience of examination (either as an examiner or as an examination 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.

All supervisor appointments require approval from the Graduate School Director.

Supporting students

The level and type of support required by students varies across the course of their studies and across Faculties/Disciplines. Arrangements between the research student and supervisors may be kept flexible, as long as the team and the Faculty Director of Research Degrees are satisfied that adequate support is being provided for the research student and that there are sufficient opportunities for formally monitoring progress. However, there will be an expected minimum contact.

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.

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 degree programme, prior to the upgrade assessment; 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 Department 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 or ARCs.

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 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 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 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 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-ARC@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

For advice on support for research funding:

Email research-support@open.ac.uk

Research Ethics

Phone +44 (0)1908 654858

Email research-ethics@open.ac.uk

Website: www.open.ac.uk/research/ethics/

Research Career Development

Phone +44 (0)1908 653677

Fax +44 (0)1908 655477

Email research-training-development@open.ac.uk

Faculty offices

Contact details for all research areas can be found on the [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

Data Protection Coordinator

The Open University

PO Box 497

Milton Keynes

MK7 6AT

Email data-protection@open.ac.uk

The Open University Library

Walton Hall

Milton Keynes

MK7 6AA

Phone +44 (0)1908 659001

Fax +44 (0)1908 653571

Email lib-help@open.ac.uk

Open University Computing Helpdesk

The Open University

Walton Hall

Milton Keynes

MK7 6AA

Phone +44 (0)1908 653972

www.open.ac.uk/students/helpdesk

Student Casework Office (for stage 3 complaints only)

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

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

Statistics Advisory Service

Department of Statistics

The Open University

Walton Hall

Milton Keynes

MK7 6AA

Email Stats-Advisory@open.ac.uk

Website www.mathematics.open.ac.uk/research/research/statistics/advisory-service