

# Appendix F – Interview 1 supporting documentation and questions

## Participant Information Sheet

### **INTERVIEW: PROGRESSION FROM TAUGHT COURSES TO POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH AT THE OU**

The project team consists of:

Alice Fraser-McDonald (E&I)

Sally Jordan (SPS)

David Sharp (E&I)

Teresa Sides (C&C)

## Contact details

Alice Fraser-McDonald (project lead)

Email: [alice.fraser-mcdonald@open.ac.uk](mailto:alice.fraser-mcdonald@open.ac.uk)

Alternative contact: Jonathan Nylk

Email: [jonathan.nylk@open.ac.uk](mailto:jonathan.nylk@open.ac.uk)

## Introduction

Following your completion of the survey about your experiences and views in relation to progression from taught courses to postgraduate research at the OU, we are seeking further detail about this topic with follow-up interviews. The data gathered will help us to better understand the decisions students make about whether to pursue or not pursue postgraduate research at the OU, their motivations, and the barriers they may face.

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to contribute to an interview via Microsoft Teams between 11<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> March. Each interview will last for no more than 30 minutes.

This research project has been reviewed by, and received a favourable opinion from, The Open University Human Research Ethics Committee – HREC reference number: 2024-0543-2.

## Participation

Participation in the interview is entirely voluntary and your participation or nonparticipation will not be linked to, or impact upon, your studies in any way.

Interview findings may be published in Open University reports or academic journals and/or presented at academic conferences. All information that might identify individual participants will be anonymised prior to publication in any form, for example, any quotes from participants in the interviews will be anonymised or paraphrased.

## Consent

If you consent to participation in an interview, **please complete and return the attached consent form to [alice.fraser-mcdonald@open.ac.uk](mailto:alice.fraser-mcdonald@open.ac.uk)**. You will not be able to participate until we have received this form.

## Your right to withdraw from the study

You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time during the interview.

You have the right to ask for your data to be removed after your participation in the interview by emailing Alice Fraser-McDonald ([alice.fraser-mcdonald@open.ac.uk](mailto:alice.fraser-mcdonald@open.ac.uk)), up until the time all data have been aggregated for analysis (end March 2025).

## Data protection

The data you provide (i.e. your responses in the interview) will be processed and stored in accordance with The Open University's Student Privacy Policy <https://help.open.ac.uk/documents/policies/privacy-notice>.

Data will be stored on a password protected computer and secure server. Only members of the research team will have access to the raw data. Your data will be retained in a fully anonymised format for a period of 10 years after the project completion date (31<sup>st</sup> July 2025).

Aggregated anonymised data will be used for research and quality improvement purposes at The Open University and beyond, and may be published in Open University reports, academic journals or in other public contexts. Your interview responses will be anonymised, but you have the right to ask for your data to be removed after your participation in the interview, up until the time all data have been aggregated for analysis.

## Accessibility

If you have a disability or an additional requirement that makes it difficult for you to participate in an online interview, please email Alice Fraser-McDonald ([alice.fraser-mcdonald@open.ac.uk](mailto:alice.fraser-mcdonald@open.ac.uk)).

## Thank you

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet, your contribution is very much appreciated.

We would be very grateful for your participation and can offer you a £15 gift voucher on completion of the interview as a token of our appreciation.

If you have any questions relating to the interview or research project, please do not hesitate to contact Alice Fraser-McDonald ([alice.fraser-mcdonald@open.ac.uk](mailto:alice.fraser-mcdonald@open.ac.uk)).

## Consent form

### **Informed consent for interview for the investigation into the progression of OU STEM students from taught courses to postgraduate research**

**Project leader:** Alice Fraser-McDonald (School of Engineering & Innovation)

**Project team:** Sally Jordan, David Sharp, Teresa Sides

Please highlight your choice by clicking inside the appropriate box.

## 1. TAKING PART IN THE STUDY

I have read and understood the information sheet for the following study: "Interview with graduate students	YES	NO
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to discuss progression from taught courses to postgraduate research at the OU", or it has been read to me. I have been able to ask questions about my participation and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study and understand that I can refuse to answer questions I am not comfortable with and I can withdraw from the study at any time by contacting Alice Fraser-McDonald ( <a href="mailto:alice.fraser-mcdonald@open.ac.uk">alice.fraser-mcdonald@open.ac.uk</a> ) up until the time all data have been aggregated for analysis (end March 2025), without having to give a reason.	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that taking part in the study involves participating in an online interview discussion with a member of the project team.	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>
I agree to the interview being recorded and understand that the recording will be destroyed at the end of the project (31 <sup>st</sup> July 2025).	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>

## 2. USE OF INFORMATION IN THE STUDY

I understand that information I provide may be used, in fully anonymous form, in internal Open University reports and presentations, research articles and conference presentations.	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that personal information collected about me that can identify me, such as my name or Student PI, will not be shared beyond the project team.	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>

<p>I understand that the data I provide (i.e. my responses to the interview discussion) will be processed and stored in accordance with The Open University's Student Privacy Policy:</p> <p><a href="https://help.open.ac.uk/documents/policies/privacy-notice">https://help.open.ac.uk/documents/policies/privacy-notice</a>.</p> <p>The data I provide will be retained in a fully anonymised format for a period of 10 years after the project completion date (31<sup>st</sup> July 2025).</p>	<p>YES</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>NO</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/></p>
<p>I agree to being quoted anonymously.</p>	<p>YES</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>NO</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/></p>

### 3. FUTURE USE AND REUSE OF INFORMATION BY OTHERS

<p>I give permission for the data that I provide to be deposited in a specialist data centre after it has been anonymised, so it can be used for future research and learning by educational establishments.</p> <p>Consent forms will be retained for as long as the research data are retained. They will be digitised and stored securely (encrypted). The original forms will be destroyed securely.</p>	<p>YES</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>NO</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/></p>
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### 4. SIGNATURES

<p><b>Name of participant [in CAPITALS]</b></p>	<p><b>Signature</b></p> <p><b>(electronic signatures may be accepted)</b></p>	<p><b>Date</b></p>
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This research project has been reviewed by, and received a favourable opinion from, The Open University Human Research Ethics Committee – HREC reference number: 2024-0543-2.

## **Invitation and reminder emails**

### **Invitation**

Hello [NAME],

Thank you for completing our recent survey (Progression from taught courses to postgraduate research at the OU) and for indicating that you would be willing to participate in a follow-up interview to discuss your experiences and views in more detail. We would be very grateful for your participation and can offer you a £15 gift voucher on completion of the interview as a token of our appreciation.

The interview will take no more than 30 minutes and will be conducted online via Microsoft Teams. Interviews will be held between 11<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> March.

If you are available and willing to participate in an interview, please read the attached participant information sheet and reply to this email by [date], including a signed copy of the attached consent form. We will then be in touch to arrange a mutually convenient date and time for the interview.

If you have any questions about the interviews or the research project, please email [alice.fraser-mcdonald@open.ac.uk](mailto:alice.fraser-mcdonald@open.ac.uk).

Many thanks,

Alice Fraser-McDonald, Sally Jordan, David Sharp, and Teresa Sides

### **Reminder**

Hello [NAME],

We recently invited you to participate in an interview about your experiences and views in relation to progression from taught courses to postgraduate research at the OU. We would be very grateful for your participation and can offer you a £15 gift voucher on completion of the interview as a token of our appreciation.

The interview will take no more than 30 minutes and will be conducted online via Microsoft Teams. Interviews will be held between 11<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> March.

If you are available and willing to participate in an interview, please read the attached participant information sheet and reply to this email by [date], including a signed copy of the attached consent form. We will then be in touch to arrange a mutually convenient date and time for the interview.

If you have any questions about the interviews or the research project, please email [alice.fraser-mcdonald@open.ac.uk](mailto:alice.fraser-mcdonald@open.ac.uk).

Many thanks,

Alice Fraser-McDonald, Sally Jordan, David Sharp, and Teresa Sides

## Questions and interviewer prompts

Introduction:

Following your completion of the survey about your experiences and views in relation to progression from taught courses to postgraduate research at the OU, we are seeking further detail about this topic with follow-up interviews. The data gathered will help us to better understand the decisions students make about whether to pursue or not pursue postgraduate research at the OU, their motivations, and the barriers they may face.

Areas to cover with questions:

- Introduction – check in on understanding of where the person is at, e.g. applied for PhD, started PhD. Info for this is in spreadsheet.
- Follow-up on motivations for doing PG research commonly identified in survey responses (*don't spend too much time on this*) – *check if participant did look at PGR before asking this. What were your motivations for considering postgraduate research?*
  - How seriously did you consider PGR?
  - Why/why not?
- Are there any ways in which you feel your taught qualification could have better prepared you for, or informed you about PG research?
  - Prepared – knowledge and experience during taught qualification that prepared students for PGR.

- Informed – awareness of PGR at the OU?
- In your experience, do you feel there were any barriers to progression to PG research? *Examples of follow-on prompts below:*
  - Impact of funding? Explore whether funded/self-funded would make a difference.
  - Explore whether part-time/full-time would make a difference – time constraints?
  - Geographical constraints – Are there barriers to progression to PG research relating to geographic location?
  - Practical experience (*this might depend on the topic of research/qualification*) – were there any barriers associated with a lack of practical experience (perceived or otherwise) during taught qualifications? Were there any barriers related to the subject of the research, for example if it was a theoretical or practical research area?
- Is there anything else that you would like to say that you feel is relevant for STEM students who want to progress from taught courses to PGR at the OU?

Wrap-up:

Thank you very much for your participation. We would like to give you a £15 gift voucher as a token of our appreciation for completing the interview and this will be arranged at the end of March. If you indicated that you would like to receive a summary of the findings from this project it will be sent to you after the project is completed in July 2025.