



Research in Health & Social Care

Further Particulars for Full-time Research Students 2011/12

About the Faculty of Health & Social Care

The Faculty of Health and Social Care at The Open University has an established research focus on high-quality work in the area of health and social care recognised at national and international level. Our research has a particular focus on developing a 'life of quality', in particular our work focuses on issues such as reproductive and sexual health; death and dying; living with a disability and/or long term condition; ageing and later life; children and young people, and parenthood and family studies. Our research draws on various methodologies and forms of analysis and much is based on multidisciplinary work across the social sciences. The Faculty has an established tradition of working in partnership with external organisations and service users to put research into practice.

Studying for an MPhil/PhD in the Faculty offers an opportunity to develop advanced, high level skills, supported by a department that is recognised for the national and international excellence of its research*.

Recent and current externally funded projects within the Faculty include:

- The Making of Modern Motherhoods (ESRC)
- 'The Last Refuge' revisited (ESRC)
- Research on Age Discrimination (Collaborative project with Help the Aged funded by the Big Lottery Fund)
- Social Interaction in Urban Public Places (Joseph Rowntree Foundation)
- A Hidden Heritage: local Mencap societies and the provision of social care in East Anglia, 1946 – 1990 (Heritage Lottery Fund)
- *Dynamics of Motherhood* and *The Oldest Generation* within Timescapes: a programme of seven qualitative longitudinal research projects, two of which are based at The Open University with others at the Universities of Leeds (2), Edinburgh, Cardiff and London South Bank (ESRC)
- A study of South Asian Geriatricians (ESRC)
- Extra-care housing for older people (funded by a consortium of housing charities)
- What happens to people with dementia on discharge from hospital? (Collaborative project with the Universities of Warwick and Surrey funded by The Alzheimers Society)

Regular research seminars are held with presentations by Faculty staff and postgraduate students, and by others from inside and outside the University. These events provide a multi-disciplinary forum for discussion and an opportunity to share the experience of different methodological approaches.

Research Students in Health and Social Care

The Faculty has a lively post-graduate student community undertaking wide-ranging research both in the UK and internationally. There are currently 30 postgraduate students registered for research towards higher degrees. Our postgraduate students are working on many diverse national and international projects and are engaged in research across the health and social care field including motherhood, learning disability, children and young people, adoption and globalisation, an evaluation of social work partnership training, palliative care in China, residential care, experiences of disability during pregnancy, identity

* In the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise 60% of our submission (under Social Work and Social Policy and Administration) was rated world leading or internationally excellent in quality, placing us in the top third of UK and Irish universities.

and diabetes, community development, and health care and organisations. Students are encouraged to engage with methodological innovation which is a recognised strength in our Faculty.

Accepted students are required to have a first or upper second class honours degree in a relevant subject and should have completed a Master's degree (or equivalent) in a relevant topic, including an element of postgraduate research methods training. Each full-time student is allocated two well qualified supervisors, usually from within the Faculty. It is expected that full-time students complete their studies within the funded period of three years and are supported to achieve this. Students have their own workstations on campus and also have access to excellent library services and IT training. They are provided with a comprehensive programme of academic training and skills development, which includes University-wide as well as Faculty-based seminars and workshops.

Full time funded students are expected to attend the university 3 days a week for most weeks. There is some flexibility at times when students are collecting data and in the final stages of writing up, however, students should expect to be in Walton Hall on a regular basis during their studies.

Further information

It is anticipated that the maintenance grant will be £13,660 per annum in the 2011/12 academic year. This is likely to stay at a similar level with the possibility of a small inflationary rise. Further information about studying for a research degree at The Open University is available in the Research Degrees Prospectus which may be accessed online at: <http://www.open.ac.uk/research-school/prospectus/> or ordered from the Student Registration & Enquiry Service on 0870 333 4340.

The application process

To apply for a studentship, please **complete the application form and write a research proposal** and return these to: Research Degrees Office, (marked clearly for the attention of the Faculty of Health & Social Care), The Open University, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes MK7 6AA. Our preference is to receive applications electronically by e-mail at RD-applications-HSC@open.ac.uk an electronic application form is accessible via our advertisement on the Open University's employment website at: www3.open.ac.uk/employment

As part of your application you will need to prepare an outline research proposal describing your research topic. Your research proposal is an important part of your application. It enables the Director of Post Graduate Studies, who is responsible for selecting applicants, to assess whether your proposed work fits within the research themes within the faculty and also your knowledge and skills in your proposed field of study. Please ensure that you include appropriate references with your application. The number of words in the reference list does not count towards the word limit. At the application stage your proposal is an indication of your interests, your knowledge of the research area and methodology. If accepted, you will be given help and support by your supervisors to refine your initial area of interest into a practical research proposal. The original proposal is likely to be amended

in the early stages of the work as you immerse yourself in the literature and start to consider negotiating access to the site of research.

For application you need to submit a research proposal which should include:

- A working title;
- A brief introduction to the topic or area to be investigated;
- The research question, or questions, or hypothesis;
- A brief discussion of current literature and research relating to your topic area (properly referenced);
- Suggested methods and data collection techniques to be used (also properly referenced);
- Ethical issues to be addressed;
- Dissemination;
- References and Bibliography
- A word count (Your written research proposal should be between 800 – 1000 words in length (not including references)).

Applications Process, Interview Procedure and Admissions Criteria

When the Faculty receives a completed application it is reviewed by the Director of Postgraduate Studies to check that the research proposal fits within the Faculty's research strategy and that there are supervisors who are qualified (and have capacity) to supervise the work.

If you are shortlisted, the Research Office Assistant will contact you by email and/or by phone to arrange an interview and will then contact your academic referees. We will notify candidates who have not been shortlisted. Shortlisted candidates will be asked to produce a writing task which forms part of the selection of successful applicants.

The interview panel for PhD students consists of the Director of Postgraduate Studies, one or more prospective supervisors and another senior academic, usually the Associate Dean (Research). At interview, the panel will discuss the applicant's research proposal and writing task. The interview also covers information about applicants' previous training in research methods, (i.e. the nature of taught courses in research methods, final-year project and/or masters' dissertation work), computing skills, and bibliographic skills. The Applicants are required to provide the names of three academic referees who can support their application. These references provide further evidence regarding applicants' prior academic performance and are considered after the interview has taken place. Applicants are

requested to bring certificates for their current qualifications and a valid passport or alternative documentation to confirm their identity.

Applicants' research proposals, writing task and interview performance are evaluated according to the following criteria:

- Entry level subject knowledge (i.e. knowledge of theoretical and recent research literature pertaining to the proposed research area)
- Rationale for the proposal, (i.e. the relationship between the proposed design of the research, the research questions and/or hypotheses and the proposed method of analysis)
- Knowledge and understanding of proposed research methods, (i.e. why certain methods have been proposed in comparison with alternatives)
- Feasibility of the design (i.e. the context of the research and data collection methods)
- Knowledge and understanding of the relationship between analysis, interpretation and theory
- Knowledge and understanding of the ethical considerations that need to be taken into account in the conduct of the research
- Skill in writing an academic document
- Knowledge and understanding of the process of research and its application to Health and Social Care research

In addition to the research proposal, academic record and record of employment (if applicable), other evidence of 'readiness' for study at doctoral level is sought at the interview. Please ensure that you complete the application form with care, and list all studies that you have undertaken in higher education specifying whether or not you have completed them.

Candidates will have the opportunity to see the research facilities and office accommodation for students and where feasible, meet current students. It is important that, if offered a studentship, an applicant is fully informed of what is involved in undertaking full time PhD study in the Faculty and that this information feeds into any decision s/he makes about acceptance.

It is important for potential applicants for full time studentships to know that where possible, they are expected to reside in the Milton Keynes area. Additionally holders of full time student grants are only permitted to engage in 6 hours paid work per week (not cumulative) over and above their studies. Full time funded students are expected to attend the university 3 days a week for most weeks. There is some flexibility at times when students are collecting data and in the final stages of writing up, however, students should expect to be in Walton Hall on a regular basis during their studies.

Bibliography

If you have not had experience of developing a research proposal before you may find the following books helpful:

Blaxter, L., Hughes, C. & Tight, M. (2001) *How to research*, Buckingham, Open University Press.

Cryer, P. (2000) *The research student's guide to success* (2nd edition) Buckingham, Open University Press.

Dunleavy, P. (2003) *Authoring a PhD. Thesis: How to Plan, Draft, Write and Finish a Doctoral Dissertation*. London, Palgrave Macmillan.

Phillips, E.M. & Pugh, D. (2000) *How to get a PhD: A handbook for students and their supervisors* (3rd Ed), Buckingham, Open University Press.