Research Degrees Recruitment and Registration Guidelines for the Affiliated Research Centre Programme

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1 Introduction

This document outlines the arrangements and procedures for the recruitment and registration of students in Affiliated Research Centres (ARCs) to read for a research degree of The Open University. It is intended to provide information for research degree coordinators in ARCs, supervisors and applicants. It should be read in conjunction with the Research Degree Regulations and Research Degrees in Affiliated Research Centres Handbook. If you have any queries or require advice please contact the Research Degrees Office who will be happy to help you:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contact details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>+44 (0)1908 653117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="mailto:Research-Degrees-ARC@open.ac.uk">Research-Degrees-ARC@open.ac.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Degrees Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Open University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milton Keynes</td>
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<td>MK7 6AA</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

2 Recruitment Guidelines

Affiliated Research Centres are responsible for managing the recruitment and fair selection of research students in accordance with the QAA Quality Code, the Equality Act 2010 and local equality policies. The ARC is responsible for:

- Giving candidates access to academic staff to discuss research proposals and ideas prior to application, and providing information that will help candidates make an informed decision about applying for a research degree awarded by The Open University
- Ensuring that staff are trained in fair selection procedures, understand their obligations in relation to Equality and Diversity and are supported in upholding Equality and Diversity principles in their ongoing relationships with students
- Arranging interviews, informal visits and meetings with appropriately trained staff in accordance with the institutional framework determined by QAA Quality Code and the fair selection process in place in the ARC
- Assessing candidates’ eligibility to study against the standard entry requirements and/or those specific to the research discipline or studentship, fairly and consistently and against other candidates wherever possible
- Checking evidence of qualifications, residency and visa status
- Obtaining references
- Ensuring that students are made aware of University policy relating to ethics review and intellectual property, and capturing any potential issues relating to ethics and/or Intellectual Property Rights on the Applicant recommendation form
- Ensuring that the infrastructure is in place to support the student, including
supervision, facilities and any contract /funding arrangements

- Ensuring that the proposed supervisors are adequately experienced and meet the academic standard detailed in the Research Degree Regulations.

- Completing and submitting the Applicant recommendation form at the end of the selection process, if a candidate is successful.

3 Registration Policy and Procedure

The research degree coordinator, in consultation with the proposed supervisors, applies to register a student with The Open University by submitting a completed Application and Applicant Recommendation Form for ARCs. The application is considered by or on behalf of The Open University Graduate School Director, who has the overall authority to admit students to the research degree programme.

Once an application for registration is approved by The Open University the Research Degrees Office will notify the student and research degree coordinator by sending an offer letter. The student will need to complete and return the acceptance form before registration can be confirmed.

4 Mode of Study

Students in ARCs are either registered to study full-time or part-time.

Registration period

This relates to the registration period, not the funded period. The standard registration period for a full-time student is 4 years, and 8 years for part-time. It is recommended that research degrees be structured with the expectation of completion in the stated study period below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>MPhil</th>
<th>PhD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Full-time students</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimum</td>
<td>1 year 3 months</td>
<td>2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximum before submission</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>4 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Part-time students</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimum</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>3 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximum before submission</td>
<td>8 years</td>
<td>8 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are no exemptions from the minimum periods of study, and registration cannot be backdated to take account of any research applicants may have already done.

The registration ‘clock’ does not stop apart from during periods of suspended registration.
Where a student changes their mode of study the time already spent studying will be taken into account when determining the new maximum registration date.

4.1 Full-time

Students registered to study full-time must meet 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 they are seeking registration 
   or
   - have funds available which will support them and pay any fees due
   - have funds that will support the project costs
   - have sufficient funds 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).

If full-time registration is being sought, details of the funding arrangements must be on the application form. This must show the duration of the funding and confirm that it is sufficient to cover the student’s living costs, fees and project related costs.

Full-time students must submit their theses for examination within the four year registration period.

4.2 Part-time

Part-time registration enables the student to study for a research degree without giving up work or other commitments. Students registered to study part-time should commit to spending a minimum of 18.5 hours a week on their research in order to complete successfully. Part-time students must submit their theses for examination within the six year registration period.

5 Research Degrees for which an applicant may be registered

Applicants may indicate on the application form which research degrees they wish to be registered for. If the application is accepted, they will initially be registered for an MPhil. Whether or not they are subsequently registered for PhD will be determined following a review of progress at the end of a probationary period, (twelve months for students registered to study full-time and 24 months for students registered to study part-time).

All students are initially registered for an MPhil degree.

5.1 Master of Philosophy (MPhil)

Students for this degree undertake a research programme that shows proficiency in research methods and techniques and shows an adequate knowledge of the literature. A thesis for the MPhil degree should be not more than 60,000 words in length including...
footnotes. This thesis must show:
(a) evidence of proficiency in research methods and techniques
(b) an adequate knowledge and/or understanding, critical evaluation and discussion of the area of study
(c) evidence of a distinct contribution to knowledge in the field of study

5.2 Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

The thesis submitted for this degree should be not more than 100,000 words in length including footnotes and should:
(a) give evidence of the student’s ability to undertake further research without supervision
(b) make a significant contribution to knowledge
(c) contain a substantial amount of material worthy of publication

6 Fees and Financial Support

6.1 Fees

The registration fee for students in ARCs is payable annually as a single, composite fee. The fee is payable on initial registration and then yearly on 1 October up to and including the year in which a student submits their thesis for examination. An invoice for the fee will be sent to the ARC, as the institution is responsible for collecting the fees and transmitting payments to The Open University. The student, however, is liable for the amount due.

If the student registers part way through the academic year the ARC will be invoiced a proportion of the annual fee depending on the quarter in which the student registered. The proportion of the fee for which a student is liable, if registered within certain dates, is set out below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quarter</th>
<th>Fee Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 October - 31 December</td>
<td>(100% fee)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 January - 31 March</td>
<td>(75% fee)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 April - 30 June</td>
<td>(50% fee)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 July - 30 September</td>
<td>(25% fee)</td>
</tr>
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</table>

For ARC students who submit their thesis part way through an academic year and meet the submission criteria, there may be a proportional fee reimbursement. Eligible ARC students, who submit their theses within the following dates may be entitled to a fee reimbursement as set out below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quarter</th>
<th>Fee Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 October - 31 December</td>
<td>(75% fee)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 January - 31 March</td>
<td>(50% fee)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 April - 30 June</td>
<td>(25% fee)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 July - 30 September</td>
<td>no fee reimbursement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Information about the current fee levels are notified annually to the research degree coordinator and can be obtained from The Open University Research Degrees Office upon request. Fees will increase annually.

6.2 Financial Support

For information on financial support available to ARC students, please refer to the Research Degrees in Affiliated Research Centres Handbook.
7 How to Apply for Admission

ARCs should submit a completed Application and Applicant Recommendation Form for ARCs to the Research Degrees Office, for consideration by or on behalf of The Open University Graduate School Director. Please ensure that the up to date form is used for each application. Forms are available from the forms and guidance section of the GSN at http://www.open.ac.uk/students/research/forms-and-guidance.

In completing the application form, applicants are asked to confirm that they are applying for registration on the terms and condition set out in the Handbook and on the basis of the University’s Research Degree Regulations. It is therefore essential that all applicants have access to the Handbook, the Research Degree Regulations and the Recruitment and Registration Guidelines when they complete their application form.

The following sections provide more information about the application requirements. The research degree coordinator should check the completed Application and Applicant Recommendation Form for ARCs carefully before submitting it to the Research Degrees Office as incomplete forms will cause delays in the consideration of the application. A checklist has been included as part of the applicant recommendation form to confirm that all required documentation has been received, checked by the ARC and a copy of the checked documentation has been sent to the University along with the completed form. Applications where copies of the checked documentation have not been included will not be accepted.

7.1 Application Form

The applicant should complete part A and B of the application form. It is important that all questions are answered fully and accurately. The Open University reserves the right to withdraw any offer made on the basis of information that proves to be untrue or misleading.

7.2 Academic Referees

In line with RD 3.3e) the names and addresses must be provided, of two people who are qualified to comment on the applicant’s suitability to undertake a research degree in the proposed subject, together with an indication of the post they hold/held and their relationship to the applicant. The research degree coordinator should contact the referees and obtain two reference letters. A copy of these reference letters must be included with the completed Application and Applicant Recommendation Form for ARCs.

7.3 Statement

The applicant is required to sign the statement confirming that they wish to apply for registration for a research degree of The Open University on the terms and conditions set out in the Handbook and on the basis of The Open University’s Research Degree Regulations. The applicant must have read the handbook and regulations before signing this section of the form.

The applicant is also signing to confirm that all the information provided in the application form is, to the best of their knowledge, correct. Registration will be made on the basis of this information. If it is subsequently discovered that incorrect information has been provided the registration may be terminated.

8 Statistical Agency (HESA) Monitoring Form
All applicants are asked to answer these questions which will be used for reporting purposes by The Open University and the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA). The information provided will not affect the applicant’s access to OU courses and services, but they do need to complete this form in order to register. The Open University, like all UK universities, is required to collect information about its students for reporting to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA). The University also uses information about its students to ensure that all our services are accessible and that we achieve fair outcomes for all. HESA observes strict rules of disclosure required by the Data Protection Act and will not give details to any third parties. Further information on the University’s Data Protection policy can be found in the *Handbook*.

9 **The Applicant Recommendation**

The information provided in part C will form the basis of the applicant’s personal record with The Open University. It is important, therefore, that correct information is given.

For further information about the data we hold and our data protection policy, please refer to the *Handbook*.

9.1 **Research Proposal**

The application must include a research proposal, which should indicate:

(a) the topic or area to be investigated  
(b) the problem or hypothesis to be tested  
(c) the methods and techniques to be used in the investigation  
(d) the relationship of the proposed research to the published literature and to current research in the applicant’s field and an indication of the contribution to knowledge the thesis would make (particularly important for students who wish ultimately to undertake a PhD)  
(e) details of the applicant’s previous work in the proposed field  
(f) a timetable for completion of the project.

9.2 **Registration Date**

Students’ registrations always start on the first day of a month. Applications to register a student can be sent to the Research Degrees Office at any time; however, the registration cannot be backdated further than the first day of the month following receipt of the application by the Research Degrees Office. Applications should be made in advance of the student commencing their research degree studies as work undertaken prior to registration should not be included in the thesis.

9.3 **JACS Codes and ATAS requirements**

The Research Degrees Coordinator should complete these questions as fully as possible.

A list of available JACS codes can be found at:  
[https://www.hesa.ac.uk/support/documentation/jacs/jacs3-detailed](https://www.hesa.ac.uk/support/documentation/jacs/jacs3-detailed)

To check whether a JACS code requires ATAS certification please visit:  
[https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/phd-or-other-doctoral-level-qualification-jacs-codes](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/phd-or-other-doctoral-level-qualification-jacs-codes)

ATAS will only apply to UK based ARC students who require a visa to reside in the UK.
Please attach a copy of the ATAS certificate to the applicant recommendation form if applicable. The University cannot confirm registration until ATAS clearance is received by the student.

9.4 Non-book Thesis

If it is intended that the thesis will contain a non-book component in accordance with research degree regulation RD17.7 and 17.8, a proposal for substitution of book with non-book media must be included with an explanation of how the non-book component is intended to locate and exemplify the ideas developed in the thesis. The balance of evidence and argument in the proposal should reflect the anticipated balance between book and non-book material in the final thesis.

9.5 Ethical Approval of Research Involving Human or Animal Subjects

If the proposed research involves human or animal subjects and requires ethical approval the ARC should indicate that this has been granted, or if an application is still underway, the date the outcome is expected.

ARC student registrations may be approved subject to confirmation from the ARC that any required ethical approval will be sought, with evidence of approval being provided with the student’s probation assessment at the latest. Students who are unable to provide confirmation of ethical approval by the probation deadline will be required to withdraw from registration. Copies of the notice of ethical approval should be submitted with the application or when received by the ARC.

9.6 Confidentiality of Theses

There must be no restriction of access to a thesis for which a research degree has been awarded. The Open University may agree to a limited period of confidentiality (not more than 24 months) under exceptional circumstances. Periods of confidentiality are usually restricted to a thesis where a patent application is expected or occasionally where material which is commercially or politically sensitive is contained in the thesis. If it is anticipated that it might be necessary to have such a period of confidentiality this should be indicated when applying to register the student.

9.7 Intellectual Property Rights

Open University research degree regulations require all students to assign the intellectual property rights (IPR) in their thesis to The Open University unless they are bound by an intellectual property agreement with a third party such as the ARC or their employer.

The Open University has taken this course of action following the establishment of its Intellectual Property Management Office (IPMO) which was set up to encourage and help the University’s research community to commercialise research results.

Students are required to indicate on their application form that either:

- they are assigning their IPR to The Open University (and are therefore eligible to ask for the assistance of the IPMO in attempts to commercially exploit it) or
- the name and address of the organisation to which they are required to assign their IPR (and therefore that they are exempt from the requirement to assign their IPR to The Open University).

Students hold the copyright to the text of their research degree thesis (unless they have entered into a different arrangement with their ARC). However, students and ARCs should be aware of the requirement to allow The Open University library to provide unrestricted access to the thesis (see section 10.9).

10 Research Facilities

ARCs should agree with the student the laboratory, computing and library facilities that will be available for research before the student starts their research degree. These should be stated clearly in the Application for Registration form.

Information about Open University resources available to registered ARC students can be found in the Handbook.

10.1 Research away from the ARC

Where research will be undertaken away from the ARC information should be provided. It is expected that students will spend at least half of their period of registration working in their ARC. Details of time to be spent away from the ARC (for example, at a named collaborating establishment or undertaking fieldwork) must be included with the application form.

10.2 Group Projects

If the student’s work forms part of a group project the application should make clear how the student’s work fits with the project as a whole and how it will be differentiated to enable them to submit a thesis which is clearly their own work.

10.3 Collaborating Establishments

If an organisation, other than the ARC, is providing facilities for a student’s research and a formal arrangement for collaboration on the research exists, the name of that organisation should be entered into this section of the form.

The Open University encourages co-operation between educational establishments and industrial, commercial, professional and research organisations for the purpose of research leading to the award of research degrees. This co-operation is intended to:

(g) encourage outward looking and relevant research
(h) extend the student’s own experience and outlook on the work
(i) provide a wider range of experience and expertise to assist in the development of the project
(j) be mutually beneficial

The ARC may set up formal co-operation with one or more other bodies, referred to as collaborating establishments. A formal letter from the collaborating establishment(s) confirming the agreed arrangements should be submitted to the Research Degrees Office with the application for registration.

Formal collaboration usually means that students will use facilities and other resources, which may include supervision provided jointly by the collaborating establishment and the ARC. It is however, expected that students will spend at least half of their period of registration based in their ARC. Details of the time (including dates) to be spent at the collaborating establishment must be included with the application.
The name(s) of the collaborating establishment(s) will appear with the name of the ARC on the student’s thesis title page and on the degree certificate.

11 Qualifications

The normal minimum entrance requirement is an upper second class honours degree or Master’s degree, relevant to the proposed area of study, from a recognised higher education institution in the UK (or equivalent). An ARC may specify additional qualification requirements if these are required for the subject area being applied for.

An applicant who does not meet this minimum requirement may, exceptionally, be considered if it can be shown that their qualifications, professional experience and/or previous research publications have provided suitable preparation for postgraduate research in their chosen field.

A case in support of the student’s registration should be provided with the Application for Registration form. This case should show:

(a) how the applicant has demonstrated their suitability to undertake postgraduate research
(b) reference to any publications or other objective evidence of the student’s suitability
(c) confirmation that the student’s degree result was not a true reflection of their suitability to undertake the proposed research if they do not meet the entry requirements.

The registration of an applicant without either a first degree or a postgraduate master’s qualification will be approved only in exceptional circumstances. The Open University Research Degrees Committee normally expects unqualified applicants to successfully complete suitable undergraduate/postgraduate master’s study before re-applying for registration. Non graduate applicants for registration are expected to be able to:

(a) demonstrate that they have an adequate general academic background in their subject area and the ability to acquire the skills and techniques necessary for the proposed research project (professional qualifications or experience alone will not necessarily provide this)
(b) provide evidence of research ability in the form of published papers in refereed journals or through a significant academic contribution to university level research. The nature of the contribution to any published work should be made clear together with an indication of the standing of the journals concerned.

An applicant with qualifications from outside the UK can be registered if their qualifications are of equivalent standing to those awarded by UK institutions of higher education. The Research Degrees Office uses The National Recognition Centre for the UK (UK NARIC), the national agency responsible for providing information and advice about academic qualifications from all over the world, for information about equivalences. If the equivalence to an appropriate UK qualification cannot be verified, the ARC will be asked to provide two references to support the application, as described in section 8.5.

It is the responsibility of the Affiliated Research Centre to check the authenticity of degree certificates and verify transcripts and translations of academic qualifications for each candidate before submitting the application and a copy of the checked documents to The Open University for consideration.

11.1 English Language Competence
Applicants who are not from a majority English speaking country or have not competed a degree in the UK or in one of the majority English speaking countries listed on the form, must supply evidence of their English Language competence. Academic staff should satisfy themselves that the candidate’s level of English language is sufficient for PhD study, i.e. the equivalent of SELTS level B2 level or above.

11.2 Interviews

Candidates must be interviewed by a panel comprising experienced staff and not exclusively the prospective supervisors. Ideally, the chair should be the same person throughout the process, and it is good practice to use the same panel members in a recruitment round, although in some ARC’s, different specialist expertise will be required according to the proposed research project. Candidates should be given an overview of the work of the ARC, which may take the form of an information pack, tour or talk, or ARC’s may put on an open day for enquirers prior to selection for interview. Where practicable, it is good practice to give applicants the opportunity to meet a range of academic staff and research students for informal discussion as well as the formal interview.

Applicants being interviewed for funded studentships should be made aware of any funder-specific Terms and Conditions relating to the studentship which would override the standard OU Terms and Conditions. This might include, for example, time off, payment arrangements, maternity / sickness policy etc. Please contact the RDO if you need advice on how specific terms and conditions might impact on the offer made to the successful candidate.

When interviewing part-time, self-funded students the arrangements for access to suitable research facilities must be agreed.

It is useful to identify any skills gaps or training needs at interview, to support the applicant in preparing for study in good time.

11.3 Fair Selection

ARC’s are responsible for ensuring that all staff responsible for handling applications are trained in fair selection. The baseline criteria for all applications are:

- Quality of the proposal / alignment with an advertised studentship
- Alignment with the ARC research priorities
- Availability of supervisors with the appropriate levels of experience and expertise

Suggestions for good practice might include, but are not limited to:

- Screening advertisements for any unintentional bias towards or against certain groups of people
- Asking interview candidates to indicate any reasonable adjustment required for interview in respect of any disability
- Including senior staff where practical and appropriate, and at least one academic or research fellow, both trained in fair selection, on the interview panel.
• Asking similar generic questions of all candidates, focused on, for example, the academic suitability of the candidate for the research, the likelihood of timely completion and the design and process of the writing task. A scoring system may be helpful. It is recognised that different projects will require different lines of questioning, but evidence of fair selection will still be required

• Keeping notes in case of further enquiry by the applicant

12 Supervision

Students are expected to have at least 2 and no more than 3 supervisors. The Open University usually expects nominees for appointment as supervisor to:

(k) have academic competence in the area of the proposed research
(l) have a PhD
(m) be a member of the academic staff of a university or other institute of higher education, or of a research group of appropriate academic standing.

Where ARCs wish to nominate a supervisor who does not meet any one of the above criteria a case in support of the appointment should be provided with the application to register the student.

In addition at least one member of the proposed supervision team must have:

(a) experience of supervising at least one UK research degree through to successful completion (if the student is to be registered for a PhD the successful completion should be at that level)

Supervisors should not be registered for a research degree themselves other than a Higher Doctorate, nor should they be in a close personal relationship with the student they are supervising, nor should there be any other significant conflict of interest.

One supervisor will be the director of studies (first supervisor) with responsibility to supervise the student regularly and frequently. Anyone registered for a research degree themselves is not eligible to act as director of studies. The director of studies should be a member of staff at the ARC or there should be a contractual arrangement i.e. a contract for supervision or visiting status, which safeguards the student’s supervision. The ARC should confirm to The Open University Research Degrees Office in writing the nature and existence of such contract.

The respective duties of the director of studies and supervisor(s) are set out in the Code of Practice for Supervisors and Research Students available in the Research Degree Regulations and in the Supervisors Guidelines. A copy of the regulations and the guidelines must be given to each new supervisor when they take up their appointment.

13 Funding

Details of the funding arrangements for the applicant for the duration of their registration should be provided.

14 Recommendation by ARC

The proposed director of studies or the research degree coordinator should provide a summary of the evidence supporting the student’s registration. This should include
information outlining how the student has demonstrated their suitability to undertake postgraduate research, the knowledge they have of the area of proposed research and any experience they have in the field.

The information provided in this section will be used by The Open University in assessing the application.

15 Declaration

The declaration must be signed and dated by the ARC Research Degree Coordinator. The checklist confirming that all documents have been checked must be completed before the form is send to the Research Degrees Office. A copy of all certified documents must be sent with the completed form. All applicant recommendations are subject to approval by the Graduate School Director. Applicants will be advised of the outcome of their application by the Research Degrees Office.

Please note that the guidance notes and forms referred to in this document are available from the forms and guidance section of the GSN at [http://www.open.ac.uk/students/research/forms-and-guidance](http://www.open.ac.uk/students/research/forms-and-guidance)