



Faculty of Business and Law (FBL)

Information for PhD Supervisors

September 2024

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1. *Message from the FBL Director of Research Degrees*

Dear Supervisor,

This handbook is full of practical information, which, I hope, you will find helpful in guiding your PhD student through their journey. Before you proceed to the subsequent sections, I wanted to ensure that something equally important doesn't get lost along the way.

Namely, the acknowledgment of the tremendous difference you will make in the life of your student.

The PhD journey is long, arduous, and sometimes lonely. There will be bumps and challenges, false starts, dead ends, U-turns, and uncertainties. There will be disagreements, upsets and perhaps, at some point, tears. There will also be excitement, joy, elation, discovery, many successes, intellectual homecoming, and at the end of it all, hopefully a huge achievement. Whatever happens, the PhD journey will be transformational for your student.

On this journey, you will be your student's closest guide, defender, and academic role model. I wanted to write this message to thank you for taking on this crucial responsibility and giving your time and energy to this service of supporting and nurturing your student. I know how pressured academic life can be, and you have my warmest gratitude for choosing to develop our next generation and foster the FBL research culture in this way.

I hope supervision proves to be a happy and rewarding experience for you. We have a fantastic PhD support team in FBL, so please don't hesitate to get in touch with any of us if you need any help or if you have ideas or suggestions for further improving the experience of our PhD students and their supervisors.

I wish you enjoyment and success,

Alex Bristow
FBL Director of Research Degrees



2. *PhD Programme in the Faculty of Business & Law*

The sections below are intended to answer frequently asked questions about the PhD Programme in the Faculty of Business and Law (FBL) and the role of the Graduate School.

The FBL PhD Programme comprises around 70 full-time and part-time students. Overall, the OU has approximately 1,000 postgraduate research students in total. All OU PhD students automatically become members of the OU Graduate School.

At the end of this document, you will find an extract from the OU Research Degree Regulations (Code of Practice - Appendix 2) which outlines the responsibilities of research supervisors at the OU. ***Even if you are an experienced supervisor***, we encourage you to take the time to read this.

3. *Becoming part of our research culture*

Full-time PhD students are expected to be based within easy daily commutable distance from the Milton Keynes campus and are encouraged to come onto campus on a regular basis to enable them to undertake their research, participate in research training sessions, supervision meetings, be part of FBL PGR research community and engage with other research events in the Faculty (e.g. research seminars, discussions, informal meetings, etc.) and University.

As a minimum, full-time PhD students are expected to meet their supervisors on campus 10 times a year, on an approximately monthly basis, and take part in two more campus-based events per year. Of course, the more they are able to join in both campus-based and online FBL and OU research events and activities, the more likely they are to feel part of our vibrant research culture. Please encourage your student to take part in the relevant research activities, both at the OU and in the broader academic community.

PhD students in FBL are registered in either the Business or the Law School. PhD students in the Business and Law Schools are affiliated to one of the four academic departments:

- Accounting and Finance
- People and Organisations
- Strategy and Marketing
- Public Leadership and Social Enterprise
- Policing Organisation and Practice / Centre for Policing Research and Learning
- Law School

As you know, departments run their own, subject-specific research seminars, events, and activities. Please ensure your student is on the mailing lists for the relevant ones and encourage your student to join in.

PhD students are also encouraged to become members of Faculty Research Centres and Clusters in the [Business](#) or [Law](#) Schools. This provides additional opportunity to contribute to the research culture in FBL.

Academic Centres of Excellence and Research Clusters:

- Centre for Policing Research and Learning (CPRL)
- Centre for Voluntary Sector Leadership (CVSL)
- Centre for the Public Understanding of Finance (PUFin)
- Research into Employment, Empowerment and Futures (REEF) Centre

- Centre for Social and Sustainable Enterprise (CSSE)
- Open Justice Centre (OJ)
- Gendered Organisational Practice (GOP) cluster
- History and Political Economy of Business and Finance (HYPE) cluster
- Intelligent Operations and Resilient Supply Chains (IORSC) cluster
- Rural Economy Cluster (REC)
- Social and Responsible Marketing (SRM) cluster
- Strategic Management and Leadership (SML) cluster
- Brain Science and Law (BraSciL) cluster
- Feminism, Law and Gender (FLAG) cluster
- Identities, Citizenship and Justice cluster
- Law and Humanities cluster
- Law and Religion cluster
- Legal Histories cluster
- The Futures of Legal Education and Practice cluster
- Common-Good Human Resource Management (CGHRM) sub-cluster

Full-time students are allocated a desk and a laptop and part-time students a 'hot desk'. Student profiles, which include the student's name, biography, abstract, email address, research title and supervision team, are available on the OU [Business School](#) or [Law School](#) websites. It might help your student to feel more connected if you add a link to their profile from your own staff profile.

4. *Faculty roles*

The PhD programme in FBL is led by the Director of Research Degrees (DRD), Alex Bristow, with oversight from the Associate Dean Research, Enterprise and Scholarship (ADRES), Dimitris Sotiropoulos. Caroline Derry is Deputy Director of Research Degrees for the Law School (DDRD Law) and Richard Godfrey is the Deputy Director of Research Degrees representing the Business School (DDRD Business). Both Deputies lead on the Teaching Scheme (see below), and they can also be contacted with any other PGR research related matters in their schools. Administrative support is provided by Alannah Brien and Briggitta Silva. Contact details for the Faculty staff who support the PhD programme are provided at the end of this document.

5. *PhD regulations*

At the central university level, the regulatory and administrative oversight of PhD programmes is provided by the OU Graduate School and the OU Research Degrees Team (RDT). These mandate the expectations and procedures that are implemented in the Faculties, and review and approve documentation relating to key aspects of our PhD programme including Upgrade Review, Progress Reports, Re-registration, Viva examination, Exam Panel Chair nominations etc. Academic guidance is provided by the Chair of the Research Degrees Committee and the Graduate School Director. This is currently Lindsay O'Dell, with Clare Warren due to replace her in November 2024.

Whether you are new to PhD supervision or an experienced supervisor, you will find the OU [Research Degree Regulations](#) useful as a reference point. Please bear in mind that the regulations do change from time to time – for example, August 2024 saw a major update on PhD attendance and supervision meetings policy. Do watch out for emails from the Graduate School, which should alert you to such developments, and do get in touch with the FBL Research Degrees team if you have any questions or issues.

6. Supervision meetings

PhD students are expected to have regular formal scheduled meetings with their supervisors, and it is a requirement that they attend. These meetings should result in an agreed set of supervisory notes which record the discussion and action points. The supervision meeting notes should be saved on the PGR manager system by the student and approved by supervisors soon after the meeting. Meetings should be held on the following frequency:

- a) Full-time students should have a formal meeting with their supervisor(s) a minimum of ten times per year. This should normally be face to face (in person).
- b) Part-time students should have a formal meeting with their supervisor(s) a minimum of five times per year. This may be remote, but efforts should be made to ensure that some of the meetings are face to face (in person)

Although it is expected that all supervisors will normally be present for each meeting, not all supervisors have to be present face-to-face on campus for each meeting. It's up to each supervision team to decide how to split this responsibility. Some supervision teams, perhaps where all supervisors live close to Milton Keynes or regularly commute to campus, may be able to all be present face-to-face. Other teams might have one supervisor located closer than others so for these teams it might make sense for the local supervisor to meet the student on campus more often, with the others joining remotely. Yet other teams might all be located at a distance, in which case it might make sense to rotate the responsibility for the face-to-face element within the supervision team. In any case, it is a good idea to ensure that the student meets all supervisors in person at least sometimes.

If possible, we encourage face-to-face supervision meetings to take place on Thursdays. Some students have been experiencing isolation when coming onto campus, so we are trying to create a buzz around 'Campus Thursdays', creating a critical mass of events, meetings, and people to talk to. Core PhD training in FBL also takes place on Thursdays.

It is really important that agreed notes are logged onto the PGR Manager for the minimum required number of formal face-to-face and remote meetings. Research degrees regulations require this, so serious issues can arise if things go wrong (for example, in case of student complaints) if this is not done. Our international visa students could also lose their visas and right to stay in the UK if this record isn't kept, and the OU could lose their licence to recruit international students. Please make sure your student logs the notes after each meeting and a supervisor approves them.

Subject to the minimum requirements as outlined above, the frequency of supervision meetings will vary during the course of a student's research programme especially at key times such as: during the first months of the PhD, prior to the Upgrade Review; and approaching thesis submission. Informal meetings, without the obligations for an agreed set of notes, can be held as required. It is a good idea to keep sufficient notes regardless, to provide an accurate record of the student's journey. Where meeting notes are informal (i.e. not logged onto the PGR Manager), they should be kept in a secure location and be made available to those with a legitimate need for access.

7. Student attendance and residency requirements

Student attendance and residency regulations have been relaxed in August 2024. The University has updated its Academic Attendance and Engagement policy accordingly, which now mandates a minimum of 12 in-person monitored academic engagement points per year, 10 of which have to be face-to-face supervision meetings,

with agreed notes logged on PGR Manager, for full-time students. As per previous, students are encouraged to attend campus regularly and participate in research seminars, training sessions, meetings and social events that will benefit them in their studies and will enable them to enjoy and contribute to the research environment in FBL.

Full-time PGRs should live an 'easy daily commutable distance' from campus, which is defined as being able to get onto campus for 10am.

The university has a policy of treating domestic and international students equally in terms of attendance and engagement requirements. However, as noted earlier, our international visa students are particularly reliant on us maintaining their attendance records, and particularly vulnerable should such records be lacking. The Student Route visa category is used for students coming to the UK for post-16 education. This applies to full-time and part-time students. Full details of the immigration regulations for students can be found at [UKVI](#). To obtain a visa, the student must meet the requirements of the immigration rules which include:

- Valid Confirmation of Acceptance for Studies (CAS)
- Proof of maintenance funds (to cover course fees and monthly living costs)

Because of the extra complexities involved, all supervisors supervising a Student Route Visa student are required to undertake training which is available via My Learning Centre. Please make sure that when a Student Route Visa student leaves the country to undertake field work that the student completes an authorised absence form via PGR manager.

8. *PhD supervision and supervisor training*

As mandated by the regulations (RD 5.5), supervision teams must comprise at least two internal supervisors who are members of the academic faculty in FBL. The supervisory team collectively must have experience of supervising at least one UK PhD from the point of registration to successful completion and at least one member of the team must be an active researcher involved in research within their chosen discipline as evidenced through peer reviewed outputs. All supervisors must be Doctorate holders.

If you are new to research degree supervision or have not yet supervised a student to completion, The Open University policy requires you to undertake initial supervisor training within the first 6-12 months of the beginning the role. Information about upcoming Research Supervisor training workshops can be found on My Learning Centre - [My Learning Centre](#).

PhD supervisors often become involved in other roles related to the PhD Programme, such as Upgrade assessment (see Section 10) and Chairing or Internal Examining a PhD as part of an FBL Exam Panel. If you are Chairing an OU PhD Exam Panel for the first time and have not yet completed the OU Exam Panel Chair training session, you will need to do this before your appointment to this role can be approved. Details can be found on [My Learning Centre](#).

9. *PhD student training and the Doctoral Colloquium*

New students are expected to attend University induction events that take place in October and February each year; this includes an FBL delivered induction element.

Your role as a supervisor involves assessing the needs of students you supervise for training and development. In the first months of registration, students are required to discuss their training and development needs with their supervisors and complete a skills audit, which is now done on the PGR Manager system. For more

information, please see 'Research Development at the OU' on the Graduate School Network. Supervisors and students can choose to develop their own method for skills auditing and development planning, but they must show that a structured approach has been taken as part of the upgrade review (see Section 10).

Information about Core Training provided by the Graduate School can be accessed via the OU [Graduate School Network \(GSN\)](#).

There are a range of research training opportunities for PhD students in FBL. 'Foundations and Practice of Business and Law Research' runs on Thursdays and comprises small group tutorials delivered by FBL academics face-to-face and/or online via Teams. The module covers skill-development topics such as 'academic writing', 'impact and engagement' and 'preparing for the PhD viva', advanced conceptual/theory sessions, research philosophies training, advanced research methods, and career development sessions such as 'applying for external funding', and 'beyond your PhD'.

We are currently re-evaluating and significantly expanding the FBL PhD research training provision. If you identify a gap or gaps in the current training provision that you would like to be covered internally, or indeed if you have a methodological, theoretical or other expertise that you could offer to share with our students in a training session, workshop, or another event/way, please get in touch directly with the DRD or via the FBL PhD office.

FBL also holds an annual Doctoral Colloquium organised by students. All current full-time students are expected to attend and participate in presentations and discussions, and part-time students are strongly encouraged to attend and present their research. The Colloquium is an opportunity for PhD students to present their work to members of the Faculty, as posters, in roundtable discussions, or full paper presentations, depending on their stage of research.

10. Upgrade review

At the OU, students are initially registered for the degree of Master of Philosophy (MPhil), and subsequently upgrade to the PhD registration. Full-time PhD students are required to pass their upgrade review, including any corrections, within 12 months of their initial registration. Part-time PhD students are required to pass an update review within 24 months.

The upgrade assessment is in four stages (see regulations [RD 15.6](#)):

- a) Submission by the student of a project report
- b) Submission by the student of a concise summary of their skills audit, training and development undertaken
- c) An oral presentation by the student of their research in a public forum
- d) An upgrade viva conducted by a minimum of two assessors

It is the responsibility of supervisors to prepare the PhD student for the upgrade review and to give them feedback in advance of the formal submission of the upgrade report. In FBL, the maximum length for the project report is 10,000 +/- 10% words in length, including references and appendices. The report should include:

- Correct and comprehensive referencing
- A viable research question(s)
- A critical literature review which situates the proposed research
- An outline of proposed method(s) including critical justification, and where appropriate, preliminary data and analysis
- A work plan for the project with a detailed timetable of dates for completion of component parts and thesis submission

- Consideration of the need for ethical review (ethical approval may have been applied for and/or granted but this is not essential to pass the upgrade)
- A skills audit (see Section 9)

The Upgrade Review assessment entails the mini-viva which is organised by Briggitta Silva (Research Degrees Coordinator) and is usually held in the middle of the 10th month of registration. Ahead of time, supervisors are asked to suggest names of two internal OU assessors to conduct the mini-viva. These individuals should be subject specialists in the field the student is researching. The role of the mini-viva assessors is to make an informed judgement of the quality of the student's work to date and their potential to meet the requirements of a PhD. The mini-viva assessors receive the Upgrade Report 2 weeks prior to the mini-viva. Neither the student's supervisors nor Third Party Monitor may form part of the assessment panel, but a supervisor can attend the mini-viva as an observer at the request of the student.

Following the mini-viva, the assessors decide whether the student meets the benchmark statements required to upgrade successfully and register for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. In addition, they may give advice to enable the student's further development. The assessment feedback should be made available on PGR Manager soon after the assessment.

A training session on 'Preparing for Upgrade' is provided as part of the 'Foundations and Practice of Business and Law Research' module.

11. *Third party monitoring and student wellbeing and support*

Beyond the support you offer as supervisors and the direct support offered by the FBL PhD team, student wellbeing is also fostered through third party monitoring, the employee assistance programme, and the student support group.

Third Party Monitoring

Every PhD student is assigned a Third Party Monitor (TPM) who is not part of the student's supervisory team. As this is a pastoral role, the TPM is not necessarily a subject specialist in an area related to the student's PhD. PhD students are assigned a TPM in the first three months of their registration. The TPM is asked to contact the student by email and offer them an opportunity to meet, preferably face-to-face, or by Skype/MS Teams/phone.

The role of the TPM is to provide support to the PhD student on concerns related to wellbeing, professional development and general welfare. The TPM relationship should enable students to discuss issues in confidence, unless it is agreed that further action is needed, or it is of a serious nature. The date of this meeting should be recorded but there is no further requirement to formally record the meeting.

Third party monitoring is an annual event, but should the student have concerns, the TPM should be available to discuss them at other times. While it is good practice for students to meet their TPM, at least initially, if the student does not wish to see their TPM, they can respond to say that they have no concerns and decline the meeting invitation.

Employee Assistance Programme

All OU PhD students have access to the Employee Assistance Programme. This is a free and confidential service available to OU employees and their immediate family members. It offers expert advice, information, counselling and support to help with life's challenges and is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week online or via a Freephone number. This programme is inclusive of issues dealing with race, ethnicity, disability, gender,

sexual orientation and gender identity, marriage and partnerships, and challenges falling under any of the equality protected characteristics. Further information is available via [employee assistance](#) or they can call 0800 030 5182.

Student Support Group

FBL also runs a Student Support Group. The FBL Student Support Group is facilitated by two or three FBL representatives (the “SGF Facilitators”) and is supported by the FBL department through the Director of Research Degrees (DRD). It provides FBL students with essential opportunities for latent knowledge exchange, community engagement opportunities and connections within the FBL community for signposting resources and contacts at the OU.

The Support Group hosts weekly meetings in-person and online (via Microsoft Teams) exclusively for students, to discuss well-being, ask for help with FBL-related processes and to enjoy the company of fellow FBL students. These are informal sessions – an open forum where students may share candid comments in confidence without repercussions. Any feedback, issues or wishes brought to SGFs will be raised anonymously with the DRD. Where feedback may be better directed elsewhere (such as the Graduate School, for example), SGFs can assist in finding the best contact.

SGFs liaise with FBL research students regularly (at least once per week) via email and Microsoft Teams, to distribute updates and share events that have been requested by students. Events may include themed talks, “three-minute thesis” presentations, game nights and workshops about various topics, such as fieldwork approaches.

To contact the SGFs for 2024-2025, students should email:

Jessica.Heddenhausen@Open.ac.uk

LouisDawuda@Open.ac.uk

Pankaj.Alexander@Open.ac.uk

12. Annual leave

Students should notify their supervisors as far in advance as possible of the dates they intend to take annual leave and ask them for their agreement to the dates. The annual leave is now recorded on the PGR Manager system. In relation to the number of days students are allowed to take within studentship regulations, they are bound by the conditions which state:

Full-time directly supported students are entitled, with the prior agreement of their supervisors, to take up to 40 days annual leave each year including public holidays and University closure periods. For part-time students, holiday allowances are pro rata. Students are not entitled to transfer holiday between years. Students who fail to take annual leave will not be entitled to payment in [lieu](#) (RD 8.5, Research Degrees Regulations).

Full-time research students are not subject to terms or semesters in the conventional sense, nor do they have fixed hours of study. The academic year begins on 1 October and ends on 30 September. However, if a student is a February starter, the student’s annual leave year would be February to January.

13. Research Training Support Grant (RTSG)

The Research Training Support Grant (RTSG) application system applies to all currently registered FBL PhD students and is used to support research expenses, including conference, seminar or workshop attendance;

research training events; purchase of equipment necessary for the PhD; proofing and transcription. The RTSG form can be found [here](#).

RTSG requests must be received by FBL-PHD at least 2 months before travel/accommodation or conference bookings are needed. We schedule in time for dealing with RTSG applications **on a monthly basis** and we need to allow time to go through the forms, request amendments if necessary, and once approved, make the bookings. Unfortunately, if we don't receive these requests in a timely fashion, we cannot guarantee that bookings (e.g. travel and accommodation) will be made in time.

Funding allowances: full-time PhD students are eligible to request support of up to a maximum of £6,000 during their PhD studies. Part-time students are eligible for support up to £3,000 during their studies. Activities in the fourth year may be funded at the discretion of the DRD whose decision is final. Activities taking place after the maximum period of registration or after the thesis is submitted will not normally be funded.

Conference attendance: PhD students who are applying to attend a conference are normally expected to present a paper, either as part of a doctoral or the main program. This may be single or co-authored. If applying to attend a conference for personal development without presenting a paper, a clear rationale for how this will contribute to your student's research is required.

Fieldwork expenses: PhD students applying for support to enable fieldwork over a period of several months (e.g. travel and subsistence) should estimate as accurately as possible for the whole period where possible, rather than putting in multiple claims.

Membership subscriptions: PhD students can use their RTSG for membership subscriptions if it is required to attend a conference or to access resources needed for their PhD studies.

Other essential research expenses: PhD students can also use their RTSG for other essential research expenses. Proofreading requests can only be considered if they are for a turnaround of 10 days or more and not exceeding £1300 (the list of references and appendices cannot be included). Researchers are expected to fully engage with their data and therefore transcriptions are not considered as part of the RTSG, only in exceptional circumstances.

Justification of resources: it is important for sufficient detail to be given in the RTSG form to enable the application to be evaluated. The application should make a clear case for support. Why is this event/activity important to your student's research; how will it enhance their PhD, research development etc.? Your student may also wish to show how this event/activity will represent value for money. Students should complete their section of the form and then ask the lead supervisor to provide a statement of support and signature. Supervisors should then submit completed forms to fbl-phd@open.ac.uk

Applications under £100 do not need to be approved in advance using the RTSG form, provided they are single, one-off expenses, but travel, accommodation, conference fees etc. must be booked and paid for via the Research Degrees Coordinators. **NB: For conference arrangements, all conference related expenses and bookings, please email FBL-PHD for the Director to have sight of conference attendance.**

Students should NOT book conferences themselves and then attempt to claim the money back. If the conference is overseas, students will also need to fill in an [International travel and assignment budget approval form](#). This is sent to the supervisor for approval. See: [Travel and Subsistence](#)

Furthermore, if the conference is overseas, the student will need to check the [Anvil risk system](#), to assess the risk factor of the country they are visiting. If the risk level is higher than 2, then a [risk assessment form](#) needs to be completed.

Once applications are approved, the booking of travel, accommodation etc. will be done by Alannah or Briggitta. They will inform students once their request has been approved and liaise with them to make any necessary arrangements and bookings.

Where TSE expenses are claimed online via SAP Concur, the students' claim will be sent via email to their Supervisor for approval.

14. Data protection

As a supervisor, you are expected to ensure that your student is compliant with the Data Protection Act. This applies to aspects of research such as storing sensitive data on your computer or on a portable device. Please see the link here for University guidance: [Data Protection](#).

15. Research ethics

Supervisors are expected to ensure that PhD students they supervise are compliant with the OU guidelines on research ethics. All OU research must have ethical scrutiny before it can commence. Students should consult the Research Ethics web pages for [guidance](#). Training sessions are offered on a regular basis and enquiries can be submitted via email to research-REC-review@open.ac.uk

16. PhD students and paid work

Full-time students are bound by the conditions issued by the Research Degrees Team and must declare any paid work they undertake to their supervisors and the Research Degrees Team. Full-time students may undertake a moderate amount of paid work, provided that the supervisors give consent and it does not interfere with the progress of their research nor delay the completion of their degree. Normally, this should be no more than six hours paid work per week, but exceptions can be made when this is compatible with the research programme and contributes to their training, subject to the agreement of the supervisors and the Associate Dean Research, and notification of the Research Degrees Team. Where a student, regardless of mode of study, is funded they must comply with the terms and conditions of their offer letter. Any work undertaken must not lead to a failure to comply with the requirement of regulation [RD 8.4](#) nor impact on their ability to complete the research degree.

17. FBL PhD Student Committee

The FBL Student Committee serves as a crucial platform for open communication and collaboration between faculty and doctoral candidates at the Faculty of Business and Law. It allows PhD students to voice concerns and provide feedback on key academic and research-related issues, such as program requirements, student life, supervision quality, and research funding. Faculty members use the committee to share updates on policy changes, curriculum developments, and research opportunities. The committee plays an important role in shaping policies that affect PhD students, ensuring a balanced and transparent approach to academic life and addressing specific needs like workload, mentorship, and career development. Any FBL PhD student is welcome to attend and contribute to the committee. Please encourage them to take part. To do so, they should email fbl-phd@open.ac.uk.

18. Graduate School Liaison Group (PGR-GS)

The PGR-GS Liaison Group exists to facilitate communication between PGRs and the Graduate School on institution-wide issues affecting PGRs. The group usually meets monthly, and it is a great opportunity for your student to share views, feedback and opinions with the Graduate School. The group aims to have a full-time and a part-time representative from each faculty, and these representatives can raise issues or feedback with the Graduate School on your student's behalf, anonymously if they wish. More information about the group can be found here: [PGR-GS liaison group and Town Halls | Graduate School Network \(open.ac.uk\)](#).

In FBL the current PGR-GS Liaison Group representatives are:

- Full-time representative – *currently vacant*
- Part-time representative – Melanie Philpott (2nd year student). Your student get in touch via Teams or email (melanie.philpott@open.ac.uk).

The PGR-GS Liaison Group also hold regular Town Hall meetings that all PGRs can attend – please encourage your student to look out for information about these in the regular Graduate School Digest emails.

19. Communications

The Faculty Research & Scholarship Newsletter is a useful way to let other colleagues and PhD students in FBL know about PhD activities and achievements. Please discuss with your student how they can contribute to the newsletter. Recent news items include but are not limited to conference presentations, work accepted for publication in a journal or as a book chapter, funding related to a research project, and successful completion of a PhD viva. Please send news items to FBL PhD to ensure they end up in the Doctoral section of the newsletter.

20. Contacts

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21. **Homeworking policy**

Please see OU [Home working](#) policy.

22. **Fitness to Study policy**

Please see OU [Fitness to study](#) policy.

23. **Chairing exam panels**

One of the rewarding ways to support our PhD programme beyond supervision is acting as viva Exam Panel Chair (EPC).

The EPC training is now done online via the [Learning and Development Centre](#). The module provides information about the role of examination panel chair for PhD viva voce examinations. It describes the regulations that frame the role and illustrates with a series of case studies to enable you to explore the scope of the chair role.

If you are Chairing an OU PhD Exam Panel for the first time and have not yet completed Exam Panel Chair training, you will need to complete the module before your appointment so this role can be approved.

We would also appreciate if experienced supervisors could complete the training even if they have not yet agreed to chair an Exam Panel, as this will increase the number of available Exam Panel Chairs in the Faculty, when appointing people to this important role.

24. **Viva arrangements**

Viva regulations have changed in August 2024, giving the student the choice between face-to-face, hybrid and online formats. Specifically, the new regulation RD 19.6 now specifies the following.

All examiners must participate in the oral examination. It is recommended that the viva voce examination will take place face to face with all of the participants in the same location, however further to the provisions outlined below the viva voce examination may, at the student's or examiners' request, take place in a hybrid fashion (some participants online) or fully online (every participant engages online from separate locations).

a) the student must give signed consent to being examined by a panel where the external examiner(s) is/are participating by video conference or where each participant is engaging remotely;

b) there is reliable and effective technology, in most cases this will be video conferencing facilities, at The Open University campus or the Affiliated Research Centre or other location where the participants are located, and that this is used as the means of conducting the examination remotely;

c) The Open University Faculty or the Affiliated Research Centre will accept responsibility for the technical arrangements for the viva voce examination;

d) contingency arrangements will be made should the technology fail on the day. The backup should be of a comparable standard (e.g. Skype or telephone conferencing). Please note however that video conference is the requisite means of conducting a viva voce examination with a remote participant. Where a contingency is put into place the arrangement must be discussed and agreed with the student.

e) wherever the viva voce takes place, the supervisory team must ensure that the student has appropriate support before and after the examination, and written evidence of this will be provided to the Examination Panel Chair.

Where members of the exam panel are co-located on campus, the arrangements will be compliant with the University's health and safety processes to ensure safe environments on campus.

For supervisors arranging an exam panel, please be aware that when recruiting external examiners it is not possible for the Open University to pay individuals that reside outside of the UK. In order to contract an external examiner from outside the UK they must be sub contracted through a company called Stipenda, who will charge a premium fee for this service. As such, external examiners from outside of the UK will only be approved where there is a justified exceptional case for their inclusion on the panel.

25. Dealing with enquiries from prospective students

FBL staff often receive emails from prospective PhD applicants asking for advice on their proposal and requesting supervision.

Some of these are mass-mailed requests, sent to several FBL staff at the same time, as well as to researchers at other universities. There may be very little fit between the proposed project and your research interests and expertise, and in such cases the proposal is often of weak quality. It is best to reply briefly to these emails. Here is a draft text that you may wish to use for this:

'Because we receive a great many enquiries from potential PhD students in FBL, I am unable to comment on your potential application. Entry requirements, information about the process of application and current research proposals can be found under [Business](#) and [Law](#). If you think you qualify for consideration to the FBL PhD programme, you would be welcome to submit an application.'

If you are contacted by a prospective applicant whose research is of better quality and more closely related to your research, then you may wish to provide them with feedback on their proposal, including via a Skype/MS Teams conversation. You may also receive an enquiry related to a PhD project which has been advertised in connection with a studentship opportunity, with you as a named prospective supervisor. Again, in such cases it makes sense to give some feedback if requested.

The overall message is to tailor your time investment to match the quality of the potential application. Alannah or Briggitta can provide guidance on writing a PhD proposal should you require this information to pass on to prospective students.

26. Study breaks

If a PhD student whom you are supervising is experiencing personal issues that are impeding their PhD progress, please discuss this with them early and consider the possibility of requesting a study break in order to ensure that they are not disadvantaged by this. This is particularly important in ensuring that their maximum period of registration is protected (maximum 4 years for full-time students; maximum 8 years for part-time students). Please note that if the student is in receipt of a studentship, OU regulations specify that only the first two months of the study break will be paid. The studentship is only allocated for 3 years (36 months), not 4 years.

Where a student has a registered disability or has ongoing health issues then it remains possible to accrue study leave in one month blocks as per the [Reasonable Adjustment Regulations](#).

Extensions to registration will continue to be granted in exceptional circumstances. Disruption due to Covid will not normally be considered to have been exceptional as disruptions should be managed through the study break process at the time of need.

27. Re-registration

According to [RD 7.2](#), students are expected to re-register annually, on the anniversary date of their initial registration provided they maintain academic progress and ensure that all fee liabilities are met. Students need to re-register until such a time as they meet their maximum registration period or complete their studies, or withdraw from registration, whichever is the sooner, provided that they maintain academic progress and ensure that all fee liabilities are met.

28. Responsibilities of research supervisors at the OU

Responsibilities of the supervisors (source: OU Research Degree Regulations, Appendix 2: Code of Practice for OU Supervisors and Research Students)

Supervisors are responsible for the academic progress and pastoral or personal support of their students, and for dealing with administrative matters. They should provide the guidance and support necessary for successful completion of the research project. Supervisors are expected to have undertaken supervisory training and be committed to ongoing development of supervision skills.

Supervisors are responsible for:

- a. Establishing a framework for supervision, at the beginning of the student's research, including arrangements for regular supervisory meetings and key milestones during registration.
- b. Defining the role of each supervisor.
- c. Meeting the student regularly and frequently, at the intervals agreed at the beginning of the research project and in line with the supervision policy.
- d. Being accessible to give advice by whatever means is most suitable, taking into account the location of both the supervisor and student, and the mode of study.
- e. Making sure the student has up-to-date supervisor contact details, including when away from the normal place of work.
- f. Giving assistance in defining the topic and objectives of research to be undertaken. It is important that this is agreed between the student and supervisors at an early stage.
- g. Making sure that the project:
 - i) falls within the supervisors' area of expertise;
 - ii) can be completed with the resources available;
 - iii) can be completed within the prescribed period of study;
 - iv) is suitable for the degree that the student intends to take;
 - v) for funded students can complete within the period of the studentship.
- h. Support the student in their professional development and specifically undertake a training needs analysis referenced to the Vitae Researcher Development Framework. In particular, making sure that students know about research training provided by the University and by the discipline, ensuring they are aware of attendance requirements and the means of planning and recording their development. The skills analysis should be reviewed on an annual basis.
- i. Seeing that the health and safety policies of the University and of the discipline or Affiliated Research Centre are brought to students' attention and explained.

- j. Discussing ethics review, standards of academic conduct, plagiarism and any hazards or risks associated with the research work and how they can be dealt with and ensuring that safety and other relevant procedures are followed.
- k. Ensuring ethics review has been undertaken and approval in place, where applicable.
- l. In agreement with Faculty or Affiliated Research Centre colleagues ensuring that suitable alternative support is arranged if the supervisors are going to be absent for a period of three months, or longer.
- m. Responding promptly and constructively to written work, within the schedule agreed at the beginning of the project.
- n. Keeping to the monitoring and reporting timetable agreed at the beginning of the project. This will include the regular progress monitoring reports.
- o. Ensuring that examiners are nominated in good time, so that the examination can go ahead as soon as possible after submission of the thesis.
- p. Ensuring that the student has an opportunity to participate in a mock viva voce.
- q. Ensuring that at the beginning of their studies students understand the requirements for submitting non-book content as part of their thesis and guiding them through the process in line with relevant guidelines.
- r. Maintaining records of formal supervision meetings as agreed with students and in such a way they can be accessed and understood by anyone with a legitimate need to see them.
- s. For those students who enter the UK on a Tier 4 visa, ensuring any breaches to Tier 4 compliance are reported.

Students can also reasonably expect their supervisors to:

- a) Treat them professionally and see that they get proper credit for their work.
- b) Give advice about the proposed research project and the standard expected for the degree the student intends to take.
- c) Arrange a supervision meeting as soon as possible after registration. This would usually be within the first week for full-time students but may take longer to arrange for part-time students.
- d) Make sure that the first meeting covers the areas set out in good supervisory arrangements and practice below, or, if that is not possible, that those areas are covered in another way.
- e) Suggest some directed reading before registration. This might be general background reading so that the student can discuss the topic with the supervisors soon after registration, or it might be the beginning of a literature review.
- f) Offer advice about literature sources and other research resources.
- g) Deal promptly with any research problems.
- h) Take an active role in introducing the student to meetings of learned societies, seminars and so on, and to other researchers in the field.
- i) Offer advice about the presentation and publication of research work, and make sure that attribution is discussed before presentation/publication.
- j) Put the student in touch with specialists inside or outside the University or Affiliated Research Centre if part of the research falls outside the supervisors' expertise. If appropriate, the supervisors should recommend the appointment of specialists as internal or external supervisors.
- k) Provide support by encouragement and constructive criticism and advice.

29. *Faculty grant extensions*

A student may apply for an FBL Research Degrees grant extension, after discussing their application with their supervisor. They would then complete an application form, which their supervisor would endorse and support, it is then sent to FBL-PHD@open.ac.uk and endorsed by Alex Bristow and then forwarded to the Research Degrees Team.

There are two deadlines annually for submission of applications: **17.00 on 1st April and 1st October**. Please note that it is the students' responsibility to ensure that their application, with supporting documentation, is received before the closing date - **applications will not be accepted after the closing date**.

Further information regarding the FBL grant extension process:

Examples of serious personal problems that may be considered a basis for grant extension include bereavement of a close family member, and legal or financial difficulties. Serious academic problems can also be considered, such as significant disruption due to a lack of appropriate supervision, problems arising from a student's research, or the conditions required for the research (e.g. equipment or facilities being out of use for a significant period). Priority will be given to serious academic problems that were beyond the student's ability to resolve.

The FBL Grant Extension fund is limited, and applications are considered on the basis of the above criteria. Progress reports are also taken into account. If a student is not making satisfactory academic progress, this will be taken into consideration. The full amount requested may not be funded and there is a cap of a maximum 2 months. Awards will not be made to students who have already submitted their thesis for examination or are in their corrections period.

If they are in receipt of an award from the Research Students Dependents Fund, this will automatically continue if they are awarded a grant extension through this scheme.

If they are due to become liable for the continuation fee when your original grant ends, and they are awarded a grant extension, they will not become liable for the continuation fee until the end of their grant extension.

Medical certificates and most recent progress report and/or other supporting evidence should be provided. Applications **will not** be considered without supporting documentation. Applications received after the deadline will be considered in the following submission round, except in extremely serious cases where a clear and convincing reason for late submission is provided.

A student may make a request for the administrative body charged with making decisions on the award of grant extensions to review a decision. Students may appeal against a decision providing that they meet the criteria outlined in the [University's appeals process](#). A student may also express their dissatisfaction concerning the administration related to the grant extensions process, which is not an appeal against a decision. Students may make such a complaint using the [University's complaints process](#).

30. *FBL Teaching Scheme for PhD students*

The FBL Teaching Scheme responds to the need of our PhD students to develop their teaching skills and experience and thereby improve their future employability. The Scheme aims to provide a structured approach to training our PhD students in distance learning provision, which will give them a distinct set of skills in the academic job market after finishing their PhD.

Each scheme runs annually over 12 months, with the application round over the summer and induction in September. Successful applicants are allocated to an FBL module and matched with an experienced mentor. Depending on the status of the allocated module, students may be able to learn about and experience module production, design and content, or module presentation, teaching and assessment.

The scheme is open to all FBL PhD students and is aimed at students in their second year of registration. Participation in the scheme is subject to successfully passing the upgrade. Applicants must have written approval from their supervisors to participate.

Students eligible and interested in the scheme should complete the Teaching Scheme application form by the specified deadline. Further details and the application form are available in the dedicated Teaching Scheme area on the FBL Research Degrees intranet pages.

For any questions about the scheme, please email fbl-phd@open.ac.uk

31. *PGR Manager*

PGR Manager is the OU system for managing the PGR student journey, including progress monitoring, upgrade, re-registration, study break requests, supervision changes and examinations. All students and supervisors must use PGR Manager. For further information see the guidance on the Graduate School Network [Forms and Guidance | Graduate School Network \(open.ac.uk\)](#). For other queries please email PGRManager@open.ac.uk

FBL is organising a number of relevant sessions including 'navigating PGR Manager', where supervisors are also welcome to attend.

32. *Expenses via SAP Concur*

Student expenses are now authorised by their supervisor via [SAP Concur](#). Please ensure that all expenses are legitimate.