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THE OPEN UNIVERSITY

### Guidelines for making an Honorary Degree nomination

Honorary degrees are awarded to people who merit special recognition for their outstanding achievements, or distinction in a field or activity that aligns to the values and commitments of The Open University (OU). Nominated by members of the University, recipients of an honorary degree will have the award formally conferred on them at one of the University’s degree ceremonies, after which, they too become part of the OU family.   
  
The following will help you to make your nomination.

1. **Types of Honorary Degrees**
2. The University awards two levels of honorary degrees:

* Doctor of the University (DUniv)
* Master of the University (MUniv)

1. **Who can make a nomination?**
2. Any member of the University can submit a nomination to the Honorary Degrees Committee. Members of the University are defined as current staff, current students, and graduates of the University (alumni).
3. Nominations for honorary degrees may also be made by its accredited institutions. In such cases, the nomination would be expected to have been endorsed by the head of the institution concerned and will arrive at the Committee via Open University Validation Partnerships (OUVP).

**2. Criteria for awarding an honorary degree**

1. Listed below are the eight criteria against which nominations for both Doctor of the University and Master of the University can be supported by the Honorary Degrees Committee. The criterion selected should reflect the primary reason for the nomination.

Nomination criteria:

* + 1. Services to the University
    2. Services to the educationally underprivileged
    3. Work in areas of special educational concern to the University
    4. Academic and scholarly distinction
    5. Public Services
    6. Services to the Arts and Sciences
    7. Exceptional contribution to education and culture
    8. Exceptionally innovative and socially responsible business developments

1. The work of nominees for the award of **Doctor of the University** would normally be expected to have gained them national or international standing and would normally have had a national or international impact that has been widely recognised by others. It should be noted that ‘national’ in the context of these guidelines refers to the four political jurisdictions of the UK and the UK as a whole.
2. The work of nominees for the award of **Master of the University** would normally be expected to have gained them local or regional repute and would normally reflect a beneficial impact that has been recognised by others at a local or regional level.
3. Ideally, the nominations submitted each year will be broadly representative of the population of the UK. The Committee welcomes recommendations to address under-represented groups in relation to gender, disability, ethnicity, sexuality, and providing for a wide geographical spread.

**3. Choosing your nominee**

1. Nominations should be a good match to the chosen criteria for award.
2. Nominations should be aligned with the University’s mission, aims and ideals ([www.open.ac.uk/about/main/strategy-and-policies/mission](https://www.open.ac.uk/about/main/policies-and-reports/mission)). This might include being prominent in their profession, or a field of work of particular interest to the University and its students.
3. It is an explicit part of the mission of The Open University to seek the removal of barriers to achievement. Nominations are welcome for those who have made outstanding contributions in their field of activity by overcoming such barriers.
4. Awards are not normally given for performing well in a role for which the nominee is or was paid to do, more so, that they have demonstrably gone ‘above and beyond’ that role in some way. The information provided by the proposer should highlight the nominee’s range of activities/impacts, demonstrating this wider contribution to the Committee.
5. Nominations for the work of individuals considered to have celebrity status are welcomed, although proposers should clearly demonstrate the nominee’s personal, ongoing and longstanding commitment to that work (e.g. an excellence in the arts, support of a charity, or the popularisation of a subject that’s of interest to the OU in the media). Nominations stating just the individual’s charitable contributions and celebrity status, are unlikely to be supported by the committee on this basis alone.
6. Proposers who nominate academics who are TV or radio presenters, or use other media to popularise their discipline, should also reference the nominee’s academic credentials and their reputation within their field.
7. Honorary degrees are not appropriate for recognising OU staff who have excelled within their employed roles, whether they are current or retired members of staff. The Honorary Degrees Committee may exceptionally consider a nomination for a retired member of staff who has made a distinguished contribution to society outside of their paid role at the University.
8. Honorary degrees cannot be made to individuals who are current elected members of local authorities, assemblies, or parliaments.
9. The committee would not normally support nominations for current students registered on a programme of study, or very recent graduates. In exceptional cases, an award might be made to individuals who have substantial achievements that are not connected to their studies with the University.
10. The University encourages donations, and it is feasible that some honorary graduate nominees may have made financial donations to the University in the past or will do so in the future. However, there is never any association between gifts to the University and the award of honorary degrees. Awards are made solely on the criteria set out by the University on the nomination form. The ‘Services to the University’ criterion does not include financial contributions to the University.
11. Whilst not essential, the Committee would also appreciate any information you may be able to provide about the benefits your nominee may bring to the University and its students, e.g. advocacy of the University, adult education, or other practical support such as participating or speaking at University events.
12. Within the nomination text, it would also be helpful to explain why you believe the nominee would want to be associated with the OU.
13. It would be helpful if you could also give some consideration to your nominee’s ability to enhance our student’s degree ceremony experience through, for example, their presentation skills or eminence in their field.

**4. Completing and submitting the nomination form**

1. Proposers should state clearly on their nomination form whether they wish their nominee to be considered for the honorary degree of Doctor or Master of the University.
2. Where two or more nominations are made, each should be submitted separately and not on the same nomination form.
3. Where a proposal passes the initial stages of consideration, the proposer may be asked to provide the Committee with further information.
4. To enable the Honorary Degrees Committee to carry out its work, proposers are asked to provide the necessary biographical details and/or information relevant to the agreed criteria for the award of the degree for which the nomination is made. Please refer to Section 3 of these guidelines when completing this part of the nomination form.
5. The final section of the nomination form asks the proposer to confirm if there is a potential reputational risk associated with the nominee. This should be information that’s available in the public domain, for example, it may include spent criminal convictions, past financial issues etc. Ticking the box does not mean that the nomination will be rejected, it merely draws attention to a need to conduct thorough due diligence checks prior to seeking approval from Senate.
6. Nominations should be marked 'Strictly Confidential and Restricted' and emailed to [Honorary-Nominations@open.ac.uk](mailto:Honorary-Nominations@open.ac.uk).

**5. The Honorary Graduate Presenter**

1. The Vice-Chancellor (or their delegate) will select a member of the University to be the Honorary Graduate Presenter at the degree ceremony. Where this is not the proposer, the proposer may be asked to meet with the honorary graduand's Presenter to assist in providing additional biographical or background information that may be required for the presentation speech.
2. The proposer will be invited to attend the ceremony at which the conferment will take place.

**6. Timescales**

1. Nominations can be made at any time but there is an annual cut-off point at the end of October. The Honorary Degrees Committee cycle will then take place during the following year, concluding with the Senate meeting in June. Successful nominees will have their awards conferred from the following year.
2. All nominations will be investigated in detail by the Honorary Degrees Committee and a list then prepared for consideration under the procedures agreed by the Senate.
3. You will receive an email advising you of the outcome of your nomination. Usually, this will be in the July that follows the annual October cut-off date.

**Steve Cooper,** **Secretary  
Honorary Degrees Committee**

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