Research Degrees
Recruitment and Registration Guidelines
(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, Conditions of Registration, and Research Degrees in Affiliated Research Centres Handbook. If you have any queries or require advice please contact the Research Degrees Team who will be happy to help you:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Contact details</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>+44 (0)1908 653806 <a href="mailto:Research-Degrees-ARC@open.ac.uk">Research-Degrees-ARC@open.ac.uk</a></td>
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<td>Research Degrees Team The Open University Milton Keynes MK7 6AA</td>
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2 Recruitment Guidelines

Affiliated Research Centres are responsible for managing the recruitment and fair selection of research students in accordance with the QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education, 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 – ARCs.
- 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 complete Applicant Recommendation Form - ARCs and any accompanying paperwork at the end of the selection process, and prior to any start date, should the candidate be successful.

3 Registration Policy and Procedure

The Research Degrees Coordinator, in consultation with the proposed supervisors, applies to register a student with The Open University by submitting a completed Applicant Recommendation Form - 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.

Approval will not be granted where the documentation is incomplete. Where the regulatory requirements have not been fulfilled a case must be made to waive the regulation but please note that this may delay the application process and approval is not guaranteed.

Backdated registration is not permitted. The earliest start date will therefore be the beginning of the month in which the complete paperwork and answers to any resultant questions have been received by the Research Degrees Team. It is therefore strongly recommended that applications are submitted prior to the students proposed start date.

Once an application for registration is approved by The Open University, the Research Degrees Team will notify the student and Research Degrees 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 when undertaking a MPhil or PhD. Professional Doctorates and PhD by Published Work are only available for part-time study.

Registration period

This relates to the regulatory registration period, not the funded period. The standard registration period for a full-time student is 4 years, and 8 years for part-time (Please refer to RD 7.4 of the Research Degree Regulations for PhD and MPhil, PD 6.4 for Professional Doctorate, and PW 5.4 for PhD by Published Work.

Please note that 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 undertaken.

Students must submit their thesis by their maximum registration date. If they fail to do so, they will have been deemed to have failed the course. Where a student has taken a study break the maximum registration date will be amended to accommodate the time taken.

Where a student changes their mode of study from full-time to part-time or vice-versa, 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
- 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.

Students registered to study full-time should commit to spending a minimum of 37 hours a week on their research in order to complete successfully.

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 eight-year registration period.

5 Research Degrees for which an applicant may be registered

Applicants may apply for one of the following degrees provided that they meet the application criteria and the degree can be supported by the ARC,

- Master of Philosophy (MPhil)
- Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)
- Professional Doctorate
- PhD by Published Work (PhDpw) – ARC staff only, please see regulations for eligibility criteria

Please note that if the application for a PhD programme is accepted, students 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 an upgrade period, (12 months for students registered to study full-time, and 24 months for students registered to study part-
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.

1 October - 31 March: (100% fee)
1 April - 30 September: (50% fee)

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:

1 October - 31 March: (50% fee)
1 April - 30 September: no fee reimbursement

Information about the current fee levels are notified annually to the Research Degrees Coordinator and can be obtained from the Graduate School. Further information can be found in the Postgraduate Research Students (Affiliated Research Centre) Fee Rules. Fees will increase annually.

6.2 Financial Support

For information on financial support available to ARC students, please refer to section D of the Postgraduate Research Students (Affiliated Research Centre) Fee Rules.

7 How to Apply for Admission

ARCs should submit a completed Applicant Recommendation Form - ARCs to the Research Degrees Team, for consideration by or on behalf of The Open University Graduate School Director. The student should complete the Application Form – ARCs. 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 Conditions of Registration for Postgraduate Research Students and on the basis of the University’s Research Degree Regulations. It is therefore essential that all applicants have access to the Conditions of Registration for Postgraduate Research Students, the Research Degree Regulations, the Research Degrees in Affiliated Research Centres Handbook and the Recruitment Guidelines when they complete their application.

The following sections provide more information about the application requirements. The Research Degrees Coordinator should check the completed Applicant Recommendation Form
- ARCs carefully before submitting it to the Research Degrees Team as incomplete forms will cause delays in the consideration of the application. A checklist has been included as part of the Applicant Recommendation Form - ARCs 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 the Application Form – ARCs. 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 the Research Degree Regulations, 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 Degrees Coordinator should contact the referees and obtain two reference letters. A copy of these reference letters must be included with the completed Applicant Recommendation Form - 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 Conditions of Registration for Postgraduate Research Students and on the basis of The Open University’s Research Degree Regulations. The applicant must have read the Conditions of Registration for Postgraduate Research Students and Research Degree 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 General Data Protection Regulations and will not give details to any third parties. Further information on the University’s General Data Protection policy can be found in the Privacy Notice.

9 The Applicant Recommendation

The information provided in the Application Form – ARCs and Applicant Recommendation Form – ARCs will form the basis of the applicant’s personal record with The Open University. It is important, therefore, that the correct information is given.
For further information about the data we hold and our data protection policy, please refer to the Privacy Notice.

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 (this is 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

Student’s registration always starts on the first day of the month. Applications to register a student can be sent to the Research Degrees Team at any time; however, the registration cannot be backdated further than the first day of the month following receipt of complete forms in which there are no subsequent queries from the Graduate School Director including regulation waiver requests. Applications should be made in advance of the student commencing their research degree studies as work undertaken prior to registration cannot be included in the thesis.

9.3 HECoS Codes and ATAS requirements

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.

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

This information categorises the applicant in line with the University’s statutory reporting requirements and enables us to gain an accurate profile of our student body, benchmarked against other universities.

It is important to use the most accurate code available that reflects the research topic.

HECoS codes are available from:

https://www.hesa.ac.uk/innovation/hecos

You can select up to three HECoS codes to accurately reflect the research topic. Where more than one HECoS code is selected then it is important to indicate the percentage of time allocated to each subject represented by each code e.g. 50%.

If you cannot find the appropriate code for the research topic, please contact the Research Degrees Team.

The Academic Technology Approval Scheme (ATAS) is to help stop the spread of knowledge and skills that could be used in the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and their means
of delivery. The scheme is designed to ensure that those applying for postgraduate study in certain sensitive subjects do not acquire knowledge that could potentially be used in WMD programmes. A list of countries for whom citizens do not need an ATAS certificate is provided here https://www.gov.uk/guidance/academic-technology-approval-scheme

For applicants who are not exempt, the CAH3 code you give us on the Applicant Recommendation Form - ARCs will determine whether an ATAS certificate will be required.

To check whether a HECoS code requires ATAS certification please visit: https://www.gov.uk/guidance/find-out-if-you-require-an-atas-certificate

9.4 Non-book Thesis components

If it is intended that the thesis will contain a non-book component in accordance with Research Degree Regulations, a proposal for substitution of book with non-book components 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 components 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 upgrade assessment at the latest. Students who are unable to provide confirmation of ethical approval by the upgrade deadline may 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. Please see section 20 of the RD regulations for further details. 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. A thesis shall not be restricted in order to protect research leads for publication. If it is anticipated at application that it might be necessary to have a period of confidentiality, this should be indicated when applying to register the student. Approval can be requested from the Research Degrees Committee Chair during registration but retrospective requests will not be approved once the thesis is available on Open Research Online.

9.7 Intellectual Property Rights

The 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).

Please refer to the Intellectual property commercialisation policy for further information on Intellectual Property Rights.

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 9.6).

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 Applicant Recommendation Form - ARCs.

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

10.1 Research away from the ARC

Where research will be undertaken away from the ARC additional information should be provided. It is expected that students will be resident in the same country as the ARC through which they are registered (except when they are conducting research away from the ARC) and must spend the majority of their period of registration working at their ARC. Details of time to be spent away from the ARC (for example, at another institution) must be included with the applicant recommendation form and must be accompanied by a clear rational and information as to how the student will be supported, what the health and safety details are, what the insurance policy is, visa requirements etc. Please note that the OU will not support a visa for a student to come to the UK if they are attending an institution other than the OU.

If the intention is for the student to spend time away from the ARC at another institution, then conversations must happen with the OU before registration. Please raise these potential arrangements as early as possible with the Research Degrees Team.

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.

11 Qualifications

Please refer to section 2 in the regulations. 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 Applicant Recommendation Form - ARCs. 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 Team uses The UK National Agency for International Qualifications and Skills (UK ENIC), the national agency responsible for providing information and advice about academic qualifications from all over the world, for information about equivalences.

It is the responsibility of the ARC 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 completed a degree in the UK or in one of the majority English speaking countries listed on the Applicant Recommendation Form – ARCs, 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. RD 2.4 provides further information.

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 ARCs 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 RDT 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

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

a) Quality of the proposal / alignment with an advertised studentship

b) Alignment with the ARC research priorities

c) Availability of supervisors with the appropriate levels of experience and expertise.

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

a) Screening advertisements for any unintentional bias towards or against certain groups of people

b) Asking interview candidates to indicate any reasonable adjustment required for interview in respect of any disability

c) Including senior staff where practical and appropriate, and at least one academic or research fellow, both trained in fair selection, on the interview panel.

d) 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.

e) 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:

a) have academic competence in the area of the proposed research
b) have a PhD

c) 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. 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 Team in writing the nature and existence of such contract.

Where there are more than 3 supervisors, a case should be included in the Applicant Recommendation Form – ARC explaining what each supervisor brings to the team and how communication issues or conflicting advice will be avoided.

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 Degrees 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 Degrees Coordinator or their approved delegate. The checklist confirming that all documents have been checked must be completed before the form is send to the Research Degrees Team. 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 Team.

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