Further Information for Research Students 2017/18

The School of Health, Wellbeing and Social Care in the Faculty of Wellbeing, Education and Language Studies at the Open University has a thriving research community that is engaged in leading-edge research with a strong national and international reach. We have an interdisciplinary focus and a distinctive record of developing innovative methodological approaches, particularly in participatory research and visual methods. Our research seeks to find original solutions to key issues relating to Health, Wellbeing and Social Care, through working with practitioners, policy-makers, service users and the wider academic community. Our research is at the heart of the faculty’s mission to transform lives through education and practice. Research students are a significant element of our research culture, linked to research excellence in 5 research themes across the life course. These are ageing and later life; children, young people and parenting; death and dying; living with disability and long term conditions; and sexual and reproductive health.

Studying for an MPhil/PhD in the Faculty offers an opportunity to develop advanced, high level skills in an environment that is recognised for the national and international excellence of its research.

Examples of recently funded projects within the school of Health, Wellbeing and Social Care include:

- Young Men, Masculinity and Wellbeing (Promundo)
- A mixed method investigation into the acceptability of intrauterine contraception, from the perspectives of women, GPs and Practice Nurses (Bayer)
- Building on Positive Convictions (ISRF)
- Carers Knowledge Exchange Resource (SSCR NIHR School for Social Care Research)
- Swedish/UK Research Dialogue on Critical Approaches to Autism (ISRF)
- Howard League Youth Participation (The Howard League for Penal Reform)
• Progressive Standards Around ICT for AHA (European Commission)
• Abortion morality and abortion stigma: developing social media resources (ESRC)
• User-centred development of a prototype smartphone application to support the management of daytime urinary incontinence in young people (University of Bristol)

Research seminars are held with presentations by faculty staff and postgraduate students, and by others from within and outside the University. These events provide a multidisciplinary forum for discussion and an opportunity to share the experience of different methodological approaches.

Research Students in Health, Wellbeing and Social Care

The School has a lively post-graduate student community undertaking wide-ranging research both in the UK and internationally. There are currently 18 postgraduate students registered for research towards higher degrees in the School of Health, Wellbeing and Social Care. Our postgraduate students are working on diverse projects drawing on methodological innovation across applied social sciences. Current and recently graduated students include:

Maddie Blackburn  The sexuality, relationships and reproductive choices of people with non-malignant, life-limited conditions in the UK
Liz Ellis  The impact of rural and urban environments on the lived experience of people with learning difficulties
Rachel France  Volunteers in End of Life Care: How is their Role Constructed?
Ruth Hamilton  Widening Participation for Women: Are non-traditional educational routes truly empowering for women seeking professional qualification through the social work degree?
Brian Kavanagh  What role, if any, do club drugs play in negotiation of safer sex practices among MSM?
Chido Ndadzungira  Learning Disability and Families: The role of Family in Promoting the Sexuality of Adults and Learning Disability
Sue Main  Creative Narratives of Chronic Pain
Grainne O’Connor  Living with Multiple Sclerosis and the Experiential Use of Assistance Dogs
Chris Chaloner  Older Fathers: views, perceptions and experiences of late paternity
Lorna Rouse  Diabetes Management for Adults with Learning Difficulties
Parvathy Harilal  Exploring the possibilities of designing an e-learning website to bridge digital divide for older people

Tom Witney  Incorporation of biomedical information on pharmaceutical HIV prevention into common sense understanding in serodiscordant partnerships

Jade Levell  Exploring the Intersection of Gang Membership and Childhood Exposure to Domestic Abuse: Finding themes from stories of survival

Support while you are studying

Each student is allocated two supervisors, usually from within the Faculty. We also support students in many other different ways including the Director of Post Graduate Studies (who has overall responsibility for research students in the faculty) and a Third Party Monitor (this is a role similar to a personal tutor) in faculty as well as support more widely in the university through the Open University Graduate School, Research Degrees Office, the Library, the careers development team and other units as required. It is expected that full time students complete their studies within the funded period of three years, part time students in six year and all students are supported to achieve this.

Students have allocated work space on campus and also have access to excellent library services and IT training. You will be provided with a programme of academic training and skills development, which includes University-wide as well as faculty-based seminars and workshops. This includes resources and training offered through the Graduate School Network which draws on the Open University’s world class expertise in pedagogy to support your development as a research student.

For full time funded students there is an expectation that you will come to the university at least 2 days a week for most weeks. There is some flexibility at times when students are collecting data and in the final stages of writing up, however, you should expect to be in Walton Hall on a regular basis during your studies. You will be expected to live in Milton Keynes or within easy travelling distance of the university. Additionally, holders of full time student grants are only permitted to engage in 6 hours paid work per week (not cumulative) over and above their studies.

Part time students are welcome to attend the university whenever they are able. There is a minimum expectation that if you study with us part time you attend the university’s two induction workshops (one in October and one in March) in your first year of registration.

Fees and studentships

Students who are successful in gaining a Faculty funded studentship receive a maintenance grant. It is anticipated that the grant will be £14,800 (non-taxable) in the 2016/17 academic year. This is likely to stay at a similar level with the possibility of a small inflationary rise.)
Self-funded students (part time and full time) are required to pay fees, details of the fees and payment are available at [http://www.open.ac.uk/postgraduate/research-degrees/fees-and-funding/fees-what-you-need-to-pay](http://www.open.ac.uk/postgraduate/research-degrees/fees-and-funding/fees-what-you-need-to-pay). Further information about studying for a research degree at The Open University is available in the Research Degrees Prospectus which may be accessed online at: [http://www.open.ac.uk/postgraduate/research-degrees](http://www.open.ac.uk/postgraduate/research-degrees).

The application process

To apply for a place to study for an MPhil/PhD in the faculty you will need to complete and send us an application form and a research proposal. The application form can be found at [http://www.open.ac.uk/postgraduate/research-degrees/how-to-apply/mphil-and-phd-application-process](http://www.open.ac.uk/postgraduate/research-degrees/how-to-apply/mphil-and-phd-application-process).

You will be required to provide the names of three referees who can support your application and comment on your academic performance. One referee must be able to comment on your most recent studies. When you have completed the application form and proposal please send them to [WELS-Student-Enquiries@open.ac.uk](mailto:WELS-Student-Enquiries@open.ac.uk).

Your research proposal is an important part of your application in which you outline your research and methodology. Information about how to write a proposal is given in the document ‘Writing your proposal for a research degree’ which we can send to you.

The timetable for application is as follows:

January - March: complete and submit an application form and proposal (details of the proposal are given below)

Early April: applicants are emailed with the decision about their application

if shortlisted, applicants are invited to write an additional document outlining the importance of their proposed research (guidance is provided in the email we send you)

Late April: shortlisted applicants submit their writing task

May: shortlisted applicants attend an interview

June: applicants are notified of the decision on their application

NB. Please let us know via email [WELS-Student-Enquiries@open.ac.uk](mailto:WELS-Student-Enquiries@open.ac.uk) if you would like an opportunity to discuss the application process.
Applications Process, Interview Procedure and Admissions Criteria

Applications are shortlisted on the following criteria: fit to school research themes and strategy; quality of the proposal; and availability of suitably qualified supervisors. The school research themes are: ageing and later life; children, young people and parenting; death and dying; living with disability and/or long term conditions; and sexual and reproductive health.

If you are shortlisted, we will contact you by email to arrange an interview (we also email applicants who are not shortlisted to inform them of the decision). Shortlisted applicants will be asked to produce an additional piece of writing which is submitted prior to interview. Full details of the writing task are provided in the email inviting you to interview. The quality of the writing task, and discussion of it at interview, form part of the selection of successful applicants.

The interview panel for PhD students consists of the Director of Postgraduate Studies and usually two members of academic staff with expertise in your chosen field. Interview questions are be based on your application, the written work and previous training in research methods (including final year projects and dissertations). Applicants are requested to bring certificates for their current qualifications and a valid passport or alternative documentation to confirm their identity.

Applicants’ research proposals, writing task and interview performance are evaluated according to the following criteria:

- **Subject knowledge** (i.e. knowledge of theoretical and recent research literature pertaining to the proposed research area)
- **Rationale for the proposal**, (i.e. the relationship between the proposed design of the research, the research questions and/or hypotheses and the proposed method of analysis)
- **Knowledge and understanding of proposed research methods**, (i.e. why certain methods have been proposed in comparison with alternatives)
- **Feasibility of the design of the project and viability within the registration period**
- **Knowledge and understanding of the ethical considerations that need to be taken into account in the conduct of the research**

Candidates will have the opportunity to see the research facilities and office accommodation for students and where possible, meet current students.