Research Degrees Handbook 2016 – 2017

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

This handbook has been prepared by the Research Degrees Office and the Business and Online Support Services unit of The Open University.

This handbook is available online from
www.open.ac.uk/research/research-handbook and from
www.open.ac.uk/students/charter/essential-documents

While The Open University has done everything possible to ensure accuracy, the information in this handbook may change during the life of this edition due to changes in regulations or policy or because of financial or other constraints. When regulations and policies are updated, the most current edition will apply to all students irrespective of when they registered, unless special provision is made for particular groups or cohorts of students.

The Open University reserves the right to record phone calls with students to make sure that it has carried out any instructions correctly and to help improve services through staff training.

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

Welcome to research at The Open University

The Open University’s mission is to be open to people, places, methods and ideas. This is reflected in its research which has the same openness and global reach. The research community comprises approximately 1,000 postgraduate research students, at the state-of-the-art research facilities on campus in Milton Keynes, online, or working in the University’s Affiliated Research Centres (ARCs) around the world. 187 students were awarded research degrees by The Open University in the academic year 2015-16.

The Open University’s innovative research and development ranks in the top half of all UK universities. Our research influences national and international policy and practice, and enriches the lives of ordinary people around the world every day.

In the Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2014, 72% of all Open University research submitted was graded as internationally excellent or world leading. In music, 94 percent of research was assessed as internationally excellent and above, ranking it 8th in the UK in its field. Assessment in the REF of the impact of research on society has shown that Open University research makes a substantial contribution to the economy, policy making and quality of life in the UK and across the globe. Examples of the outstanding impacts of Open University research include:

- Space researchers built the instrument *Ptolemy*, part of the *Philae* lander, which landed on comet 67P in November 2014.
- Research on the climate of and animals living at the earth’s poles was used for the BBC TV programme, *Frozen Planet*, watched by over 10.8 million viewers an episode.
- Design research on sustainable growth is influencing the development of transport technologies and systems in Milton Keynes.
- Innovation research has influenced government policies on the pharmaceutical industry in several African countries.
- Research by the Institute of Social Marketing on alcohol marketing led the British Medical Association to call for a ban on alcohol advertising and the introduction of minimum alcohol prices.
- The Open University aims to ensure that its research continues to be recognised for excellence and impact, delivering substantial benefits to the University’s mission and priorities.

The aims of the Research Plan 2020 are to:

- Ensure that Open University research transforms lives by meeting the challenges of the twenty-first century and promotes social justice.
- Improve The Open University’s national ranking in the next Research Excellence Framework.
- Achieve global influence for research through open and innovative forms of knowledge sharing, supported by digital technologies.
- Continue to use the research to inform the Open University’s curriculum and underpin an outstanding learning experience for all students.
• Support, develop and value all of the research community in a sustainable environment that fosters creativity and collaboration.

How to use this handbook

This handbook is a guide to the University’s academic and administrative arrangements for research degree study. It provides information about the services available to research degree students, the policies that apply to registration, and it provides advice about key points in the student journey.

This handbook should be read prior to registration and referred to throughout registration. Upon acceptance of an offer of registration, students will be bound by the Research Degree Regulations, the terms and conditions described here, and relevant policies on the Essential Documents website.

The Open University Student Charter sets out the responsibilities The Open University and its students have towards each other, to allow students to achieve their full potential.

Contact details are provided in Part 6.

This handbook is in six parts containing:

Part 1 Research degrees at The Open University
Research degree qualifications, mode and location of study, the organisational structure for delivering research degrees, administrative arrangements and equality and diversity.

Part 2 Terms and conditions of registration
The student record, the terms and conditions of registration, fees, financial support and grants.

Part 3 Studying for a research degree
Key milestones, facilities and services, the research community, professional development, participating in Open University life, help and support.

Part 4 Facilities and Services
Research facilities and support services available to students.

Part 5 Complaints and appeals
Procedures for making a formal appeal or complaint.

Part 6 Contact details

Online resources

Research website
A wealth of information about the University, the research degrees programmes, and student registration can be found online. Please visit the Graduate School Network.

Graduate School Network (GSN)
The Graduate School Network is the gateway to online training and development resources. Forms and guidance notes that support student progress are available on the GSN. All of the University’s policies, statements and regulations can also be found on this website.
Part 1 Research degrees at The Open University

1.1 The Open University

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

The Open University promotes educational opportunity and social justice by providing high-quality university education to all who wish to realise their ambitions and fulfil their potential.

Through academic research, pedagogic innovation and collaborative partnership, the University seeks to be a world leader in the design, content and delivery of supported open learning.

The University’s central headquarters is at Walton Hall, Milton Keynes, and it has 6 regional and national centres located in other parts of the United Kingdom. Over 900 full-time academic and research staff are employed by the University, the majority of whom are based at Walton Hall which is the administrative and operational centre of the University. It is also the location at which most of the research is undertaken.

The University has over 20 Affiliated Research Centres around the world, with approximately 250 students engaged in research degree studies.

The Open University Graduate School launched in October 2016, and is a focal point for research degree community support. Its aim is to facilitate the development of research degree community networks, partnerships and training pathways to support an open, engaged and digitally literate research student community. Research degree policies, regulations and services for research students are aligned with the Quality Assurance Agency UK Quality Code for Higher Education (2012) Chapter B11: Research Degrees.

1.2 Research degree qualifications

The University’s research degrees are:

- Master of Philosophy (MPhil) (full or part-time)
- Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) (full or part-time)
- Master of Research (MRes) (full or part-time – please see Research Degrees (MRes) Handbook)
- Doctorate in Education (EdD) (part-time – please see Research Degrees (EdD) Handbook).

MPhil

For the Master of Philosophy, a student must undertake a research programme leading to the submission of a thesis that must include a critical review of the literature and give evidence of research ability. It must be a distinct contribution to scholarship in the field. 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 Qualifications1 (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\(^2\) (see Appendix 1B of the Research Degree Regulations).

**PhD by published work**

A student may apply to submit a portfolio of published work and a cover paper for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The criteria for the award of the degree is that the portfolio of work must show a significant contribution to knowledge. 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\(^2\) (see Appendix 1B of the Research Degree Regulations).

**Higher doctorates**

The University awards two higher doctorates on the basis of published work:

- Doctor of Letters (DLitt)
- Doctor of Science (DSc)

The candidate must show that s/he has made an original and substantial contribution to a significant field of study over a considerable period of time. The published work submitted must demonstrate that the candidate is a leading authority in his/her field and has taken part in important innovations and developments in it.

The entrance requirements for all research degrees can be found in the [Research Degree Regulations](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/qualifications-frameworks.pdf).

**Taking another research degree**

If a student has been awarded one research degree and wants to take another, they must reapply for admission to the University. The second research programme may build on the work from the first thesis, but the submission for the qualification must contain entirely new material. Clearly indicated references to the contents of the first thesis are permitted.

**Collaborating organisations**

The University encourages cooperation between educational establishments and industrial, commercial, professional and research establishments for the purposes of research leading to the award of a research degree. This cooperation is intended:

- to encourage outward-looking and relevant research
- 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 his/her project
- to be mutually beneficial.

Formal collaboration usually means that the student may use facilities and other resources, provided jointly by the University and the collaborating organisation. The student is expected

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to be fully integrated into the University's research community, student training and pastoral systems.

A formal letter, confirming the agreed arrangements and giving details of the facilities available and the time to be spent at the collaborating organisation, is submitted to the University at the point of application for registration.

### 1.3 Organisational structure for supporting research students

Senate retains overall responsibility for the governance and award of research degrees at The Open University. Senate delegates responsibility for the development of research degree strategy, policy and regulations to the Research Committee and the Research Degrees Committee.

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 Office 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 policies, regulations and legislation.

Research students are recruited into research groups within a School in one of the University faculties or institutes. Where a research project spans more than one School, one school/faculty will take the lead in all of administrative matters relating to the registration.

Upon registration, each student will be assigned a supervisory team. Further details regarding the role of a supervisor can be found in section 3.3.

Information regarding additional support for students from the third party monitor can be found in section 3.4.

The Associate Dean (Research) or Director of Postgraduate Studies has oversight of all research students in their faculty. This person will have a responsibility for ensuring students are supported and progressing well throughout their studies.

The Associate Dean (Research) or Director of Postgraduate Studies works with administrative staff within the faculty who help with the day to day management of research students.

Research degree policy is formulated by the University’s Research Degrees Committee, which makes recommendations to Senate through the Research Committee. The Research Degrees Committee includes representatives of the University’s faculties and research degree students; one full-time and one part-time.
Figure 1 Organisation of research degrees
1.4 Administrative arrangements

The Research Degrees Office will be the main point of contact with the University on administrative matters. The Office also implements policy developed by the Research Degrees Committee and plays a major role in enhancing the quality of the University’s research degree provision and the experience of its research students.

The team of advisors can give advice and guidance on a wide range of topics at any point before, during or after a student studies. This includes information on registration and fees, payment of grants and expenses, financial support, key points in a students studies such as probation, progress reporting and examination.

Our office can also provide letters in support of visa applications, transcripts, and stamps for railcard and Oyster card applications.

The Research Degrees Office is in the Charles Pinfold building and is open from 8:30 to 17:00, Monday to Thursday and 8:30 to 16:30 on Fridays.

The contact details for the Research Degrees Office can be found in Part 6.

The Research Degrees Office is part of the Research and Academic Strategy unit, which is responsible for the Code of Practice for Research, which sets out the standards that govern the conduct of research at The Open University. The code is available on the Research plan and policies website.

The Research Career Development Team is responsible for providing the professional development framework for researchers at all stages of their career life cycle. There is more information about career development in Part 4.

The Academic Strategy Office is responsible for the Code of Practice for Research, which sets out the standards that govern the conduct of research at The Open University. The code is available on the Research plan and policies website.

The Research and Enterprise Office at the Open University is a central office that supports academic staff, research staff and students with their endeavours in seeking external funding for research, and advice on intellectual property assignment and knowledge transfer.

1.5 Equality and diversity

For more than 40 years, The Open University has been promoting social justice and equality of opportunity. It is core to the University’s 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
- where inequalities are challenged
- where it anticipates and responds positively to different needs and circumstances.

This will create an environment where everyone can achieve their potential.

The Open University’s equality and diversity principles

1. The Open University values diversity and recognises that different people bring different perspectives, ideas, knowledge and culture, and that this difference brings great strength.
2. The Open University believes that discrimination or exclusion based on individual characteristics and circumstances such as age; disability; caring or dependency responsibilities; gender or gender identity; marriage and civil partnership status; political opinion; pregnancy and maternity; race, colour, caste, nationality, ethnic or national origin; religion or belief; sexual orientation; socio-economic background; trade union membership status or other distinctions, represents a waste of talent and a denial of opportunity for self-fulfilment.

3. It is recognised that patterns of under representation and differences in outcomes at The Open University can be challenged through positive action programmes.

4. The Open University respects the rights of individuals, including the right to hold different views and beliefs. The Open University will not allow these differences to be manifested in a way that is hostile or degrading to others.

5. The Open University expects commitment and involvement from all its staff, students, partners and providers of goods and services in working towards the achievement of its vision.

For further details about equality and diversity at The Open University, including its Equality Schemes, please visit the Equality and Diversity website.

**Student responsibilities**

Students should:

- treat all members of the University community with dignity and respect for their rights and beliefs
- challenge or report incidents of discrimination and bullying
- respond positively and inclusively to individual differences.

For help or advice with an issue relating to equality and diversity, contact the Research Degrees Office in the first instance. The Research Degrees advisors will be pleased to help, all enquiries will be treated sensitively and confidentially.

Equality and diversity policy enquiries may also be addressed to The Open University Equality and Diversity office (email: strategy-equality@open.ac.uk). The office offers general information and guidance on University equality and diversity policy. However, it cannot normally take an active part in issues of an individual nature concerning cases involving staff or students where these are being handled by existing institutional complaints, appeals or grievance processes.
Part 2 Terms and conditions of registration

This section contains the terms and conditions for research degree registration with The Open University. For the latest version of the terms and conditions as they apply to registration please visit the Graduate School Network.

Other documents such as the Code of Practice of Research at The Open University, Procedure for dealing with allegations of academic malpractice, The Code of Practice for Student Discipline, The Open University Student Computing Policy, the Student Charter, Plagiarism policy, The Open University Ethics principles for research involving human participants and other documents cited in this part of the handbook, apply to a student’s registration and can also be accessed via the Graduate School Network.

2.1 The student record and personal data

Personal identifier

Each student is provided with a ‘personal identifier’ (PI number) upon registration. Students will be asked to provide this unique PI number whenever they contact the University or complete any forms.

Change of personal details

If a student changes his/her name, address, phone number or email address s/he must tell the Research Degrees Office in writing. Any change of name must be supported by appropriate documentary evidence such as:

- a marriage certificate
- a birth certificate, or
- a deed poll.

Updates to University records for transgender student transitioning to a different gender, may be made upon receipt of a letter explaining that the student intends to undergo gender reassignment. However, the University requires evidence of legal name change before a degree certificate in the preferred name can be issued. Evidence may be in the form of:

- a statutory declaration of name change
- a birth certificate in the new name, or
- a deed poll.

The data held by The Open University

The Open University is committed to the principles of data protection and best practice in handling information. All personal information is held in secure files and will be processed only for the purposes identified at registration.

Within the University, information is transferred only to those who need it for the purposes of academic, administrative and support services. In addition, where a student is part of a Doctoral Training Partnership (DTP) The Open University will be sharing his/her details with other members of the DTP.

Some information will be sent to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA). Information will also be provided to other statutory bodies on request.
Further information about the use of data can be found in The Open University Data Protection policy published on the Graduate School Network.

**Access to data**

Students can access information about their research degree registration on StudentHome.

Each student will be issued with a username and password following the acceptance of their registration.

Students have the right under the Data Protection Act 1998 to a copy of the personal data the University holds about them and to information about its processing. Requests can be made in writing to the Data Protection Coordinator (contact details are in Part 6). There is a small fee payable for this.

**Information and advice on data protection**

The University’s Data Protection policy is published on the Graduate School Network but note that the policy covers taught students as well as research students so not all of it is relevant.

For more information or advice about data protection matters, please ask the Data Protection Coordinator (contact details are in Part 6).

**Freedom of information**

The University has a publication scheme which gives 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.

**How The Open University will communicate**

The University keeps electronic records and will usually communicate with students and supervisors by email. During their studies students will be required to complete and submit forms electronically. The forms and guidance notes required are available on the Graduate School Network.

Where a document cannot be found or where clarification is needed regarding forms and/or guidance, please contact the Research Degrees Office (contact details are in Part 6).

**Giving feedback**

The Open University welcomes feedback from students regarding their studies, registration, or life in general as an Open University research student. Any suggestions and ideas for improvements are also welcome. Where appropriate, the feedback will be used to make improvements to services for students. Please email the Research Degrees Office (contact details are in Part 6). Feedback can also be left on the Graduate School Network website.

For specific concerns relating to studies, students should talk to their supervisors and/or third party monitor in the first instance. Students may also speak to members of the Research Degrees Office in confidence (contact details in Part 6).

**Appeals**

Students can appeal against administrative and academic decisions of the University. Please see Part 5 of this handbook.
Complaints

For information on the complaints process and the University’s Complaints procedure please refer to Part 5 of this handbook.

Public interest disclosure

The University has a statement setting out its policy on ‘whistleblowing’ (public interest disclosure). It offers guidance for students and staff who want to raise reasonable suspicions they may have about irregularities in the running of the University or about the activities of colleagues within the University. This statement is not intended to replace the University’s other policies and procedures in relation to grievances, harassment, disciplinary matters or students’ complaints.

The policy statement is intended to incorporate the requirements of the Public Interest Disclosure Act, January 1998, but is broader in two respects – it applies to students as well as to staff and its scope goes beyond that of protected disclosure as defined in the Act. A copy of the statement can be downloaded from the Graduate School Network.

2.2 University regulations and codes of practice

Regulations:

The Research Degree Regulations are available at: www.open.ac.uk/students/charter/essential-documents/research-degree-regulations

The Research Degree Regulations should not be read in isolation. It is important that they are read in conjunction with the University’s general regulations, such as the Code of Practice for Student Discipline, this handbook, and other relevant documents referred to both in the regulations and the handbook.

These documents are available through the Graduate School Network.

The Research Degree Regulations form part of a student’s contract with the University.

Any questions about the Research Degree Regulations should be addressed to the Research Degrees Office.

Supervision:

The University’s Research Degree Regulations section 5, and Appendix 2, the Code of Practice for Supervisors and Research Students set out guidelines for the conduct of the relationship between supervisors and students and serve as a standard for external audits of research degree provision and research degree appeals.

The Open University Research Degrees Committee reviews the regulations, codes of practice and policies periodically and would welcome any comments. Please send them to the Research Degrees Office (contact details in Part 6).

2.3 Registration

The forms and guidance notes for recording and managing registration are on the Graduate School Network.

Registration arrangements

On admission to the research degree programme, a student will be registered for the degree of Master of Philosophy (MPhil). Before the end of the probationary registration, the student...
will be assessed and a recommendation made about continuing registration and specific degree registration to the Graduate School Director.

If probationary registration is confirmed, registration will continue until the submission deadline, provided the student maintains satisfactory academic progress and meets all fee liabilities.

**UKVI (UK Visas and Immigration)**

The Open University is a Tier 4 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 Tier 4 visas. Full details of the immigration regulations for students can be found at [UKVI](#).

A student needing a Tier 4 visa will be required to demonstrate that s/he can meet the UK Visas and Immigration requirements.

In order to fulfill its responsibilities as a Tier 4 Sponsor the University will need to copy and verify a student’s passport and visa each year that s/he is registered as an Open University student. The University will also keep records of attendance and contact with University staff.

A student studying on a Tier 4 visa must tell the Research Degrees Office immediately if his/her contact details change at any point in his/her studies, if s/he is leaving the country or if s/he is going to be absent from studies for more than a week, including conference attendance and field study. The University will be keeping records of attendance/absence and monitoring them to ensure compliance. These records will be made available to the UKVI.

It is imperative that a student ensures s/he is compliant with the up-to-date requirements, as they may change from time to time. If a student needs to extend his/her student visa, s/he should read the guidance notes and application form on the UKVI website very carefully, and then contact the Research Degrees Office.

**Residence requirements**

Students must normally be resident in the United Kingdom throughout their studies. Full-time students normally study on campus and are required to live within easy commutable distance from Milton Keynes (approximately 40 miles/40 minutes travelling time from Milton Keynes).

If, in exceptional circumstances, a student needs to live further away (e.g. due to domestic or childcare commitments) the faculty will need to request a residency waiver from the Graduate School Director. Applicants living outside the UK are not normally accepted for full-time registration.

Part-time students are not required to live in the vicinity of Milton Keynes but are expected to engage fully with the University and their research community. In exceptional circumstances, the University may allow someone who is resident outside the UK to register as a part-time research student if it can be shown that adequate supervision and engagement with the research can be arranged. A student would be expected to make regular visits to the UK for supervision sessions at his/her own expense. All research degree examinations are held in the UK and s/he is required to attend at his/her own expense.

The University is willing to waive the residence requirement to enable full-time and part-time UK students to undertake periods of fieldwork overseas if it is essential to the research and if it can be shown that regular and adequate supervision can be maintained.
Non-book components to thesis

A student intending to develop and submit a thesis with a non-book component in line with the Research Degree Regulations (RD 2.7 and 17.7 – 17.9) should prepare for this eventuality from the beginning of registration.

Other study

The University supports research students undertaking supplementary study related to their research degree. A student would require approval of the Graduate School Director on the recommendation of the faculty before registering for any additional study.

A student may not study for any other degree or qualification at The Open University or any other institution at the same time as undertaking research degree study.

Study hours

Full-time research students are required to spend a **minimum of 37 hours** a week on their studies.

Part-time students are expected to spend **at least 18.5 hours** a week on their studies.

Full-time students are expected to undertake no more than **six hours** per week paid employment. Any paid work must be declared to the supervisors and the Research Degrees Office.

Study periods

Students may start in October or February. The main cycle of induction events begins after registration with further events throughout the year. Registered students will be given a ‘submission due date’ by which they must submit the thesis for examination. This date will be adjusted to take into account any periods of suspended registration or changes to mode of study.

The UK funding councils set the benchmarks for the timely completion of research degrees. The minimum and maximum study periods permitted by the regulations are shown below.

**Table 1: minimum and maximum study periods permitted.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualification</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full-time students MPhil</td>
<td>15 months</td>
<td>48 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-time students PhD</td>
<td>24 months</td>
<td>48 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time students MPhil</td>
<td>24 months</td>
<td>72 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time students PhD</td>
<td>36 months</td>
<td>72 months</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In order to study for a degree, submit a thesis for examination and be awarded the degree, a student must be a registered research student of the University. Should registration lapse prior to submission, the student will be deemed to have withdrawn from the research degree programme. Any research or other work undertaken before registration as a research student cannot count as part of the minimum period of study required before the submission of a thesis for the award of a research degree and may not be included in the thesis.
Change of mode

Students may apply to the Graduate School Director for a change of mode of study from full time to part time or vice versa. In such cases the minimum and maximum registration periods will be calculated pro rata.

Probation

PhD students will initially be registered for the degree of Master of Philosophy (MPhil).

For full-time students, the first year of registration is considered the probation period. For part-time students the first two years are the probation period. For details please see section 3.5.

Absences and other disruptions

A student must inform his/her supervisors and the Research Degrees Office if s/he is absent or if his/her studies are disrupted for any reason. All information disclosed will be treated confidentially and sensitively.

All absences of a week or more that are due to illness or injury should be reported, or any problems leading to an inability to study for a week or more. Funded students will continue to receive stipend up to a maximum of 2 months within any 12 month period, provided s/he does not suspend registration. Medical absences beyond 2 months are not funded and in such cases registration would be suspended.

For students in receipt of a grant, refer to the information in Section 2.6 or contact the Research Degrees Office (contact details in Part 6).

Supervisors and Associate Deans (Research)/Directors of Postgraduate Studies are required to notify the Research Degrees Office immediately of any unauthorised absences or if they have concerns about disruptions to a student’s attendance or progress.

Students on a Tier 4 visa sponsored by The Open University who fail to comply with this requirement may have their sponsorship withdrawn.

Holidays

The academic year for research students begins on 1 October and ends on 30 September. Research students are not subject to terms or semesters in the conventional sense, nor do they have fixed hours of study. Full-time research students are entitled, with the prior agreement of their supervisors, to take up to 40 days annual leave each year including public holidays and University closure periods. For part-time students holiday allowances are pro rata. Students are not entitled to transfer holiday between years. Funded students who fail to take annual leave will not be entitled to payment in lieu.

Students who entered the UK on a Tier 4 visa sponsored by The Open University must comply with the reporting requirements as outlined in the UKVI Tier 4 Responsibilities document signed as part of the acceptance of registration.

Suspending registration

A Faculty or Institute may submit a request for suspension of a student’s registration to the Graduate School Director for consideration. Suspension of registration is not an automatic right. Any request must be submitted together with the supporting evidence. Where possible, such requests should be made in advance. Where this is not possible they should, as soon as they become aware of an incident that is likely to lead to the submission of a request for suspension, inform the Associate Dean Research (or delegate) and the Research Degrees
Office. The completed paperwork should be submitted as soon as possible thereafter. Overly late requests will not be considered.

A full-time student may apply for a suspension to his/her registration for a maximum of 12 months in total on the following grounds:

a) Certified serious ill health of the student or a family member or dependent for whom the student is acting as a carer.

b) Internship or placement.

A part-time student may request a suspension to his/her registration, for a maximum of twenty-four months in total on the following grounds:

a) Certified serious ill health of the student or a family member or dependent for whom the student is acting as a carer.

b) Work related difficulties.

c) Domestic commitments.

d) Internship or placement.

Students requesting a suspension after the submission of their thesis may only do so in exceptional circumstances.

Students wishing to suspend their registration on the grounds of ill health, must provide a medical certificate.

Students requiring longer than the maximum permitted period of suspended registration will have to withdraw from their programme of study.

Periods of suspension do not count towards the maximum permitted periods of study. If suspended registration is approved the submission deadline will be extended accordingly and the University will confirm the revised deadline in writing.

For students in receipt of a stipend, payments will normally cease during periods of suspension and will be resumed upon return to study. Upon return students will be required to have a ‘Return to Study’ meeting with their supervisor(s).

Students who have entered the UK on a Tier 4 visa sponsored by The Open University, who are considering suspending registration, should consult the Research Degrees Office as it may affect the terms and conditions relating to their leave to remain in the UK.

Maternity, paternity and adoption leave

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

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

Conditions apply and a Suspended registration form will be required. Full details of maternity, paternity and adoption leave and pay are on the Graduate School Network.

Please contact the Research Degrees Office for further information on minimum registration periods.
If the student has entered the UK on a Tier 4 visa sponsored by The Open University and is considering taking maternity, paternity or adoption leave, they must consult the Research Degrees Office as it affects the terms and conditions relating to their leave to remain in the UK.

A shared leave policy is under development. Please contact the Research Degrees Office for further information.

**Extensions**

Exceptionally, the Graduate School Director may consider requests for an extension to the maximum periods of study if they are supported by the supervisors and Associate Dean (Research) or Director of Postgraduate Studies. The supervisors will need to submit a case to the Research Degrees Office with a plan for completion of the outstanding work. The length of time requested should be realistic as further extensions are unlikely to be granted. The maximum extension to registration regardless of mode of study is 12 months.

**Withdrawal**

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

Where a student decides to withdraw from the programme, the supervisor will need to submit a withdrawal form to the Research Degrees Office via the Associate Dean (Research) or equivalent.

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

New students who accept a place on the programme but withdraw before their start date, will receive a full refund of any fees paid. For students in receipt of a grant, further payments will be stopped once appropriate notification has been received from the faculty.

Research degrees are not credit-bearing. No staged or incremental credit will be awarded.

**Assignment of intellectual property rights (IPRs)**

Intellectual property law aims to safeguard intellectual property creators by warranting them certain time-limited rights to control and use their creations. IPRs can be registered, in the form of designs (registered and unregistered), patents and trademarks.

The distinction between the four categories is defined below:

- **Copyright**: protects material such as literature, art, music, sound recordings, films and broadcasts and computer programmes; it is an automatic right which does not need registration at the Intellectual Property Office.
- **Designs**: protect the visual appearance or eye appeal of products.
- **Patents**: protect the technical and functional aspects of products and processes.
- **Trademarks**: protect signs that can distinguish the goods and services of one trader from those of another.

Whilst Copyright is protected on creation, designs, patents and trademarks need to be registered at a national Intellectual Property Office.
Registered and un-registered IPRs are an important tool in using and exploiting research activities, as they can be transferred, sold, assigned or waived, allowing others to use the work but at the same time protecting the creators.

**Postgraduate research student IP policy**

Research students are required to assign any IPRs arising from their research to The Open University. This includes:

- original inventions, design rights and copyright in all materials (written, broadcast, recorded, computer programs, research information on Open University websites, iTunes, videos and any other form of storage device) produced during the course of an Open University studentship or in work specifically assigned to a student.

Research IP that is excluded is as follows:

- copyright in books that are not part of a University course
- copyright in journal articles, and thesis work
- copyright in conference papers
- copyright in presentations
- students’ personal notes (excluding laboratory notebooks)
- copyright in software, databases and questionnaires is owned by The Open University and should not be included in research papers / books, where the intention is to assign IP rights to a third party (i.e. publisher). Contact the Enterprise Office before any action is taken.

If the research is sponsored by a third party at the start of any collaboration, contractual arrangements must be in place to define The Open University’s position on research IPR’s before work commences. Such arrangement might involve third party ownership of IP arising from the research, and therefore students must assign the IP to The Open University so that it can comply with such terms.

For more information about IP with (regards to research only), contact the Research and Enterprise Office.

Contact details for the Research and Enterprise Office can be found in Part 6.

**Copyrighted material owned by a third party**

It is the responsibility of the student to ensure any copyrighted material owned by a third party has been cleared (i.e. permission to make it available on open access websites secured) prior to depositing the thesis in Open Research Online. More information on third party copyright can be found at Open Research Online help.

**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 his/her studies. The fee is payable on initial registration as a single payment and then, in advance, prior to the anniversary of their registration date. It is payable every year or part-year throughout registration, up to and including the year in which a student submits his/her thesis for examination.

The fee due is shown in the offer letter and is subject to an annual rise.
The fees and other charges for research students are on the Fees and funding website.

There are different fees for full-time, part-time, UK, European Economic Area and overseas students, and fees are reviewed each year in line with Research Councils UK recommendations.

The fee covers the supervision, and assessment for the degree.

There may be other costs of study which may have to be met in addition to the fees and other charges paid to The Open University. These include the costs of research materials (e.g. chemicals, access to specialist software, books and journals, stationery, computers and printing, travel to and from the place of study). By applying to study at the University and agreeing to the offer of registration, a student expressly agrees to pay the additional costs of study, if any, which are not covered by the tuition fees.

For those students in receipt of funding (registered on a studentship) the fees will either be waived by the faculty for the period specified in the offer letter or paid by the funding body for a designated time period. The offer letter describes the arrangements for fees. Should the funding period end prior to thesis submission, the student will be liable for fees for the remaining period of registration.

A student paying his/her own fees must make the first fee payment upon acceptance of the offer of research degree registration. The fee covers the period of one academic year. Thereafter the relevant annual fee is payable prior to the anniversary of the student’s registration date each year. When entering the fourth year of study as a full-time student, or sixth year as a part-time student, or the end of the funded period, the student will become liable for either a write up fee or a continuation fee (see ‘write-up fee’ and ‘continuation fee’ below). If following the viva the student is required to resubmit a revised thesis, s/he will be charged a resubmission fee (see ‘resubmission fee’ below).

**Write up fee**

Upon entering year four as a full time student or year six as a part-time student, the fee due may be reduced providing the substantive research has been completed, the student is no longer acquiring new data and is predominantly engaged in writing the thesis. This must be verified by the supervisors.

A student may benefit from reduced write up fees for a maximum of one year. Regardless of mode of study, should the student fail to submit his/her thesis within the ‘write-up year’ s/he will become liable for the continuation fee should s/he be granted an extension to registration.

**Continuation fee**

If upon entering year four as a full-time student or year six as a part-time student, the substantive research has not been completed and the student is still acquiring new data, a continuation fee must be paid.

**Resubmission fee**

A resubmission fee is charged if a student is required to resubmit his/her thesis following examination. This charge is made to cover the costs of the re-examination and additional supervision. 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.
Payment of fees

The University accepts payment by an approved payment method such as a credit card, cheque, grant or studentship, or payment by a sponsor. Self-funded students are normally required to have secured the agreement to pay the fees by some other method before registration is accepted by the University.

Pay as you go

A student may pay for his/her study in instalments with an Open University Student Budget Account (OUSBA) agreement. This is a legally binding credit agreement between the student and OUSBA Ltd to pay The Open University on his/her behalf so that The Open University can complete registration. By agreeing to the terms and conditions of the loan, the student remains liable for the repayments under the terms of the credit agreement.

Details can be found at OUSBA for this option of paying.

Staff fee waiver

Part-time students who are salaried Open University staff or Open University associate lecturers can apply to have their fees waived while they are employed by the University, subject to current policy. Details and application forms are available on www.open.ac.uk/research/main/research-careers/research-students/directly-registered-students.

Sponsorship

Students may be sponsored for their fees by their employer or another third party. If an employer or another third party is willing to be invoiced by the University for all or part of the fee, the student should complete a Sponsorship agreement, which can be downloaded from the website at: www.open.ac.uk/research/main/research-careers/research-students/directly-registered-students/offer-packs.

This should be returned to the Research Degrees Office with the Acceptance form.

Refunds

Please refer to the Fees Policy for information on refunds.

Failure to pay fees and charges

Refusal of registration

A student who fails to pay fees or provide an approved payment method at the time of registration, will not be registered.

Cancellation of registration for non-payment of fees

a. A registered student is liable to pay an annual fee. If this is not paid the University may cancel registration.

NOTE: Students who are unable to pay fees should contact the Research Degrees Office to find out if arrangements can be made to help safeguard registration.

b. The University may, at its discretion, accept registration or permit further study before an approved payment method has been secured. The exercise of this discretion will be conditional upon the student having taken and/or agreeing to take all reasonable steps (as the case may be) to secure that payment method within a reasonable time.

NOTE: Failure to secure payment within the timeframe stipulated may lead the University to cancel registration as set out in paragraph (c) below.
c. Students permitted to register or undertake further study under paragraph (b) above who fail to secure an approved payment method within the reasonable time provided, may have their registration cancelled even where they have started studying or have continued to study. Students will be given notice by the University of its intention to cancel registration and a final opportunity to secure the payment or to pay by a different method will be granted. If registration is cancelled under this paragraph any part payment of fees that have already been made for the relevant year of study will be refunded and any grant or loan in respect of part payment of those fees will be cancelled.

d. If the University has accepted the registration or continued registration and, for any reason, the payment method the University has accepted is cancelled or withdrawn the University may cancel registration even if the student has started studying or is continuing to study. The student will be given notice of the University’s intention to cancel registration and provided with a final opportunity to secure the payment or to pay by a different method.

e. If registration is cancelled under paragraph (b) or (c) above it will be reinstated in the following circumstances:

i. the student contacts the University within 7 days of the date of cancellation having secured an agreed payment method or provides payment by a different method; or

ii. the student contacts the University more than 7 days after the date of cancellation having secured an agreed payment method or provides payment by a different method, and

• the University records that it has provided the student with advice on the impact any gap in studies may have on their academic progress, and

• the student confirms that they have received that advice and wish to be reinstated.

f. If registration is cancelled under paragraph (d) above the student will remain personally liable to the University for all of the fees which are due by the date of the cancellation. If the fees are not paid the student 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 his/her studies (for example residential weekends) and s/he does not pay those charges when they become due s/he 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, the student will be in debt to the University.

What if the student is in debt to the University

Restriction on further study

A student will only be permitted to undertake further study for which any further annual fee or other charges may become due if this is paid in advance or the student has in place some other secured means of payment for those tuition fees or charges, which the University has accepted.
**Action to recover debt**

If a student does not pay his/her 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.

Before the University does this it will:

a. Notify the student of what action s/he may take, if appropriate, to limit any liability for further fees and other charges that may become due and give him/her a reasonable opportunity to take that action before any further liability will be incurred.

b. Notify the student that s/he is in debt, the amount of the debt and how s/he may pay that debt and give him/her a reasonable opportunity to pay any outstanding fees or other charges before taking any further action.

**Discretion to postpone action**

If the University continues, at its discretion, to provide tuition, facilities or services or allow further study by students who are in debt to the University, the University reserves the right to take the actions shown above at a later date.

**2.5 Financial support**

**Support for study related costs**

Please contact the Research Degrees Office for more information.

**Dependants fund**

Full-time students with dependants, who are resident in the UK and who have a household income of less than £19,500 per year, may apply for financial support from the Dependants Fund. The fund is cash limited and awards are not guaranteed. For more information and an application form contact the Research Degrees Office.

**Open University Students’ Educational Trust (OUSET) fund**

The Open University’s Students’ Association has made a sum available from The Open University Students’ Educational Trust to provide financial support for directly supported postgraduate research students. The fund is available to full-time and part-time directly supported research students (who are not a member of Open University staff in receipt of a fee waiver); who are experiencing unforeseen financial hardship. While applicants must be resident in the United Kingdom, there is no citizenship restriction; UK and non-UK citizens are equally eligible to apply. Further information can be found from the [OU Students Association](#).

**Crowther Fund (Open University graduates only)**

The Crowther Fund was set up as a tribute to the late Lord Crowther, the first Chancellor of The Open University. It is intended to help Open University graduates build upon their Open University degrees, either by formal study or research or by generally broadening their experience through a period of voluntary work.

The closing date for award applications is 28 February each year.

For further details on eligibility criteria students can download an application form and guidance notes from: [www.open.ac.uk/postgraduate/fees-and-funding/ou-funding](http://www.open.ac.uk/postgraduate/fees-and-funding/ou-funding)
Beevers Fund

Additional funds were also donated by the late Dr Robert Beevers, one of The Open University’s “founding fathers”. Open University honours graduates can apply for funding to undertake research towards an Open University research degree from the Robert Beevers Memorial Fund. An award from this fund can be used for payment towards fees or study related costs such as books or travel.

The fund is administered via The Crowther Fund. For further information see: www.open.ac.uk/postgraduate/fees-and-funding/ou-funding

The closing date for award applications is 28 February each year.

Disabled Students' Allowances (DSAs)

Disabled Students’ Allowances are government grants for students in higher education who are obliged to incur additional study-related costs because of a disability, mental health condition or specific learning difficulty.

DSAs are not means tested and are not dependent upon income or any savings that the student may have. If a student is eligible for a DSA it will not affect any state benefits the student may be receiving. A student may still be eligible for a DSA if s/he is studying part time.

Where a student gets their DSA from will depend on several factors including where the student lives, when they started their qualification and whether they have received DSA support before.

A student can find out whether s/he is eligible for a DSA and find out where to apply by visiting disability support information.

Students in Scotland

To determine eligibility and to apply for a DSA students based in Scotland should either:

- email: scotland@open.ac.uk or
- phone the University’s Disability and Additional Requirements Team on +44 (0)131 226 3851 (Monday to Friday 08:30 to 17:00 GMT).

2.6 Grants

Research students who are registered on a funded studentship normally have their fees covered by their funder and receive a monthly grant payment. Students are responsible for ensuring that they comply with the terms and conditions of registration including those related to grant payments. Students should read this section carefully and make sure that they understand their responsibilities. If there are any terms and conditions specific to the studentship these will be provided in the offer letter. Details of the grant rate and conditions for Research Council studentships are published by each Research Council.

Any questions should be directed to the Research Degrees Office.

Grant rate

The standard grant rate for academic year 2016-17 is £14,296 per annum. Payments for less than a year and for part-time students are reduced pro-rata. Some students will have a different grant rate due to the specific terms and conditions of their studentship.
**Residential address**

Grant payments will not be made unless the Research Degrees Office has a current residential address and phone numbers (mobile and landline).

Students should notify the Research Degrees Office of a change of address, email address or phone number. This includes temporary residence elsewhere in the UK or overseas for the purpose of field trips. Failure to provide a current address and phone numbers is a breach of the terms and conditions of registration.

Students on a Tier 4 visa who fail to update their contact details may have their sponsorship withdrawn.

**Absences and disruptions**

If the studentship is based on Open University terms and conditions (as opposed to an externally funded studentship with its own set of terms and conditions):

- The student is entitled to retain registration and full grant payments for the first two months of certified ill health within any 12-month period.
- The studentship grant payments and registration will be suspended if the student is unable to study for more than two months because of ill health within any 12-month period.
- The student must be certified by a general practitioner as fit to resume studies, before the studentship and registration will be reinstated.
- If the student decides to apply for a suspension of registration this must be done via the supervisors.
- Grant payments will cease whilst suspended.
- Grant payments resume when the student re-engages with his/her studies following a suspension and will continue until s/he has received three years’ funding in total.
- The final submission date will be deferred by a period equivalent to the suspension.

If the studentship is from a Research Council, they allow full grant payment for up to 13 weeks within any 12-month period. After that, no grant payments are made and registration is suspended. When a student is certified as fit to resume study the studentship is reinstated and:

- Grant payments resume until s/he has received three years’ funding in total.
- The final submission date is deferred by a period equivalent to the suspension.

Whatever the circumstances, the maximum period of suspension allowed for any full-time student is 12 months in total and if they are part-time by 24 months in total.

If a student withdraws or completes the studies before the end of the funded period, the University will stop grant payments and the student may be asked to repay any payments made following the withdrawal/completion date.

**Research Training Support Grants**

Funds for Research Training Support are available from the faculties.
Income tax and National Insurance

Grant and other payments made for research studentships are not regarded as income for income tax purposes by the HM Revenue and Customs.

For information about the position of research students in relation to benefits under the National Insurance Acts, telephone Jobcentre Plus on 0345 600 0643. For information about contributions and further information about National Insurance contact the local tax office.
Part 3 Studying for a research degree

This section contains information about the key milestones in research degree registration and the academic support available. It provides guidance on sources of support and guidance.

3.1 Key milestones

Figure 2 Key milestones during registration

Upon acceptance of an offer of registration, the University will contact the student about completing registration and beginning life as an Open University research student. This will mean coming on to campus with proof of identity and qualifications for the University to check and completing any remaining paperwork. If self-funding the student will need to pay fees. This can be done over the phone.

The student will be invited to several induction sessions. These will include an introduction to The Open University, skills development and student life, as well as more specific sessions and meetings organised by the faculty to explain how the student will fit into the research group.

Before starting a research degree, and at regular points in a student’s studies, s/he should, with the help of the supervisors, consider his/her training needs. Students will be asked to conduct an online skills audit as part of induction. Skills training will be available to strengthen the student’s research and transferable skills. Details are available via the Graduate School Network.

When a student first registers, his/her supervisors will discuss day-to-day arrangements with him/her, including supervision meetings and key study milestones. The arrangements for assessing the probation period are given below. Progress will be formally assessed in accordance with the regulations. If any changes are made to the registration, such as a period of suspended registration, the Research Degrees Office will provide the student with a 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 a MPhil and a PhD align with the Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications 4. This can be found 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 below.

3.2 Induction

The Research Career Development Team organises the main induction events and will show students how to access training and development resources and book themselves on to further events throughout the year. Students coming to the UK for the first time will be invited to attend bespoke induction events to cover moving to the UK and getting settled in. The faculty will provide local induction activities to ensure students are settled and ready to begin studies.

Supervisors and faculty offices will make appropriate practical arrangements for students depending on mode of study e.g. office keys, security passes, library and computer access, health and safety training and any workstation assessment needed. Students will be introduced to staff and fellow students and will be able to build networks of contacts at The Open University and in the wider research community.

3.3 Supervision

All MPhil/PhD research students have two internal supervisors who are members of the University’s academic staff. One supervisor, the lead supervisor, has the responsibility for day to day supervision. Students may have an external supervisor appointed from an institution of higher education or a research institute in their home area or near their place of work.

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.

The number of meetings a student has with his/her supervisors will depend on the nature of the project and mode of study.

Full-time students should have a minimum of ten formal supervision meetings in an academic year. Part-time students should have five such formal supervision meetings as a minimum in an academic year. Supervisors and students discuss the direction of the research project and the amount and nature of communication (meetings, correspondence, email and phone) at their first meeting. Students are expected to agree outcomes of formal meetings with their supervisors and keep a written record.

The nature of the work the supervisors require of the student will depend on the research project. Regular written reports and draft thesis chapters may be specified, or a student may spend a considerable period at the beginning of the project on a preliminary reading programme and literature survey before producing a significant piece of written work.

Further information about what a student can expect from the supervisor and what the supervisor can expect from the student can be found 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 his/her studies with a third party – someone other than the supervisors or head of discipline. Within The Open University research degree programme, this opportunity is formalised through the appointment of a third party monitor by the Associate Dean (Research) (or delegate). The role of the third party monitor is to provide the student with independent support. The student should feel free to discuss with his/her third-party monitor, in confidence, any matters that might affect his/her studies. Any records kept should be agreed by both parties.
Students should be advised of the name and contact details of the third-party monitor during the first month of registration. The first third-party monitoring session should take place no later than the fifth month of registration. Third-party monitoring should then take place at least annually in the first quarter of each calendar year. The Research Degrees Office can provide advice about third-party monitoring upon request. Contact details are in Part 6.

3.5 Probation assessment

All research degree students are required to undertake a probation assessment before their Mphil or PhD registration can be confirmed and they can progress to a second (full-time) / third (part-time) year of study. Students and supervisors work together to plan and carry out the probation assessment.

Before a student reaches probation assessment, s/he must ensure that any ethics review required for the project is completed. For more information see Part 4.

The University requires a detailed report that reviews the project and plans, assesses skills development and makes a recommendation about degree registration. Students are also required to give details of their skills audit and project development, give an oral presentation and to undertake a ‘mini viva’ as part of the probation assessment. The deadline for the completion of the probation process are as follows:

- Full-time student – 12 months of the initial date of registration
- Part-time student – 24 months of the initial date of registration.

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

The criteria for the probation assessment are outlined in detail in Research Degree Regulations RD15.3 - 15.4 for MPhil students and RD15.6 – 15.7 for PhD students.

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

- registration for the degree of Master of Philosophy (MPhil); or
- registration for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD); or
- probation should be extended to enable the student to complete any remedial work\(^5\) (extensions should not exceed two months beyond the end of the first year for full-time students or four months beyond the end of the second year for part-time students) probation; or
- registration should be terminated due to failure to make satisfactory academic progress.

If registration is confirmed following probation assessment, registration will continue until the submission deadline. This is subject to the student making progress to the satisfaction of the

\(^5\) Remedial work will be reviewed. Further registration will depend on it having been completed to the satisfaction of the assessors and ARC research degree coordinator and confirmed by the Graduate School Director.
supervisors, the Faculty/Institute and the Graduate School Director. The student must also comply with any non-academic conditions of registration, including payment of fees.

If a student does not pass probation, s/he may decide to withdraw, or the supervisors may recommend deregistration.

3.6 Progress monitoring

Progress monitoring reports are required for all MPhil/PhD research students. The faculty 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 faculty/Institute to the Research Degrees Office on an annual basis and should encompass a student's progress throughout the previous year. A student is expected to have a meeting with his/her full supervision team to discuss the progress of his/her research during the period immediately before the report is prepared. If there are any concerns about a student's progress, s/he will be given an opportunity by the University to get back on track. The supervisors and the student should plan any remedial action. Please refer to the Procedures for addressing failure to make satisfactory academic progress, Appendix 3 of the Research Degree Regulations.

Progress monitoring gives an opportunity for a student and his/her supervisors to review his/her 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 faculty will make a recommendation to The Open University about continuing registration.

3.7 Examination

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

Students and supervisors should read the Regulations and the guidelines carefully. These include information on publication of papers, originality and joint work, the length and format of the thesis and non-book components.

A student must give the Research Degrees Office 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 faculty/Research Degrees Office know if any adjustments are required on the day to accommodate a disability or additional need.

Theses can be submitted at any time during the year, although those submitted during the summer may be subject to some delay if examiners are not available for oral examinations.

When the notice is received, the Associate Dean (Research) (or delegate), 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 his/her 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.
The student is required to attend the examination in person and defend the thesis to the examiners. A supervisor may be present as an observer at the oral examination. However the invitation to attend is at the student’s discretion.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is using the work (including 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 develops and maintains best practice in his/her writing throughout the research. In cases of suspected plagiarism, the University will follow the Procedure of dealing with allegations of academic misconduct and malpractice.

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 (A-Z) on the Graduate School Network.

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

Results

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

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

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

Award of degrees

If no corrections are required, the degree is awarded with effect from the date the examiners recommendations are approved by the University. Where 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 The Open University Thesis Submission Guideline) 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. These are held in March to June and September to November in towns and cities across the UK. Graduates are presented to the Chancellor, the Pro-Chancellor, the Vice-Chancellor or one of the Pro-Vice-Chancellors or Executive Deans. The student may, if s/he
wishes, be presented at one of these degree ceremonies. They are always memorable and inspiring occasions. Details will be sent to the student when s/he becomes eligible.

More information about degree ceremonies can be obtained from the Ceremonies website or by contacting the Ceremonies Centre. Contact details are in Part 6. Information about the accessibility of each venue and hiring academic dress at the ceremony is also available on the ceremonies website or by contacting the Ceremonies Centre.

3.9 Directory of graduates

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

A student who does not wish his/her 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.

3.10 What a student should do if s/he needs help

Throughout a student’s studies, the University strives to give the best support and guidance, to help him/her towards successful completion of the degree.

The University understands that sometimes a student may fall behind or have unexpected disruptions to his/her studies. Illness, bereavement, changes in domestic circumstances and financial difficulties can all impact on ability to study. A student may also find that the project is not progressing as well as hoped, or something has gone wrong with the data collection.

Whatever the reason, a student should talk to his/her 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 sometimes renegotiate deadlines or ask for a period of suspended registration. The student may also address concerns to the Post-Graduate Research Tutor, Faculty Director Research Degrees or Associate Dean (Research) depending on the structure of the faculty.

If a student needs help because s/he feels a process has gone wrong, s/he may want to appeal against an academic or administrative decision or complain about a service, please see Part 5 of this handbook covering 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 Research Degrees Office directly. Contact details can be found in Part 6.
Part 4 Facilities and services

How to access the research facilities and support services available as a student.

The University provides research facilities (laboratories, computers, workstations) for full-time and part-time students in receipt of a grant or a fee waiver.

The University cannot usually provide laboratory facilities for part-time self-funded students. Arrangements for access to research facilities should have been agreed prior to offer and acceptance. If requirements change upon registration the student should contact the faculty to discuss possible alternative arrangements.

4.1 Library facilities and services

Open University research students will need to make use of library resources as part of the research project. Library Services at The Open University provides students with access to high quality and trusted resources that will support 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 resources also include 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. All research students can take advantage of the document delivery service which provides access to items that are not available through Library Services’ wide range of online resources and print materials held within the Library.

More information about bibliographic management software and the benefits of using it can be found on the Library’s website.

Library Services offers a programme of online training sessions, including an introduction to Library Services and an introduction to reference management tools. There is also a programme of face-to-face training including getting to grips with research data management, social media for scholarly communications and networking. Details can be found via the Graduate School Network.

The Open University’s open-access database of peer-reviewed research publications, Open Research Online (ORO), shows the range and depth of recently published Open University research. Research students are required to upload an electronic copy of their thesis to ORO and are encouraged to deposit their publications. The Library Services Research Support team can give advice and guidance on where to publish, and dissemination of publications.

Once a student has started studies s/he may wish to view examples of other theses. EThOS, a service from the British Library, provides free online access to a large selection of UK PhD theses from participating universities. There is also access to some Open University-awarded theses via ORO.
These will give an insight into the structure of theses, different approaches to research, and how to develop a thesis. Library Services also holds a selection of printed theses which can be borrowed from The Open University Library in Milton Keynes when visited in person.

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.

All Open University research students are entitled to apply for a free pass to use the British Library's St Pancras, London reading rooms.

The National Libraries of Scotland and Wales also welcome Open University students.

Managing research data

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's Research Data Management service can help a student plan for the management of the data throughout the project and once it's complete; the Library offers an enquiry service and training on all aspects of data management, and ORDO (Open Research Data Online) a data storage service for secure storage of both live research data and material the student would like to keep available for the longer term.

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.

4.2 Computers

Once a student has been registered, s/he will be given an Open University computer username (OUCU) and a pre-set password that allows him/her to access some OU systems. When a student first signs on to the systems s/he will be asked to change the pre-set password. It is his/her 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, s/he should tell The Open University Computing Helpdesk by phoning +44 (0)1908 653972.

Students are expected to comply with the University’s Computing Code of Conduct, which is published on the Graduate School Network.

4.3 Statistics Advisory Services

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

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

At the data analysis stage the service can help to:

• identify suitable statistical methods to properly address the research objectives
• understand outputs from statistical computing software
• ensure that evidence-based conclusions can be drawn from the analysis.

Students are advised to seek statistical advice as early as possible, preferably while planning the study and before collecting the data. Please visit the Statistics Advisory Service website for details or email: stats-advisory@open.ac.uk

4.4 Health and safety

The University is required to ensure the health and safety of all persons on site and off site, for example for the purposes of field work. In order to do this and to comply with legislative requirements, the work the student will be undertaking in laboratories must be risk assessed. 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 s/he must follow whilst working in the laboratory to prevent causing harm to his/herself or others.

The Open University laboratories are covered by a Safety Code of Practice which applies to all users, including students and their internal supervisors. Those responsible for the laboratories are also responsible for ensuring that all users have been alerted to this Code of Practice. If undertaking laboratory work outside The Open University, a student will be bound by the Safety Code of the host institution.

The current legislation requires a formal risk assessment for all risk activities. The assessment must:
• identify the hazards and consider the risk of injury from any student and/or work activity
• identify steps that can remove or reduce the risk
• decide priorities for action.

These requirements follow the principles established in the 2002 Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations (COSHH) and lay down the essential requirements for the control of all hazardous activities and for the protection of all people exposed to them. No work shall be carried out involving any activity likely to be hazardous to health until a suitable and sufficient assessment of the risks has been carried out. The purpose of any risk assessment is to enable a valid decision to be made about measures necessary to control any activity likely to be hazardous to health involved in, or arising from, any work.

Students and supervisor(s) are formally responsible for ensuring that a written COSHH Assessment is prepared for all laboratory experiments conducted either within The Open University or elsewhere. In addition, students and supervisor(s) are expected to be familiar with, and ensure compliance with, safety regulations which apply to any laboratory or equipment used, and the COSHH regulations. For more information please refer to Health and Safety Executive website.

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

If based outside the UK, the student must make sure that s/he is aware of, and adheres to, the health and safety legislation in force in that country. Students should consult the supervisor if unsure about how Health and Safety applies to his/her place of study.

4.5 Ethics review

All research involving the collection of data or biological samples from human participants requires ethics review by The Open University Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). If the research is low risk this may not be necessary, but if the student is not sure s/he should complete the Human Research Ethics Committee Project Registration and Risk Checklist (Human Research Ethics Committee), and return it to Research-Rec-Review@open.ac.uk so the level of ethics review can be assessed by the HREC Chair.

Research ethics applications from all directly registered research students require an endorsement from their supervisor (preferably the primary supervisor). This will need to be provided before, or at the same time, as the application is submitted. More information is available in Ethics review of research with human participants: A note for supervisors and research students. EdD (Doctorate in Education) students should note that where their research will involve human participants, it is mandatory for them to have contacted the HREC before any research commences. Further information can be found on The Open University’s Research Ethics website. If, after the checklist is submitted, it is judged that the research will need a full ethics review, the researcher or student should complete a HREC proforma and submit it with any relevant documents, for example, a consent form and participant information sheet. Full details of the ethics review process is available on the Research Ethics website with a set of frequently asked questions (FAQs), links to further sources of information and guidance, and contact details for any queries.

It is imperative that potential participants should not be approached to take part in any research until the checklist is submitted and, where required, a HREC review takes place. If research is not reviewed at the appropriate stage it may not be covered by Open University
insurance, as in the event of a claim, evidence of compliance with Open University procedures will be important – see the Open University’s Research Ethics website for details.

Gaining a favourable review and opinion from the HREC on the ethics protocol for a research project is essential in supporting OU research, whilst protecting participants, researchers, supervisors, the institution and any funding bodies, and minimises the likelihood of legal action being taken against any parties involved.

Any research involving NHS premises, staff or patients will also be likely to require review by the NHS Health Research Authority (HRA). Please note that this is often a lengthy process so this will need careful consideration and sufficient time should be allowed 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.

4.6 Indemnity insurance

The University has indemnity insurance for full-time and part-time directly supported students carrying out research related to their studies. (Note that this insurance is subject to the normal terms and conditions that apply to the University’s other insurances.) An appropriate risk assessment should be carried out for all off-site field work.

4.7 International students

The University welcomes students from all over the world to its research degree programme. The University recognises that coming to the UK to start a degree programme is an exciting, but sometimes overwhelming, time. The University can help the student to settle in to the University and give help and support, including a dedicated induction session for students from overseas, documents in support of visa applications, help with finding accommodation and with opening a UK bank account. The Open University is a Tier 4 Sponsor under Tier 4 of the Points-based Immigration scheme.

For more information about visas see Part 2 or contact the Research Degrees Office.

4.8 Studying with a disability or additional need

The University is creating an inclusive University community and welcomes as research students people with disabilities or other requirements.

Whether a student is studying full-time on campus or as a part-time student using their own research facilities, the University responds positively to the different needs and circumstances of the students. Where possible, The University will, for example:

- make reasonable adjustments that may be required for students with a disability, health condition, mental health difficulty or specific learning difficulty (such as dyslexia); and
- make reasonable accommodation for students with other requirements such as:
  - pregnant or breastfeeding students
  - students who have specific needs related to their religion or belief
  - students who are transitioning to a different gender
  - students who have caring or dependency responsibilities.
The student should inform The University as early as possible if support is needed as some services may take several months to arrange. The information the student provides will be used only to help the University to assist them in their studies.

**Referral process**

If the student has a disability or additional needs they should discuss with their supervisor how these might impact on their studies and inform the Research Degrees Office. Any information that they disclose will be confidential.

Some adjustments can be made immediately, such as making changes to the student’s workstation, arranging meetings in particular rooms to take account of sensitivity to sound or light levels, producing printed information in large format, and so on.

If the student is likely to need equipment, personnel or services to support them, The University will ask them to apply for a Disabled Students’ Allowance (see Part 2) to help with any costs arising from meeting their needs. The student will undergo an assessment and The University will discuss the recommendations with the student. The University will make reasonable adjustments to enable the student to study and The University will do so in consultation with the student.

If the student is not eligible for a DSA, the University may still be able to provide equipment, personnel and support – the Research Degrees Office will liaise with the student, the student’s supervisor and Academic Services to discuss how best to support the student.

**4.9 Professional development as a researcher**

**Research skills development**

The Vitae Researcher Development Framework endorsed by Research Councils UK, informs The Open University’s career development programme for research degree students. Vitae is an international programme dedicated to active career learning and development for researchers. The employability lens for the Researcher Development Framework provides an overview of the knowledge, behaviours and attributes most frequently desired by employers. Students, as early career researchers, can expect to acquire these over the lifetime of their research degree programme.

Professional development resources are intended to support and supplement the research skills training available in the faculty.

The Graduate School Network will be the gateway to online training and development resources. Students will be given login details upon registration.

It provides tools and learning resources to help students identify and tailor training requirements, covering a variety of generic research skills. A student can use these materials independently and in individual training sessions with his/her supervisors. Students should discuss his/her training needs with supervisors at the beginning of studies. The Vitae Research Development Framework Planner is licensed for use by all Open University research degree students. It supports skills audit at the beginning of registration, to help a student to identify his/her training needs. It enables a student to monitor his/her skills development, and provides a progress file to enable him/her to log all the skills s/he has acquired through the course of the degree. More information can be found at Researcher development framework.

Further resources are available through the Vitae website.
The Research Career Development Team at the University delivers a programme of face-to-face events aimed at enhancing research capabilities. Further details are available at the Graduate School Network.

Career development

Students may access advice on all aspects of careers and employability planning and development via The Open University Careers and Employability Services website. Open University research students may access the careers section on the Graduate School Network for advice on:

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

There is also information on Knowledge Transfer Partnerships and internships.

The Research Career Development Team delivers a programme of events aimed at enhancing research capabilities. Within this programme are events focusing on aspects of career management.

Students can find details of available events in the Research Events Diary (Open University student username and password required).

Open University research students can contact the Research Career Development Team at research-training-development@open.ac.uk to request a one-to-one careers appointment.

As a member of The Open University research student community there are many opportunities to build networks and professional relationships. A student will normally join an established research group. This ensures that a student is placed within an appropriate, supportive environment from which to build and establish his/her identity as an independent researcher.

4.10 Participating in Open University life

The Open University Students Association is the voice and community for all OU students. Membership of the Association is automatic and there are many opportunities to get involved or access the Association’s services.

Student community

The Students Association exists to promote interests of students and to ensure The Open University is more than just a place of learning – it’s a student community. The Association has vibrant communities on:

- Facebook @OUstudents
- Twitter @OUstudents
- Instagram @OUstudentslive
- A suite of forums on the VLE.
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! Find out more at: www.open.ac.uk/ousa/societies

Local Communities

Coffee mornings and pub meet ups are being organised by OU students throughout the UK. Find the latest events at: www.open.ac.uk/ousa/news-and-events/events

Student voice

The Association enables students to influence how the University is run by representing the collective needs of The Open University students through…

Elected Student Representatives

The Association is led by a team of elected representatives, who make up the Central Executive Committee. There are a variety of roles, find out more at: www.open.ac.uk/ousa/who-we-are/students-who-represent-you

Central Representatives

There is also a huge team of student representatives, who are sharing the student voice in committees, and projects across the University’s entire governance structure. To volunteer as a Central Representative, students should visit: www.open.ac.uk/ousa/get-involved/volunteer

Research

The Association undertakes its very own research projects – with the latest being about module delivery. Visit www.open.ac.uk/ousa/research.

Student support

Peer Support

Run by student volunteers, a place for students to get some confidential student to student support: www.open.ac.uk/ousa/help-and-support/peer-support

Nightline

Available for all OU students to call through the night on 020 7631 0101 (term time only) or by emailing listening@nightline.org.uk. For more information: www.open.ac.uk/ousa/help-and-support/nightline

Disabled Students Group

A hugely supportive and very active group of students: www.open.ac.uk/ousa/get-involved/disabled-students-group

Student services

OU Students Shop

Hoodies, pens, teddies, and best of all past exam papers to download for free: www.oustudentsshop.com

NUS Extra

OU students can buy the fab discount card for £12 per year: www.open.ac.uk/ousa/shop-ousa/nus-extra.
OU Students Educational Trust

The Association’s own charity, helping students who are in financial need:
www.open.ac.uk/ousa/help-and-support/ouset

Volunteering

There are a variety of volunteering opportunities for those who have plenty of time to spare or a few hours to give, ranging from representing other students to volunteering at day schools or degree ceremonies, there is a volunteering opportunity to suit everyone!

Visit the Association’s website to see what volunteering opportunities are available:
www.open.ac.uk/ousa/get-involved/volunteer

Postgraduate Students' Society (PGSS)

The Postgraduate Students’ Society is responsible for organising a wide variety of social events throughout the year, introducing new students to Milton Keynes and generally raising the profile of postgraduate activity on and around the campus.

The PGSS is currently looking for new, active members to lead the society. To get involved email: ousa-societies@open.ac.uk

The Open University Alumni Association

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

Members will be sent communications including the regular email newsletter OpenNews which contains the latest Open University developments. Members will also have access to the association’s website: www.open.ac.uk/alumni with access to information on new courses, supporting The Open University, OpenLearn, The Open University on iTunes U and YouTube, member benefits, careers advice, updating personal details and various social networking sites including Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn.

All that’s needed is the student’s OUCU and password (if these have been lost or forgotten, please contact the alumni team below). Users will be able to access the site, set up groups, contribute in the forum areas, write blogs or simply look around at what’s on offer.

To contact the team, please send the enquiry with name, address and Open University personal identifier to:
Alumni Relations
The Open University
Walton Hall
Milton Keynes
MK7 6AA,

Phone +44 (0)1908 653815
Email alumni@open.ac.uk
www.open.ac.uk/alumni
Association of Open University Graduates (AOUG)

The Association of Open University Graduates offers graduates the opportunity to keep in touch with other like-minded graduates with similar experiences. It is an independent, subscription-funded Association run by Open University graduates for Open University graduates. Members can maintain their links, while fostering new ones, and stay connected with The Open University. AOUG supports The Open University by giving awards to research students in faculties and research centres and to new graduates in each region and nation.

Members’ benefits include:

- opportunities to network with Open University graduates in the UK and internationally
- a website and forum, Facebook and Twitter, AOUG’s magazine OMEGA and local e-newsletters
- academic and social events including meetings, trips and weekends away.

To find out more, visit AOUG or contact the AOUG office

Association of Open University Graduates
The Open University
Walton Hall
Milton Keynes
MK7 6AA

Tel: +44(0)1908 653316
Email: aoug@open.ac.uk.
Part 5 Research degree complaints and appeals

The Open University aims to provide all students with an excellent learning experience that enables them to achieve their academic goals. The University recognises that sometimes things go wrong and, when they do, it welcomes the opportunity to put them right as soon as possible.

The Student Complaints and Appeals Procedures apply to all enquirers, applicants and research students.

Students can obtain this procedure in alternative formats and seek help, advice and guidance on making a formal complaint or appeal from the Complaints and Appeals area of the Help Centre, the Graduate School Network and from either the Student Casework Office or the Research Degrees Office.

5.1 Administrative appeals

The University defines an administrative appeal as ‘a request for a review of a decision taken by an individual or body charged with making decisions about any aspect of a student’s access to learning or learning experience with the University which is not an academic decision’.

Decisions about registration processes, fee liability, financial support, exceptional arrangements and reasonable adjustment which are not academic in nature are covered by the Administrative Appeals Procedure.

More information on administrative appeals can be found in the Help Centre.

5.2 Academic appeals

The University defines an academic appeal as ‘a request for a review of a decision of an academic body charged with making decisions on admission, assessment, student progression and awards’.

Decisions about entry requirements, reasonable adjustments for assessment for students with disabilities, progression rules, academic misconduct, thesis submission and the award of qualifications would be covered by the Academic Appeals Procedure.

More information on academic appeals can be found in the Help Centre.

5.3 Complaints

The University defines a complaint as ‘an oral or written expression of dissatisfaction concerning the provision of a programme of study or related academic or administrative service, which is not an appeal against a decision’.

Concerns about the provision of a service or facility or the failure to provide a service or facility, where the standard of the service or facility has fallen below the standard that might reasonably be expected, or where there is a reasonable expectation that the service or facility would be provided, would be covered by the Complaints Procedure.

More information on the complaints procedure can be found in the Help Centre.
5.4 Sources of advice

Advice is available from:

The Research Degrees Office
The Open University
Milton Keynes
MK7 6AA
Phone +44(0)1908 654882
Email research-degrees-office@open.ac.uk

The Student Casework Office
The Open University
PO Box 5155
Milton Keynes
MK7 6YJ
Phone +44(0)1908 659535
Fax +44 (0)1908 659536
Email studentcaseworkoffice@open.ac.uk

The Open University Students’ Association
Central office at Walton Hall, Milton Keynes
Email ousa@student.open.ac.uk

The Office of the Independent Adjudicator
Second Floor
Abbey Gate
57 – 75 Kings Road
Reading
RG1 3AB
www.oiahe.org.uk

Casework Support Team: +44 (0)118 959 9813
(Calls to and from this office may be monitored for quality control and training reasons.)

5.5 Other policies and statements

A student can access the University’s other regulations, policies and statements on the Essential Documents website.

All policies and statements relevant to research students can be found on the Graduate School Network.

5.6 The Open University's Research Degrees Supervision Policy

Introduction

This policy sets out the University’s expectations and requirements for Postgraduate Research Student (PGRS) supervision; it applies to MPhil, PhD and EdD students directly registered and those who are registered through the Affiliated Research Centre programme.
Supervision of postgraduate research students is considered to be an integral and valued aspect of the academic role. It requires ongoing development and reflection in line with departmental, faculty and OU policies.

The policy adheres to the University’s equality and diversity principles; it recognises and values diversity of individual students and supervisors. Equally, the policy recognises diversity of arrangements within disciplines. The purpose of the policy is to provide an environment in which research degree supervision takes place in a supportive, enabling and effective way for all but which articulates a set of minimum expectations for all supervisory arrangements.

**Appointment of supervisors**

Faculties, institutes and Affiliated Research Centres are required to have clear and consistent processes for the eligibility and appointment of supervisors. Directors of research degrees (or equivalent, including Research Degree Co-ordinators in Affiliated Research Centres) are responsible, in consultation with their colleagues, for recommending supervision teams to the Research Degrees Committee.

Supervision teams will typically comprise of two internal supervisors, one of whom is named as the main contact, who takes day-to-day responsibility for administrative issues and processes required for student registration, progression and completion. However it is the responsibility of both internal supervisors to ensure that all administrative elements of the student's registration are completed in a timely manner.

It is recognised that the EdD programme and Affiliated Research Centres will constitute supervision teams from a mix of internal and external supervisors, as appropriate.

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

Students are allocated to supervisors who have academic competence in their chosen area. Supervisors should typically be active researchers involved in research in their chosen discipline. The expectation is that supervisors will have a research degree (usually a PhD or professional doctorate) or, for some disciplines, supervisors may have demonstrated significant engagement within their research or practice field in the absence of a research degree. It is expected that within the supervisory team at least one supervisor will have a doctorate. Engagement in research is defined at the level of institute/faculty/discipline/unit, but needs to be clearly demonstrated, for example through outputs such as peer review articles, books, reports, etc.

Within the supervision team there needs to be experience of supervision of at least one UK PhD to successful completion. In addition to this requirement, teams may also demonstrate experience of research degree supervision in a variety of ways including experience of broader research degree processes such as experience of examination (either as an examiner or as an exam panel chair); engagement with the University’s training programme for supervisors, or engagement with the University’s research development programme for students.

The appointment of external supervisors is determined by the need of the student and any negotiated arrangements for their studies (i.e. co-funded by an external organisation/industrial partner, or supervised through a DTC partnership) and in the case of Affiliated Research Centres, may be determined by institutional policy. Any external appointment would typically be in addition to the two internal supervisors.
All supervisor appointments require Research Degrees Committee approval.

Supporting students

The level and type of support required by students varies across the course of their studies and across institutes/faculties/disciplines. Arrangements between the research student and supervisors may be kept flexible, as long as the team and the institute or faculty director of research degrees are satisfied that adequate support is being provided for the research student and that there are sufficient opportunities for formally monitoring progress. However, there will be an expected minimum contact.

The style and approach to supervision will vary by discipline and by the individual needs of the student and supervisors. However, full-time students should normally have a minimum of ten formal supervision meetings in an academic year. Part-time students should normally have five such formal supervision meetings as a minimum in an academic year, ideally with one supervision meeting face-to-face. Formal means that the meeting is scheduled and that there are jointly agreed notes of the meeting.

Meetings with full-time students will usually be face-to-face; however, other arrangements may also be used such as telephone, video conference and Skype. Supervisory meetings with part-time students should be arranged according to whatever means of communication is most appropriate.

Subject to this agreed minimum, the frequency of supervision meetings will vary during the course of a student’s research programme especially at key times such as: during the first months of the PhD, prior to the Probationary Review; and approaching thesis submission. Supervisors may also choose to schedule additional meetings with students to help meet their individual learning needs.

Supervision in teams enables short absences to be managed by the supervisory team in consultation with the Head of School or line manager as necessary. Where there is a significant absence of a supervisor alternative support needs to be provided. An absence of over three months requires provision of alternative arrangements agreed within faculty and institute or Affiliated Research Centre.

Where supervisors have been on extended leave, discussions about the viability of returning to supervisory team need to take place. The decision is made based on student need, the stage of the student’s studies and the supervisory team.

Supporting supervisors

This policy recognises that research degree supervision is a process that requires a thorough induction and continued ongoing professional development.

Faculties, Institutes and Affiliated Research Centres are responsible for allocating sufficient time for supervisors to carry out the duties required for quality supervision and support of students.

Supervisors are required to undertake initial training within the first 6-12 months of beginning the role within the University or within the Affiliated Research Centre. This includes experienced supervisors who are new to the University as well as newly qualified supervisors.

Training is provided within the University to support supervisors in the development of their role. Within the institute/faculty/unit the career development and staff appraisal (CDSA) process provides individual supervisors with the opportunity to discuss their training needs.
and workload concerning supervision with their line manager. This enables support and the identification of ongoing development/training opportunities relevant for the role at a disciplinary level. Affiliated Research Centres are responsible for ensuring that supervisors have access to training to support the development of their role.

Development needs and performance issues are managed through the usual line management processes.

Where there are concerns about quality of supervision, directors of research degrees (or equivalent, including Research Degrees Co-ordinator in Affiliated Research Centres) can, where required, provide feedback to line managers.

Where supervisors have concerns about the quality or progress of a student’s work, the relevant Director of Research Degrees (or Research Degrees Co-ordinator in an Affiliated Research Centre) supports the team through a number of actions including the procedure for managing unsatisfactory progress.
Part 6 Contact details

Research and Academic Strategy Unit

Research Degrees Office
The Open University
Walton Hall
Milton Keynes
MK7 6AA
Phone +44 (0)1908 654882
Email research-degrees-office@open.ac.uk

The Research Degrees Office is open from 8:30 to 17:00, Monday to Thursday and 8:30 to 16:30 on Fridays

Research and Enterprise Office
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