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1 General Information for Supervisors

1.1 Introduction

These guidelines reflect the arrangements for full and part-time external research students who started their studies on or after 1 October 2005. The revised institutional strategy for directly registered part-time external research degree study was developed to comply with the revised QAA Code of Practice for Research Programmes (published 30.9.04).

1.2 The role of the Research Degrees Team

The Research Degrees Team in the Research School is responsible for the registration of all research students and is the first point of contact for queries about administrative matters, including student registration records and fee liability. It is also responsible for the implementation of institutional policy developed by the Research Degrees Committee.

1.3 Intellectual property rights

Just as staff are required to assign their intellectual property rights (IPR) to the OU under the terms of their employment, research students are required to assign their IPR to the OU, unless they are bound by an intellectual property agreement with a third party, such as a sponsor, and have assigned their IPR to that third party. This policy gives students the same rights as staff to a share of any money made from the commercialisation of their research results. Research students hold the copyright to the text of their thesis.

1.4 Research degree student fee liability

Part-time research degree students are required to pay an annual registration fee which covers the period 1 October to 30 September. The Research Degrees Student Handbook provides further information about fee liability.

Fee liability for full-time research degree students is also incurred in accordance with the conventional academic year, 1 October - 30 September. Unless a full-time student is self-funded, fee liability is covered by her/his studentship.

1.5 Mode of study

Students are registered to study either full-time or part-time. A student registered to study full-time must fulfil the following criteria:

(a) The student must either:
   - be in receipt of a grant, bursary or studentship of not less than three and not more than four years duration for the project for which s/he is seeking registration
   or
   - have funds available which will:
     - support her/him and pay any fees due
     - support the project costs
     - be available for a minimum of 3 and a maximum of 4 years.

(b) The student must not have any other paid employment during the period of the studentship (other than part-time for a maximum of 6 hours per week\(^1\)).

There are no prescribed hours for students registered to study part-time. However it should be noted that the timescales for part-time registration indicate that students need to work at half the full-time rate in order to complete within the maximum registration period\(^2\).

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\(^1\) Where the employment is directly related to her/his research degree this may be aggregated over a period to allow for longer periods of employment.

\(^2\) The maximum registration period for part-time study is six years.
There is no maximum number of hours for part-time study.

1.6 OU research degree award criteria

The criteria for the award of an OU research degree are set out below.

- **Master of Philosophy**

  The thesis must be of good presentation and style, and show evidence of the student’s proficiency in the methods and techniques of research, demonstrating an adequate knowledge and discussion of the literature in a specific field of study. It must show initiative, independence of thought and must be a distinct contribution to scholarship. Including footnotes and appendices the thesis should be a maximum of 60,000 words.

- **Doctor of Philosophy**

  The thesis must be of good presentation and style and show evidence of being a significant contribution to knowledge and of the student’s capacity to pursue further research without supervision. The thesis must contain a significant amount of material worthy of publication. Including footnotes and appendices the thesis should be a maximum of 100,000 words.

1.7 Theses with non-text content

The University’s research degree regulations (RD 6.2.2, 6.2.9 and 6.2.14) provide for the submission of theses containing ‘non-book’ media in conjunction with the written (‘book’) part of a thesis.

It is the responsibility of the supervisors to ensure the guidelines are followed and that students understand the requirements for submitted non-text content at the commencement of doctoral studies. Students are required to indicate in the initial research proposal submitted at application whether they intend to substitute text with non-text media and include an explanation of how the non-text component is intended to locate and exemplify the ideas developed in the thesis.

The term ‘non-book’ refers to material of a non-printed text form. This can include, but is not limited to, digital media, film, audio files, drawings and software. See RD 6.2.14 concerning the types of non-book media that may be submitted as part of a thesis. Where possible, digital non-book contributions should comply with existing standards appropriate for the type of media (e.g. 3D, hypertext, image audio). Advice on media standards can be sought from The Open University library.

In a combined book and non-book thesis it is advised that the ‘book’ part of the thesis should not be less than 10,000 words for an MPhil and 20,000 words for a PhD. The content and volume of material submitted in a combined book and non-book thesis should adhere to two key principles:

a) The combined material in both book and non-book form should contain as much argument, analysis, deployment of evidence and referencing as would be provided in a written text thesis.

b) The volume of material contained in a combined book and non-book thesis should represent a workload to its examiners that is no greater than that represented by a book thesis of 60,000 words for an MPhil or 100,000 words for a PhD.

Where applicable, subject-level guidance will be provided by OU faculties to assist supervisors in the assessment of content and volume of material submitted. When contemplating the inclusion of non-text content students and supervisors should consider the means of sharing the research findings.
It is likely that the thesis will evolve over time and therefore the student will be required to report in probation and progress reports on any changes and explain how the non-text component locates and exemplifies the developing ideas.

The supervisor has a significant role in guiding the student through this process, and preparing students to present the non-text component along with the standard text thesis.3

1.8 Probation assessment and report

Initially a student is registered for an MPhil degree. The first part of a student’s studies is a probation period lasting twelve months for students registered to study full-time and 24 months for students registered to study part-time. Towards the end of this period, the student and supervisors are required to submit a probation assessment report. This should involve a major review of the student’s progress and should include an assessment of whether the student has achieved the probation benchmarks so that a recommendation can be made about continuing registration and whether s/he is to be registered for a Master of Philosophy or a Doctor of Philosophy degree.

Further information about preparing a student for probation assessment can be found on the OU research degree skills website http://phdskills.open.ac.uk/.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The student:</th>
<th>Assessment</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Must submit a <strong>project report</strong> which includes the following:</td>
<td>Supervisors must provide an evaluative commentary indicating whether or not each of the element of the project report is adequate. If there is any shortfall, information should be provided about what must be rectified before probation can be 'passed'.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• A viable research question</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• A critical literature review which situates the proposed research</td>
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<tr>
<td>• A research proposal including an outline of proposed method(s) and a critical justification for them</td>
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<tr>
<td>• A work plan for the project.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Must provide a concise <strong>summary of their skills audit, and training and development plan.</strong></td>
<td>Supervisors must provide an evaluative commentary indicating whether sufficient progress has been made with skills development. If there is any shortfall, information should be provided about what must be rectified before probation can be 'passed'.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Must give an <strong>oral presentation</strong> of their research in a public forum such as a Research Centre or Department seminar.</td>
<td>Supervisors must confirm that the student has given an oral presentation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Must undergo a <strong>mini-viva</strong> – an independent oral examination on the project report. It must be conducted by at least two experienced academic researchers who are not the student’s supervisors.</td>
<td>The assessors must provide a written report indicating whether the student’s performance was adequate. If the student's performance was not adequate, information should be provided about what must be rectified before probation can be</td>
</tr>
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</table>

3 Please refer to the S12G Submission of theses with non-text content guidelines for further information about the requirements for such theses.
Information about the probation assessment and report is sent to the student and supervisors when it becomes due.

1.9 Student progress monitoring reports

Students and supervisors are required to prepare six monthly progress monitoring reports.

1.10 Suspension of registration

In certain circumstances research students can apply to suspend their registration. All suspensions require the support of the supervisors and head of discipline, and must be approved on behalf of the Research Degrees Committee. Requests for suspensions should be made in advance in writing to the Research School. If you receive such a request please refer it immediately to the Research School, with your comments on the implications for completion of the project. Policy differs depending on whether the student is studying full-time or part-time. More detailed information about registration suspension policy is provided in the Research Degrees Student Handbook.

1.11 Withdrawal from the research degrees programme

If a student decides to withdraw from study, s/he must inform the Research School in writing. This is the only permitted method of withdrawal. It is not sufficient for a student to advise the supervision team. Students remain liable for fee payments until written notification of their withdrawal is received by the Research School.

1.12 Research facilities for part-time students

The University cannot usually provide laboratory or computing facilities for part-time students. The fees paid by part-time external students take account of the fact that they are responsible for the provision of their own research facilities and covering their own research costs.

The University will try to help external students to negotiate access to libraries through the Library Learner Support Team. Many external students will already have the use of a suitable library, perhaps through their employment or proximity to the university from which they graduated. The Open University library has compiled a database that details the access and services offered to OU students by other higher education institutions. The database is located at http://library.open.ac.uk/resources/databases.html.

Part-time external research students are welcome to register as borrowers with the OU library at Walton Hall as long as they can visit the library to borrow and return or renew books in person. The library cannot provide an inter-library loan service for external students but it is developing comprehensive services for those studying at a distance.

The Open University’s online service, Open Library, is located at www.open.ac.uk/library. It provides access to databases of references to books and journals, full text journal articles, electronic books and internet resources. The ROUTES database, located at http://routes.open.ac.uk is available to students to help them find web resources.

Selected examples of theses written by OU students are available on the Library’s website at http://dart.open.ac.uk.

To find out more, please see the website or contact:

Learner Support Team
Students and their supervisors are strongly encouraged to make use of the materials on the OU research degree skills website http://phdskills.open.ac.uk.

1.13 Research training pack

The training pack U501 Doing Postgraduate Research is sent to all new research students (unless they are registered in the Faculty of Science) to help them to complete their studies as efficiently and painlessly as possible. It is also sent to Open University supervisors, and students are told to take it with them when they meet their supervisors at the beginning of their studies to discuss their training needs.

1.14 Students with disabilities

Students are encouraged to take part in all student activities, and the University will take all practical steps to enable them to participate in University life as fully as circumstances allow. The Office for Students with Disabilities at Walton Hall is concerned with co-ordinating the provision of services.

Students who could benefit from these services may not necessarily see themselves as disabled, since only one aspect of their studies may present them with problems. For research students such problems are difficult to categorise and may depend upon the field of research chosen and the facilities it demands. The Office for Students with Disabilities will be pleased to offer its expertise though it may not be able to help in areas which are very specialised. It may sometimes be able to put students in touch with outside agencies, better able to offer services or help with grants to overcome study problems. In the first instance students and supervisors may consult the Research Degrees Team, who will refer the matter to the Office for Students with Disabilities as necessary.

1.15 Safety in laboratories

Open University laboratories are covered by a Safety Code of Practice which applies to all users, including students and their internal supervisors, and those responsible for the laboratories are also responsible for ensuring that all users have been alerted to this Code of Practice. External students are clearly advised that the University cannot provide laboratory access, and that they may only apply for research in laboratory-based subjects if they already have suitable access elsewhere. In this case, it is assumed that they will be bound by the Safety Code of the relevant institution.

The 1974 Health and Safety at Work Act was supplemented on 1 January 1993 by new regulations introducing the requirement to carry out 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 1989 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 (e.g. students) 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.

Supervisors of internal students are formally responsible for ensuring that a written COSHH Assessment is prepared for all laboratory experiments conducted either within The Open University or elsewhere.

The supervisors of a research student undertaking laboratory work are expected to be familiar with, and ensure that the student complies with, safety regulations which apply to any laboratory or equipment used, and the COSHH regulations.

In 1989, the CVCP issued a note of guidance (N/89/166) on responsibilities of supervisors. Universities have a legal duty to provide such supervision as is necessary to ensure the health and safety of students. When dealing with postgraduate students, it is important to understand that this duty cannot be discharged by relying solely upon a student’s status or competence. The University’s duty to supervise is delegated to the head of discipline, department, centre or research group and thence to the member of staff directly responsible for the student (the supervisor). It will never be enough to rely upon the assumption that “post graduates ought to know what they are doing”. Staff must be able to demonstrate that they have exercised an effective supervisory role. This role will be exercised within a context of departmental procedures and monitoring arrangements.

Further guidance is available from the University’s Occupational Health and Safety Section.

1.16 Research degree guidelines

The following documents are available from the Research School website http://www.open.ac.uk/research/research-degrees/directly-registered-students/index.php

- Research Degrees Student Handbook (sent to new supervisors on appointment)
- Research Degree Prospectus
- Research Degree Examination Guidelines
- Research Degree Examination Guidelines for Students.

The Research Degrees Team can also provide copies of the guidance notes for full-time research students which provide information about studentship terms and conditions, grant rates and other sources of financial assistance.

2 Research Degree Supervisor Duties

2.1 The Code of Practice for Supervisors and Research Students

This section should be read in conjunction with the Code of Practice for Supervisors and Students, which is included in the Research Degrees Student Handbook. The code of practice sets out guidelines for the conduct of the relationship between research students and supervisors.

2.2 Duties of all supervisors

All supervisors are responsible for:

(a) establishing, at the beginning of the student’s research programme, a satisfactory framework for supervision, including arrangements for regular meetings with the student

(b) defining the role of each supervisor in the supervision team
(c) the continuing assessment of the student’s training needs and directing the student to relevant agreed training

(d) regularly discussing the research project with the student

(e) providing such advice and guidance as may be necessary

(f) monitoring the student’s progress and providing regular progress reports to the head of discipline and the Research Degrees Committee (see Sections 1.3 and 1.4).

2.3 Frequency of supervision

Frequency of supervision will depend on whether the student is full-time or part-time, the phase of the project and nature of the work. For part-time students contact every two months is required to maintain momentum. Although these two month contacts do not all have to be face to face, they must have some ‘formal’ status as supervision and are likely to require preparatory work by both the student and the supervisors (e.g. written work to be commented on), and should lead to agreed actions and outcomes. For full-time students the frequency of supervision will be greater.

The frequency of meetings refers to the supervisory team as a whole – although it may not always be possible for the full supervision team to meet the student on each occasion.

2.4 Additional duties of internal supervisors

If the internal supervisors are working with an external supervisor, they are also expected to:

(a) ensure that the external supervisor is carrying out her/his responsibilities to the student and to the University, this includes contributing to progress monitoring reports and ensuring that they are presented at the required time

(b) meet the student with the external supervisor face to face to discuss the research project at least twice a year (or three times in the case of full-time students).

Where there is no external supervisor, the internal supervisors are expected to:

(a) present progress monitoring reports to the head of discipline as required

(b) meet the student to discuss the research project at least six times each year (usually weekly in the case of a full-time student).

The responsibility of the internal supervisors for the performance of the above duties is through the head of discipline and/or the associate dean research (or equivalent) to the Research Degrees Committee. The Committee approves the initial and continuing registration of students, and their registration for particular degrees. In making these decisions the Committee is dependent on the advice and guidance of internal supervisors. This statement of duties is intended to assist supervisors to provide such advice, by establishing a framework within which internal supervisors are free to make appropriate detailed arrangements for the supervision of the student. This includes the relative participation of the supervisors in the direction of the research programme, the specification of written work required from the student, etc.

3 Conditions of Appointment and Payment Arrangements

3.1 Internal supervisor conditions of appointment

Supervision teams for new students must comprise at least two internal supervisors.

Normally only members of the University’s staff of lecturer status or above may be appointed as internal supervisors.
University policy requires the supervision team to have:

- academic competence in the area of the proposed research topic
- a PhD
- experience of research degree supervision, including the successful completion of at least one student
- experience of research degree examination.

Team supervision enables inexperienced staff to gain experience of the supervision process in a context which is intended to safeguard the student.

The maximum supervision load for internal supervisors is four part-time external students. The appointment of externally locally based supervisors should not be the norm, but should be considered on the basis of student locality, access to internal supervisors and the expertise of the internal supervision team.

Heads of discipline are responsible, in consultation with their colleagues, for recommending supervision teams to the Research Degrees Committee. If one of the nominated internal supervisors is based in the same academic unit, but in a different discipline from the discipline that the student is to be registered in, the approval of that supervisor’s head of discipline is also required. Similarly, if one of the nominated internal supervisors is based in a different academic unit from the one that the student is to be registered in, the approval of that supervisor’s dean.

All supervisor appointments require Research Degrees Committee approval.

3.2 Travel and subsistence expenses

Travel and subsistence expenses for supervision meetings are not normally paid to internal supervisors, unless with special agreement from the Faculty in advance. Claims must be submitted using the electronic claims system to the appropriate faculty office.

3.3 External supervisor conditions of appointment

Those appointed as external supervisors will not be treated as employees of the University. They should normally be of lecturer status in a university or institution of equivalent standing. Members of The Open University’s staff can not be appointed as external supervisors.

3.4 Payment rate

The payment rate for external supervisors is currently £438 per annum. This fee is paid in two equal instalments, usually in June, in respect of supervision during all, or part of, the period between 1 January and 30 June and in December in respect of supervision during all, or part of, the period 1 July to 31 December, up to the time of the award of the degree to the student, or the termination of the student’s registration, (see Section 3.13).

3.5 Method of payment

All expense and fee payments will be made by automatic bank transfer. External supervisors will be sent a payment advice notification which provides details of the payment and confirms the account in which payment has been made. In the case of supervisors who are also Open University Associate Lecturers, supervisor payments may be made with tutor payments. This may involve some variations to the payment dates given above.

3.6 Income tax

Supervisor fees will be taxed at source at the standard rate.
3.7 Income tax exemption

If you think that taxation at the standard rate is inappropriate and your income tax is normally assessable under Schedule ‘D’, you have the right to appeal against the taxation of your supervisor fees. You should forward:

(a) your external supervisor offer letter
(b) a copy of your signed acceptance form
(c) details of your tax office
(d) your National Insurance Number

to the University’s tax office at the following address, quoting reference 362/069:

HM Inspector of Taxes
Bowbeck House
299 Silbury Boulevard
Witan Gate West
Central Milton Keynes
MK9 1NQ

The Open University is unable to act upon direct requests from external supervisors or their advisers to be treated under Schedule ‘D’. The only acceptable authorization is an instruction from the Inland Revenue, Milton Keynes.

3.8 National insurance

External supervisor fees are not subject to national insurance contributions.

3.9 Travel and subsistence expenses

The University will reimburse travel and subsistence expenses incurred within the UK by external supervisors for meetings with internal supervisors and students. This includes visits to the place where the student is undertaking research, for the purpose of inspecting or advising the student about the use of research materials and research facilities. All external supervisor expenses will be reimbursed at the actual cost of standard class public transport. Approval for travel by car will be granted if the use of public transport is genuinely not possible, a full explanation must be provided. External supervisors may claim telephone and postage costs incurred in the course of their duties. Expenses will also be reimbursed for attending research degree student seminars organised by the University.

Any claims for subsistence will be subject to the University’s maxima. Expense claims must be submitted within two months of the expenditure being incurred. If in doubt, external supervisors are encouraged to enquire from the Research School in advance whether their claim will be met. Details of expenses should be entered in the appropriate section of the expense claim form with receipts attached. Please include the student’s name on the reverse of the expense claim form. The claim form must be signed and sent to the Research School, within two months of the expenses being incurred. Expense claim forms are available from the Research School.

3.10 Insurance cover

The University has arranged insurance cover in respect of its legal liability arising out of the engagement of external supervisors. This cover does not extend to acts committed outside
the supervisor’s normal duties or whilst driving a motor car in the course of employment as a supervisor.

3.11 Motor insurance

External supervisors who are likely, in the performance of their duties, to use their private motor vehicles must ensure that the terms of their motor insurance policies cover them for use in connection with their ‘business, trade or profession’. Most standard forms of motor vehicle insurance do incorporate a clause of this nature, but appointees in doubt should consult their insurers without delay. The University reserves the right to call for evidence of cover before paying allowances.

3.12 Illness

The University regrets that it will not be able to make payments in respect of duties not completed as a result of illness.

3.13 Duration of appointment

External supervisors will normally be appointed from the date of the student’s registration with the University (some appointments will be made after the student has started her/his studies) until the student is either awarded a research degree or ceases to be registered for any reason. The appointment will include the period in which students may be required to correct or revise their thesis after examination. The appointment and payment of external supervisors continues during any period in which the student’s registration is temporarily suspended. Where an external supervisor joins the University’s salaried staff, the appointment will be changed to that of an internal supervisor.

3.14 Termination

The University reserves the right to terminate the contract of external supervisors, subject to safeguards to protect the supervisor from arbitrary dismissal. When a contract is terminated either by the University or by the supervisor, payment will be made only for actual duties performed as determined by the University. Any external supervisor may terminate her/his contract by giving one month’s notice in writing to the Research School.

3.15 Revision of policy

The University reserves the right to revise policy and payment rates at any time.

S10 Feb 2011