ESRC Grand Union Doctoral Training Partnership – Innovation in Learning Pathway

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Pathway Title</th>
<th>Innovation in Learning</th>
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<tr>
<td>Host institution</td>
<td>The Open University</td>
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<tr>
<td>Host faculty</td>
<td>Wellbeing, Education and Language Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Key words</td>
<td>Digital technology. Openness. Inclusion. Innovation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Supervisory team</td>
<td>To be determined according to topic</td>
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Pathway highlights

This pathway welcomes research into innovative approaches to learning, teaching and assessment. Its focus is on initiatives which foster openness, inclusion and wellbeing in the digital age, particularly where these cross the boundary between formal and informal learning. Areas of research strength include the use of assistive technologies by disabled learners, children's digital lives, online language learning, creativity and technology use.

Overview

The Innovation in Learning pathway is hosted by the Faculty of Wellbeing, Education and Language Studies (WELS), in partnership with the Open University’s Institute of Educational Technology (IET), which together form the Centre for Research in Education and Education Technology. The Centre’s vibrant Research Environment was scored 100% 4* and its research was ranked 2nd in the UK for ‘Research Power’ in REF 2014. The Centre is home to a large and growing community of doctoral researchers, including a substantial cohort of Leverhulme Doctoral Scholars. It offers a cohesive research community with many opportunities for interdisciplinary, collaborative and participatory research. The Centre’s interests link closely to research expertise in the Learning and New Technologies Research Group at Oxford’s Department of Education, creating opportunities for shared events and co-supervision.

The pathway welcomes and encourages interdisciplinary research in areas as diverse as openness and inclusion, sports and fitness education, learning design and analytics, MOOCs and the educational mainstream, open educational practices and international teacher development, the educational uses of social media and mobile devices.

Specific areas of interest include:

- technology enhanced learning (learning analytics, innovation, openness)
- technologies for inclusion (assistive technology use by disabled learners)
- child-led research (e.g. digital storytelling)
- creativity and technology use
- online intercultural and language exchange
- technologies for social and global justice
- life histories: technology, learning disability and the ‘good life’
- what (and how) children learn about food from the digital media
- how translators use digital tools
- using digital tools for international development:
- MOOCs for the continuing professional development of teachers
- using eye-tracking to research language learning and teaching
But please don’t feel limited by this list. If you have an idea for research you want to pursue, contact us and we’ll help you develop it.

**Training and skills development**

The training of doctoral researchers in the Innovation in Learning pathway will be shaped by a process of Training Needs Analysis, to identify individual needs and enable the development of personalized training plans. What follows is a short summary of training opportunities available to researchers in the pathway:

Core research methods training is provided by the Open University’s Graduate School. It comprises four modules providing an introduction to research philosophy, design and ethics, dealing with qualitative and quantitative research methods, and engaging with the theory and practice of interdisciplinarity.

Advanced research methods training is tailored annually to respond to students’ actual needs. It draws on a wide span of disciplinary and interdisciplinary expertise and is provided by experienced research academics or specialist trainers. Training offered in 2018-19 will include thematic analysis, autobiography and narrative analysis, advanced statistical methods, advanced and digital discourse analysis, participatory research methods, multimodal transcription and analysis, the reflexive use of vignettes and research methods in cognitive translation studies.

**Structure**

There are two main routes into and through the Innovation in Learning pathway

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Entry level qualifications</th>
<th>Structure of provision</th>
<th>FT/PT/Distance</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BA/BSc (Hons) First Class in Education Studies, Languages, Psychology, Philosophy, Computer Science, or another appropriate discipline.</td>
<td>+4</td>
<td>FT (4 yrs) or PT (8 yrs)</td>
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<tr>
<td>MA/MSc with Distinction, in Education Studies, Languages, Psychology, Philosophy, Computer Science, or another appropriate discipline.</td>
<td>+3</td>
<td>FT (3 yrs) or PT (6 yrs)</td>
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**Knowledge exchange, internships and careers**

WELS hosts a wealth of initiatives in which knowledge transfer and exchange are of central importance. Two striking illustrations are provided by the TESSA and TESS-India projects and by the AHRC-funded *Language Acts and Worldmaking* project. The former explores the use of open educational practices for teacher development in Sub-Saharan Africa and India. The latter brings together four UK universities aiming to regenerate and transform modern language learning by foregrounding language’s power to shape how we live and make our worlds. Its *Diasporic Identities* strand is led from within WELS. These and other projects offer opportunities for research placements, studentships and postdoctoral fellowships. Current examples of externally-funded studentships predicated on engagement with various branches of industry include the Royal Dutch Shell/Energy Institute studentship in Learning from Incidents and the Globe Theatre/Deutsche Bank studentship in Playing Shakespeare.
Doctoral researchers in WELS and IET are actively encouraged to take advantage of placements, mobility awards and internships and have done so recently at CERN, at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin and at the Universitat de Barcelona. Attention is paid, throughout their period of registration, to enabling students to undertake training and gain experience that will equip them for a successful future career.

Further reading


Rebecca Ferguson *et al* *Innovating Pedagogy 2017*, Open University Innovation Report 6. This report and its predecessors are downloadable here: http://www.open.ac.uk/blogs/innovating/

Further details

Prospective students should have a strong background in Educational Studies, Social Science, Humanities (including Languages), or Computer Science.

Please contact: WELS-Student-Enquiries@open.ac.uk

Applying for a studentship:

- Applications should include a cover letter outlining why the project is an important area of study, how your background relates to the proposed research topic and why you wish to study at the Open University;
- An outline research proposal of no more than 2,000 words, covering research topic and methodology. General advice on the proposal can be found here: http://www.open.ac.uk/postgraduate/research-degrees/how-to-apply/mphil-and-phd-application-process;
- an academic CV that includes contact details of three referees, of whom at least two should be academic;
- an Open University application form, downloadable from http://www.open.ac.uk/students/research/sites/www.open.ac.uk.students.research/files/documents/Application%20form.docx

Applications should be sent to WELS-Student-Enquiries@open.ac.uk by midnight on 13th January 2019.