About the Faculty of Health & Social Care

The Faculty of Health & Social Care has a thriving research community that is engaged in leading-edge research with a strong national and international reach. We have an interdisciplinary focus and a distinctive record of developing innovative methodological approaches, particularly in participatory research and visual methods. Our research seeks to find original solutions to key issues relating to health and social care, through working with practitioners, policy-makers, service users and the wider academic community. Our research is at the heart of the faculty's mission to transform lives through education and practice. Research students are a significant element of our research culture, linked to research excellence in 5 research themes across the lifespan. These are ageing and later life; children, young people and parenting; death and dying; living with disability and long term conditions; and sexual and reproductive health.
Studying for an MPhil/PhD in the Faculty offers an opportunity to develop advanced, high level skills in an environment that is recognised for the national and international excellence of its research*.

Current externally funded projects within the Faculty include:

- Developing a co-produced, digital, and living archive of learning disability history: an exploration of ethics, ownership and new connectivities (AHRC)
- Determinants of post-abortion sexual and contraceptive behaviours that result in repeat abortion amongst young women. (Marie Stopes International)
- At home in the welfare state? The public and the private in new spaces of service provision (ESRC)
- Crossing over: new narratives of death (AHRC)
- DISCOVER - Digital Inclusion skills for Carers: bringing Opportunities, Value and Excellence (EU)
- Do boys need male role models? Gender identities and practices in work with young men. (ESRC)
- Co morbid diabetes and depression: an investigation of clinical manifestations and care pathways, a global study. (Association for the Improvement of Mental Health Programmes)
- Developing and sharing pain expertise of parents of children with profound cognitive impairment. (Wellchild)
- Preparation of children for and management of their post-operative pain following surgical correction of pectus excavatum and pectus carinatum. (Children's Research Fund)
- Population ageing and urbanisation: developing 'age-friendly cities' (ESRC)

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

*In REF2014, the most recent assessment of our research excellence, nearly 70% of our research in the Faculty (submitted under UoA:22 Social Work and Social Policy) was rated as world leading (4*) and internationally excellent (3*).
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 18 Postgraduate students registered for research towards higher degrees. Our postgraduate students are working on diverse national and international projects drawing on methodological innovation across applied social sciences. The current student group undertaking projects including:

Maddie Blackburn  The sexuality, relationships and reproductive choices of people with non-malignant, life-limited conditions in the UK

Liz Ellis  The impact of rural and urban environments on the lived experience of people with learning difficulties

Rachel France  Volunteers in End of Life Care: How is their Role Constructed?

Ruth Hamilton  Widening Participation for Women: Are non-traditional educational routes truly empowering for women seeking professional qualification through the social work degree?

Jonathan Harvey  Neurological Rehabilitation … What next?

Jeff Hunt  From a Psychosocial perspective how does fatherhood affect a man's sense of masculine identity?

Brian Kavanagh  What role, if any, do club drugs play in negotiation of safer sex practices among MSM?

Dee Kelly  Abortion in Ireland- the interface Between Law and Social Work Practice

Adam Lockwood  The Meanings, Uses and Potentialities of Evaluation in Public Health Projects: A Study of Community-Based Physical Activity Interventions Chido Ndadzungira  Learning Disability and Families: The role of Family in Promoting the Sexuality of Adults and Learning Disability

Sue Main  Creative Narratives of Chronic Pain

Katia Narzisi  Adoptees View on International adoption into Italy

Chido Ndadzungira  Learning Disability and Families: The role of Family in Promoting the Sexuality of Adults and Learning Disability

Ian Ndlovu  Life experiences of street children in Bulawayo: Developing a child-centred model

2015
Support while you are studying

Each student is allocated two supervisors, usually from within the Faculty. We also support students in many other different ways including the Director of Post Graduate Studies (who has overall responsibility for research students in the faculty) and a Third Party Monitor (this is a role similar to a personal tutor) in faculty as well as support more widely in the university through the Research Degrees Office, the Library, the careers development team and other units as required. It is expected that full time students complete their studies within the funded period of three years, part time students in six year and all students are supported to achieve this.

Students have their own desks on campus and also have access to excellent library services and IT training. You will be provided with a programme of academic training and skills development, which includes University-wide as well as Faculty-based seminars and workshops. This includes resources and training offered through the VRE (Virtual Research Environment) which draws on the Open University’s world class expertise in pedagogy to support your development as a research student.

For full time funded students there is an expectation that you will come to the university at least 2 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, you should expect to be in Walton Hall on a regular basis during their studies. You will be expected to live in Milton Keynes within easy travelling distance of the university. 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.
Part time students are welcome to attend the university whenever they are able. There is a minimum expectation that if you study with us part time you attend the university’s two induction workshops (one in October and one in March) in your first year of registration.

Full time student training opportunities

For full time students there are opportunities for engaging with the teaching and research administration that takes place in the faculty. These are on a voluntary basis and are unpaid. However they offer students the opportunity to develop key skills relevant to their interests and future career development needs. You may want to work with a module team whose teaching overlaps with your research interests. The expectation is that the student attends module team meetings and will shadow the work of the team. As the arrangement becomes established there could be opportunities for the student to be involved in further activities with the support of the module team and the Director of Post Graduate Studies. There are also opportunities to contribute to research and enterprise activities such as conference organisation, literature review and horizon scanning for research and/or scholarship funding opportunities.

Maintenance Grant and Fees

Full time funded students receive a maintenance grant. It is anticipated that the grant will be £13,863 (non-taxable) in the 2015/16 academic year. This is likely to stay at a similar level with the possibility of a small inflationary rise.)

Self funded students (part time and full time) are required to pay fees, details of the fees and payment are available at http://www3.open.ac.uk/study/research-degrees/explained/fees_and_funding/fees_what_you_need_to_pay.htm

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://www3.open.ac.uk/study/research-degrees/index.htm

The application process

To apply for a place to study for an MPhil/PhD in the faculty you will need to complete and send us an application form and a research proposal. The application form can be found at http://www3.open.ac.uk/study/research-degrees/explained/how_to_apply/mphil_and_phd_application_process.htm

You will be required to provide the names of three referees who can support your application and comment on your academic performance. One referee must be able to comment on your most recent studies. When you have completed the application form and proposal please send them to RD-applications-HSC@open.ac.uk

Your research proposal is an important part of your application in which you outline your research and methodology. Information about how to write a proposal is given in the document ‘Writing your proposal for a research degree’ which we can send to you.

The timetable for application is as follows:
Jan- March: complete and submit to us an application form and proposal (details of the proposal are given below)

April: applicants are emailed with the decision about their application

April: if shortlisted, applicants are invited to write an additional document outlining the importance of their proposed research (guidance is provided in the email we send you)

May: shortlisted applicants submit their writing task and attend an interview in the Faculty

May-June: applicants are notified of the decision on their application

NB. Please let us know via email hsc-research-enquiries@open.ac.uk if you would like an opportunity to discuss the application process.

**Applications Process, Interview Procedure and Admissions Criteria**

Applications are shortlisted on the following criteria: fit to faculty research themes and strategy; quality of the proposal and availability of suitably qualified supervisors. The faculty research themes are: ageing and later life; children, young people and parents; death and dying; living with disability and/or long term conditions; and sexual and reproductive health.

If you are shortlisted, we will contact you by email to arrange an interview (we also email applicants who are not shortlisted to inform them of the decision). Shortlisted applicants will be asked to produce an additional piece of writing which is submitted prior to interview. Full details of the writing task are provided in the email inviting you to interview. The quality of the writing task, and discussion of it at interview, form part of the selection of successful applicants.

The interview panel for PhD students consists of the Director of Postgraduate Studies and usually two members of academic staff with expertise in your chosen field. Interview questions are be based on your application, the written work and previous training in research methods (including final year projects and dissertations). 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:

- **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 of the project and viability within the registration period
• Knowledge and understanding of the ethical considerations that need to be taken into account in the conduct of the research

Candidates will have the opportunity to see the research facilities and office accommodation for students and where possible, meet current students.