Research Degrees Handbook

Affiliated Research Centre PhDs
2024–25

The Open University

This handbook has been prepared by the Graduate School at The Open University.

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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 the registered period. 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.

For readability, links have been embedded in the text. You will need to open a version online to click through to resources. Search for 'Handbook' on

https://www5.open.ac.uk/students/research/forms-and-guidance

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Introduction

Welcome to The Open University

I'm Professor Clare Warren, Director of the Open University Graduate School, and

I would like to welcome you to postgraduate research at The Open University (OU).

The OU's mission is to be open to people, places, methods and ideas and this is reflected in its research which has the same openness and global reach.

You're joining a research community of around 850 Postgraduate Research Students (PGRs), based at the state-of-the-art research facilities on campus in Milton Keynes, supported offsite, or working in one of the University's Affiliated Research Centres (ARCs) around the world. Here are some (approximate) statistics about the make-up of this community:

Programme and mode of study

- Three-quarters of our PGRs are directly registered with the Open University; one-quarter are based at ARCs.
- 85% are studying for a PhD; 15% are studying for a Professional Doctorate.
- Of directly registered PGRs, half are studying full time and half are studying part time.

Faculty breakdown

- The **Faculty of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM)** has most PGRs (including most ARC students): about 50%.

- Then comes the **Faculty of Wellbeing, Education and Language Studies (WELS)** (including Professional Doctorate students) with just over 20% of PGRs.

- **Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASS)** takes 18% of PGRs and then the **Faculty of Business and Law (FBL)** with 8%.

Research at the OU

The OU's research shapes policy and practice, drives innovation and changes lives for the better throughout the UK and around the globe.

The latest Research Excellence Framework – the UK's system for assessing the quality of Higher Education research – ranked the OU in the top third of UK universities for research power and 76% of the University's research, which spans 21 broad and distinct disciplines, as world-leading or internationally excellent.

The OU's Open Societal Challenges Programme, launched in 2022, aims to tackle some of the most important societal challenges of our time through impact-driven research.

The Programme's focus on the themes of Tackling Inequalities, Living Well and Sustainability aligns well with the OU's mission to be open to people, places, methods and ideas.

The Programme's aim is to apply excellent research by OU academics to some of the most pressing challenges facing people across the UK and worldwide to transform lives and drive societal change.

General advice

We hope that you'll refer back to this handbook throughout your programme with the OU, to check what to do around milestones and find sources of support when you need them. You may find the abbreviation list in Appendix 1 helpful while you're getting used to the OU – we use quite a few!

We hope that you're excited to get started on your research degree – it's a joy to get immersed in a topic that fascinates you – but we know you may feel lonely or overwhelmed at times. Treat yourself and others with kindness, and please be willing to reach out if you need help. Know that you have a team to support you in this journey – from your supervisory team and Faculty support; to the Graduate School team seeing you through general training, administrative processes and additional opportunities; to the wider University, including Library help, Disability Support and Careers advice. We're looking forward to cheering you on!

Best regards,
Clare
Professor Clare Warren, Graduate School Director

Part 1   Research Degrees at The Open University

1.1   The Open University

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

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

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

The University's central headquarters is at Walton Hall, Milton Keynes, and national centres located in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Over 1,000 academic and research staff are employed by the University, the majority of whom are based at Walton Hall which is the administrative and operational centre of the University, and where most of the research is undertaken.

The University has 15 Affiliated Research Centres around the world, within which approximately 200 students are engaged in research degree studies.

The OU Graduate School launched in October 2016, and is a focal point for research degree community support. It leads on the development of research degree community networks, partnerships and training pathways to support an open, engaged and digitally literate research student community.

It promotes wellbeing and personal development and widening access to postgraduate opportunities.

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 50 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.

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

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 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 students the chance to enhance their professional career to doctoral level enabling them to make a unique contribution to their profession, while continuing to work and progress in their field.

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.

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 OU. ARCs may register students across the full range of areas of the OU's academic excellence for a UK postgraduate research degree.

Standards

The OU 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 OU 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 OU. 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 and this can be evidenced.
- 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 OU 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 shows the main OU teams and structures that support the research degree journey.

GOVERNANCE

Senate → Research Committee → Research Degrees Committee → Research Degrees Results Approval Committee

FACULTY

Director of Postgraduate Research (PhD)/ Programme Leader (Professional Doctorate)*

Associate Dean (Research)

RESEARCH STUDENT

Supervisory Team

Third Party Monitor

Postgraduate Research Tutor*

GRADUATE SCHOOL

Research Degrees Advisor team

Core Training Programme

Student communications

Student opportunities (e.g. internships)

OTHER SUPPORT
See 'Facilities and services' for further information

Library research support team

IT helpdesk

Statistics Advisory Service

Disability support

Mental Health Casework and Advice Team

Student wellbeing support
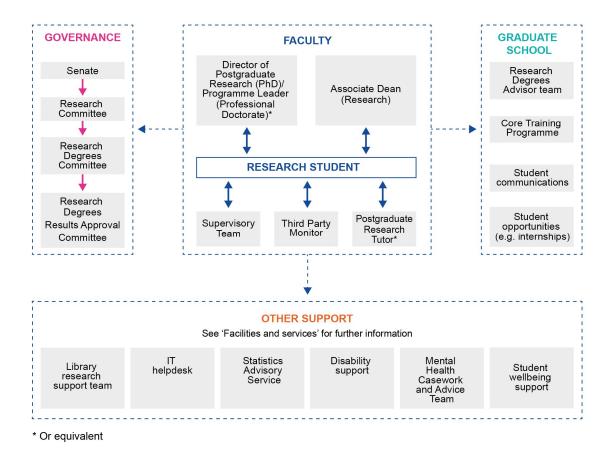
* Or equivalent

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).

Decisions about individual student cases are made by the Progress Board, chaired by the Graduate School Director with members including Head of Research Degrees, the Faculty Directors of Research Degrees and ARC Academic Lead.

Management in Graduate School and Faculties

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

The Research Degrees Team within the Graduate School fulfils the registry function, providing quality assurance, managing student records and ensuring that student registration and progression is managed in accordance with the University's regulations, policies and legislation. The Graduate School runs the Graduate School Network (GSN) website and PGR Manager tool (more information about these in section 4).

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 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.

Whilst the Research Degrees Coordinator in the ARC is the main point of contact for queries relating to research degrees at the OU, if students and their supervisors wish to contact the Graduate School directly for any reason they are welcome; see contact details and opening times.

The Graduate School is part of the Research, Enterprise and Scholarship unit, which is responsible for the Research Code of Practice, 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.

Also part of RES, the Research and Enterprise team at the Open University 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 (see Part 6 for contact details).

Part 2 Essential Information

This section contains essential information for research degree registration with the OU.

2.1 University regulations, policies and codes of practice

Regulations

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.

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

- [Code of Practice of Research](#)
- Fee rules on [Forms and Guidance](#) (Graduate School Network)
- [Student Privacy Notice](#)
- [Complaints and Appeals Procedure](#)
- Procedure for Dealing with Allegations of Research Malpractice or Misconduct on [Research policies](#) site
- [Code of Practice for Student Discipline](#)
- [Student Computing Policy](#)

- [Open University Student Charter](#)

- [Academic Conduct Policy](#)

- [Research Ethics](#)

- [Fitness to Study Policy](#)

Policies are inclusive of all Open University Students, Learners, Enquirers and Alumni, regardless of age, civil status, dependency or caring status, care experience, disability, family status, gender, gender identity, gender reassignment, marital status, marriage and civil partnerships, membership of the Traveller community, political opinion, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, socio-economic background, sex, sexual orientation or trades union membership status.

Safe Space Reporting

The Open University is committed to creating a diverse and inclusive environment in which everyone feels safe and is treated with dignity and respect. Unlawful discrimination of any kind across The Open University will not be tolerated. Safe Space Reporting is available through an [online tool](#) [Report + Support](#) through which staff, students, learners and visitors are encouraged to report incidents of assault, bullying, harassment, hate crime, or sexual harassment. It also provides information about what you can do if these incidents happen to you, or someone you know, and where to find support.

Study hours, annual leave and paid work

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

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

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 submit a request for a study break to suspend their registration via PGR Manager, in advance and in accordance with section 9 (for MPhil/PhD) 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 (for MPhil/PhD) 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

Students are entitled to maternity leave plus unpaid maternity leave, in addition to standard study break entitlement, if they meet the following eligibility criteria:

- currently registered and actively studying
- have been registered with the University for a minimum of 1 year full-time or 2 years part-time
- have not withdrawn or completed their studies.

The same applies where a child is being adopted if the student is the carer. Two weeks of unpaid paternity leave may be taken in addition to the standard study

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

Full details of maternity, paternity and adoption leave and stipend payments are available on the Graduate School Network (under 'M' on 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 and input it onto the PGR Manager system under change requests/withdrawals where they are reviewed by Progress Board for approval.

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.

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 OU welcomes feedback from students regarding any aspect of their time as an OU research student, including any suggestions and ideas for improvements.

The Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) is carried out by universities across the UK and administered by Advance HE. The OU participates in PRES every two years. PRES feedback helps us to understand what is working well and what is not, so we can make improvements where they will be most relevant and useful.

The postgraduate research student-Graduate School (PGR-GS) liaison group exists to facilitate communication between students and the Graduate School on institution-wide issues affecting research students. We encourage you to let your representative know if you have some feedback on an issue that is affecting all or some students (specific problems are best directed to your supervisor or Faculty postgraduate tutor).

You can also email Graduate-School@open.ac.uk with any direct 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.

At the end of their studies students who have completed and still have sufficient time on their visa dates, can apply for the Graduate Route Scheme. Please contact the Graduate School for advice.

Study break

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

2.4 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; a link to Fee Rules is available under 'F' on Forms and Guidance 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 1 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.

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 OU

If the ARC does not send the student's University registration fee to the OU 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 we 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:

- 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;
- 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 Doctoral Loans 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. Links to the product and eligibility criteria are available under 'L' on the Forms and Guidance. This is only available in the UK.

These loans will be available to students based at UK ARCs only.

2.5 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

Registration and induction

Registration as an OU research degree student within the ARC programme begins once the student has accepted the formal offer of registration from the OU, 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. See more about this in Section 4.10.

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.

3.3 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. It is the responsibility of the student to ensure that the meeting notes are written up and uploaded to PGR Manager, where the supervisor will approve them.

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 OU 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](#).

The Graduate School Network (GSN) includes a [Student Wellbeing](#) page which has links to several resources to supplement the wellbeing support within the ARC.

3.5 Upgrade assessments

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

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

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

Deadlines

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

• full-time students – 12 months from the initial date of registration

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

It is imperative that the upgrade reporting on PGR Manager reaches the Graduate School in time for the process to be completed (i.e. by the 11th month for full-time students and by the 23rd month for part-time students). The Research Degrees Team does not have the authority to accept late submissions and any extension can only be granted in exceptional circumstances, and requires prior approval, by Progress Board.

Outcomes

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

- registration for the degree of Master of Philosophy (MPhil)
- registration for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)
- the student is asked to make revisions to their upgrade report which will be reviewed; further registration will depend on it having been completed to the satisfaction of the assessors and confirmed by Progress Board
- registration should be terminated due to failure to make satisfactory academic progress and a failure to meet the Upgrade criteria.

3.6 Progress monitoring

Progress monitoring reports are required for all MPhil/PhD 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 OU about continuing registration.

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

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 (see [Research policies](#)).

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 (RDRAC). At this point the Committee will confirm the outcome of the examination in writing.

Where further amendments are needed in order to meet the academic requirements of the award the student will be informed in writing 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 post-examination 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' in [Forms and Guidance](#)) before the degree can be conferred. The degree and title of Doctor or Master of Philosophy are conferred in absentia by Congregation. The student will receive

confirmation in writing of completion of the degree. At this point the student may use the title 'Dr' if awarded a Doctor of Philosophy.

3.8 Degree ceremonies

The University holds an annual series of degree ceremonies for the presentation of graduates. 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

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

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

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

Part 4 Facilities and services

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.

The Graduate School 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 OU research degree study. Contact details are in Part 6 of this handbook.

Online resources

These key Graduate School websites support research students and collate links to services:

Graduate School Network (GSN)

The [Graduate School Network](#) is the gateway to forms, advice, opportunities, and links to training and development resources, as well as relevant University policies and regulations.

PGR Manager

[PGR Manager](#) is a bespoke system for managing your PGR student journey – bringing all information into one safe, secure and easily accessible system, streamlining administration processes, and simplifying progression monitoring and reporting. It also contains a Calendar that advertises training and development events, and a skills audit tool.

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 Training and development page on the Graduate School Network and Events on PGR Manager.

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 OU computer usernames (OUCUs) and passwords that allows them to access some OU systems.

To use the PGR Manager system ARC student can gain access by using their institution emails. More advice on using PGR Manager: PGR Manager Advice | Graduate School Network (open.ac.uk).

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 a student thinks that someone else knows the password, they should tell the [IT Helpdesk](#) by phoning +44 (0)1908 654321.

Students are expected to comply with the [University's Computing Code of Conduct](#).

For further IT advice please see: [IT support | Graduate School Network (open.ac.uk)](#).

4.5 Statistics Advisory Service

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

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

At the data analysis stage the service can help to:

- identify suitable statistical methods to properly address the research objectives
- understand outputs from statistical computing software

- ensure that evidence-based conclusions can be drawn from the analysis.

Students are advised to seek statistical advice as early as possible, preferably while planning the study and before collecting the data. The Statistical Advisory Service is operated by email and commonly agreed appointment only. Email stats-advisory@open.ac.uk to find out more.

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](#). The Human Research Ethics Committee Chair at the OU provides advice and support on ethics aspects of individual research projects. Information about policies supporting research, governance, integrity and ethics are available on the [OU's intranet site](#) and the [OU Research Website](#).

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.

You can audit and log your skill development using the tools on [PGR Manager](access the 'Development' section in your 'Student Project' page).

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 Network](GSN) (GSN) and [Events on PGR Manager](link) are gateways to online training and development resources at the OU, co-ordinating a wide range of professional development opportunities which are intended to support and supplement the research skills training available in the Faculties.

Career development

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

Open University research students can also access the careers section on the [Graduate School Network](link) 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](link).

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.

Teaching

The OU is a unique institution which has successfully developed its own style of teaching and module design; teaching opportunities at the OU are not conventional but will equip you with a distinct set of skills for the academic job market. Each Faculty offers the opportunity to get teaching experience and the schemes are outlined at [Teaching opportunities](#).

There is also the opportunity to join The Brilliant Club for paid opportunities to deliver academically rigorous programmes to small groups of high potential pupils from low HE-participation backgrounds.
See more at [Teaching opportunities](#).

Entrepreneurship

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

If you have any questions please get in touch with RES-student-programmes@open.ac.uk.

4.11 Participating in Open University life

The Graduate School

The Graduate School's PGR community organisers set up regular social events at our campus in Milton Keynes and online: see Community for further information about these and other community options.

The Graduate School operates a Bluesky account and we encourage PGRs to share their research degree experience by tagging us with @ougradsch.bsky.social. There is also a Facebook page @OUGradSchool and non-OU-moderated Facebook group for postgraduate research students: PGRs at the OU.

Poster Competition and Bake Your Research

The Graduate School runs an annual Postgraduate Research Student Poster Competition which offers a unique way to engage the wider University community with your research. Researchers need to be able to convey their research ideas to a broad audience. This competition, judged by academic and academic-related staff from across the OU, provides students with the opportunity to practise these skills.

It also gives students the opportunity to meet other students from across the University and make useful contacts whilst raising their own profile. When the competition is finished the posters can be used at further networking events, conferences and displayed within schools.

We also run an online Community Choice category alongside the in-person Poster Competition so students who can't make it onto campus can display their posters.

Each November sees our very exciting Bake Your Research event, where PGRs display research-inspired baked creations. Again there are online elements to this, or we encourage ARC colleagues to set up parallel events.

The Open University Students Association

The [Open University Students Association](#) 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 the Association and there are plenty of ways to get involved.

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
- [X](#) @OUstudents
- [Instagram](#) @Oustudentslive.

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! There are also more informal, common interest groups: [Clubs](#).

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. Students can apply via PGR Students in Academic Governance

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.

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.

OU Pride – LGBTQI+ Support Group

OU Pride is the OU Students Association LGBTQI+ group. It is open to all students, whether they self-define as LGBTQI+ or are an ally of the LGBTQI+ community. OU Pride's aim is to educate and raise awareness of issues affecting their members and create social opportunities for LGBTQI+ students and their allies.

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.

The OU Alumni Association

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

Members will be sent communications including the regular email newsletter OpenNews which contains the latest OU developments.

Members will also have access to the Alumni Association's website with opportunities to share their OU story, receive free career tips and advice and keep in touch by email. All that's needed is the student's OUCU and password (if these have been lost or forgotten, please contact the alumni team). 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.

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 OU graduates for OU graduates. Members can maintain their links, while fostering new ones, and stay connected with the OU. AOUG supports the OU 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 OU 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.

Part 5 Research degree appeals and complaints

The OU 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, 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@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 [Student Policies and Regulations](#) website.

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

Part 6 Contact details

OU postal address

The Open University

Walton Hall

Milton Keynes

MK7 6AA

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

For more information and opening hours

https://www.open.ac.uk/students/research/ou/contact-us

Enterprise Team

Email RES-Research-Enterprise@open.ac.uk

Website https://www.open.ac.uk/research/engagement

Research Ethics

Email research-ethics@open.ac.uk

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

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

Email data-protection@open.ac.uk

The Open University Library

Walton Hall

Milton Keynes

MK7 6AA

Phone +44 (0)1908 659001

Email form https://www.open.ac.uk/library/help-and-support/contacting-the-helpdesk

IT Helpdesk

Phone +44 (0)1908 654321

Website https://openuniv.sharepoint.com/sites/intranet-it/Pages/it-helpdesk-opening-hours.aspx

Student Casework Office (for stage 3 complaints only)

Email studentcaseworkoffice@open.ac.uk

Open University Students Association

Email ousa@open.ac.uk

Website https://www.oustudents.com/contact-us/

Statistics Advisory Service

Email stats-advisory@open.ac.uk

Website

https://www.open.ac.uk/students/research/OU/content/services/statistics-advisory-service

OU Alumni Association

Email alumni@open.ac.uk

Website www.open.ac.uk/alumni

Association of Open University Graduates

Phone +44 (0)1908 653316

Email aoug@open.ac.uk

Website https://www.aoug.org.uk/

Appendix 1   Abbreviation list

Abbreviation	Stands for…
ADR	Associate Dean Research (Faculty)
ARC	Affiliated Research Centre
DHSC	Doctorate of Health and Social Care
DRD	Director of Research Degrees (Faculty)
EdD	Doctorate in Education
ETHOS	E-Theses Online Service (British Library)
FASS	Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
FBL	Faculty of Business and Law
GSN	Graduate School Network (website)
HREC	Human Research Ethics Committee
MPhil	Master of Philosophy
ORDO	Open Research Data Online (Library)
ORO	Open Research Online (Library)
OU	Open University

OUCU	Open University Computer Username (IT)
PGR	Postgraduate Research/Postgraduate Researcher/Postgraduate Research Student
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
PRES	Postgraduate Research Experience Survey
RDC	Research Degrees Committee
RDF	Researcher Development Framework (Vitae Skills Framework)
RDO	Research Degrees Office (now the Research Degrees Team within the Graduate School)
RDRAC	Research Degrees Examination Results Approval Committee
SCONUL	Society of College, National and University Libraries
STEM	Faculty of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
UKVI	UK Visas and Immigration (Government department)
WELS	Faculty of Wellbeing, Education and Language Studies