CREET Full-time Postgraduate Studentships

Grant: Anticipated rate £13,840 pa studentship (pro rata)

Closing date: 1 July 2015   Interview dates: July 2015

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## Section 1.1: Studentship details

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<td>Studentship type:</td>
<td>MRes followed by a 3 year PhD (1+3) or 3 year PhD studentships</td>
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<td>Reports to:</td>
<td>Director of Postgraduate Studies</td>
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<td>Location:</td>
<td>Walton Hall, Milton Keynes</td>
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## Section 1.2: Studentships in CREET

The Centre for Research in Education and Educational Technology (CREET) at the Open University is offering a limited number of full time fully funded and partially funded full-time studentships. Students who are awarded a fully-funded studentship receive a tax-free bursary covering three or four years study. The anticipated grant rate for fully funded studentships for 2015-2016 will be £13,840, which is reviewed annually in line with Research Council norms and a research training grant.

Applications will be considered for PhD research in Technology Enhanced Learning.

There is currently a vibrant international community of students studying our PhD programme on campus. Successful candidates will be expected to live in, or within easy reach of Milton Keynes so that you can attend the University on a regular basis and fully engage with the research environment at the OU.

## Section 1.3: CREET

CREET is one of the leading education research units in the UK. It is an internationally renowned centre of excellence, pursuing innovative and rigorous research that influences policy and practice. CREET research is multidisciplinary – drawing on cutting edge research in education, applied linguistics, childhood studies, foreign and second language learning and technology enhanced learning and is united by:

- a focus on learning through diverse media in a wide range of social, cultural and disciplinary settings
- a radical, challenging approach to established orthodoxies in policy, pedagogy, theory and research methods and a commitment to social justice and widening participation
- a major thread of socio-cultural theorising

Research in CREET is situated at the intersection of social, technological and economic change. Central to CREET’s concerns is the conceptualisation of both contemporary and next generation educational practices and technologies. CREET’s development of evidence-based understandings of education involves interdisciplinary, innovative, multi-methodological forms of inquiry and working in partnership with key stakeholders.

### Research Clusters and Open Technology-Enhanced Learning (OpenTEL)

In 2015 the Open University is strengthening its commitment to the development of interdisciplinary research in Technology Enhanced Learning across the University by launching a strategic research initiative on this topic which is the source of funding for these studentships. In this initiative researchers from CREET (which comprises the Institute of Educational Technology and the Faculty of Education and Language Studies) are working with partners in the Faculties of Science, Mathematics Computer Science and Technology and the Faculty of Business and Law to encourage a cross disciplinary approach to Technology Enhanced Learning. Studies in this area are expected to reflect cross-University connections and bring out the potential for research findings to impact on student learning at the University.

CREET research is organized within four clusters. These studentships relate to the Technology Enhanced Learning cluster located in the Institute of Educational Technology and the Childhood Studies, Education Futures and Language and Literacies clusters, which are within the Faculty of Education and Language Studies, as well as to research partners across the University. TEL is interdisciplinary, bringing together researchers across the University, with existing research capabilities and established excellence. Researchers are envisaging, theorising and instantiating new places and spaces for learning, both formal and non-formal - offering distinctive local solutions to global challenges. Research topics include new forms
of technological engagement; open education and accessibility; digital literacies and scholarship; creativity,
digital technologies and schools; innovation in child development and learning; and language(s) in an open
world; as well as inclusivity and new research methodologies. Some examples of potential research projects
are included in Appendix 1 but we welcome proposals across our range of interests in Technology
Enhanced Learning research.

**Technology Enhanced Learning:**
Research from the Institute of Educational Technology (IET) is represented in the Technology Enhanced
Learning (TEL) Cluster in CREET. Our main interests include Open Educational Resources (OERs), citizen
science, participatory learning, accessibility of learning systems, learning design, technology-enhanced
assessment, game-based learning, learning analytics, and understanding the changing experience of
distance learning. Our expertise in these fields is world-renowned and our researchers carry out exciting
projects. Funding reflects a diversity of sources such as the US-based Hewlett Foundation, the Nominet
Trust, European Union research programmes, and the UK Research Councils. In 2013 IET was granted the
first ever Regius Professorship in Open Education to mark the Queen’s Diamond Jubilee.

Research in TEL is organised into three programme areas each of which would welcome prospective student
proposals:

- **Learning analytics** is a field emerging at the intersection of education research and analytic
  research. It involves the measurement, collection, analysis and reporting of ‘big data’ related to
  learners and their contexts, in order to provide actionable intelligence that supports teaching and
  learning. We have unique research experience in this area and have taken an early lead in the
  field by developing and deploying analytics and publishing and presenting in this area.

- **Learning in an Open World** explores the impact that an increasingly ‘open’ technologically
  mediated learning environment will have on learning in the future. The research programme takes
  a particular position on the notion of “openness”; considering it from a broad perspective covering
  each major phase of the academic lifecycle: design, delivery, evaluation and research. It asks what
  the implications are for education in a world where content and expertise are often free and where
  services are shifting to the ‘cloud’.

- **Innovating Pedagogy** investigates developments in teaching and learning using the latest
technologies and pedagogical innovations to define the future of learning. It aims to lead university
research and development in Technology Enhanced Learning and inform OU innovations in
teaching, learning and assessment. It asks questions such as: How can we facilitate effective
learning in convivial environments that learners want to return to again and again? And what
we can do to make teaching a rewarding experience in the midst of constant change? The
programme develops and evaluates new educational theories, methods, models, systems and
technologies, informed by theories of technology-enhanced learning.

**Childhood Studies, Education Futures and Language and Literacies:**
Research in these clusters focuses on participatory approaches to education that harness creativity and
capitalise upon the potential of technologies to transform provision. Established educational systems and
structures are experiencing new challenges; the boundaries of learning and how we learn are shifting. There
is unprecedented increase in informal learning, mediated largely by the use of new technologies. At the
same time, traditional forms of assessment are inhibiting innovation for children and young people,
particularly for school aged learners. Innovative approaches to rethinking educational structures are
required in order to balance the imperatives of social well-being with the demands of economic
competitiveness and young people need to be involved, such that they are enabled to respond with
confidence, creativity and flexibility to the complex, changing and uncertain world.

Digital technologies are transforming the nature of literacies and the ways in which we use and learn
language(s). They offer new ways of communicating (e.g. digital storytelling) and new learning arenas
(MOOCs, social media, online intercultural exchanges). They make new demands on understanding the
world, thereby challenging traditional teaching. This ongoing transformation has the potential for greater
inclusiveness, but at the same time makes sophisticated skills involving language(s) and literacy
fundamental to many social activities, knowledge acquisition and employment. This places demands on
learners and teachers alike. One key challenge is to give our young people language and literacy skills for
the digital age while enabling them to make best use of technology to enhance their learning. Another is to
equip teachers themselves with the required pedagogic expertise: new teaching needs to respond
appropriately by exploiting learners’ pre-existing skills and habits of digital information sharing. In the new
online learning spaces, teachers will have to use pedagogies that accord with open and learner-centred
environments.

For further information about research at The Open University please visit the Research School Website or
the Research Degrees Prospectus.
Section 1.4: Postgraduate research students in CREET

Supervisors

It is expected that applications will be located within supervisors’ research areas. On submission, proposals will be forwarded to appropriate potential supervisors for consideration.

Studentship holders will be supervised by an experienced team in Technology Enhanced learning. If appropriate, a supervisor from another Faculty can be asked to join the supervision team.

Training and support

CREET has 32 full-time PhD students, 7 part-time PhD students and 145 part-time EdD students. Full time students will have use of office space at Milton Keynes and will also be allocated computer facilities. The University provides a generic postgraduate student induction as well as a training programme. Additional training and support is provided by CREET.

Informal enquiries may be made to the Director for Postgraduate Studies by contacting anne.foward@open.ac.uk or CREET-Student-Enquiries@open.ac.uk.

Note for Non EEA (European Economic Area) International Applicants

All prospective non-EEA (European Economic Area) applicants will require a Tier 4 student visa to take up a place to study full-time in the UK. In order to obtain a student visa, students will need an unconditional offer of a place to study for a postgraduate degree at a recognized educational provider and will need to be able to demonstrate that they meet the financial requirements laid down by UK Visa and Immigration (i.e. currently sufficient funds to cover the course fees for one year and £7380 to cover living costs for nine months). Full details of the current requirements of the points-based system can be found at https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/370866/T4_Guidance_11-14.pdf

In terms of qualifications, experience and expertise, it is essential that candidates have the following:

- A good degree at 2.1 level or above relevant to the area in which they are applying or
- A Master’s degree in a relevant area
- Knowledge of and some experience of using qualitative/quantitative research methods
- Commitment to disseminating research findings
- Good written and spoken communication skills. It is a requirement that all non-native English candidates demonstrate that they have passed the IELTS http://www.ielts.org/ or equivalent at B2 level.
- The ability to work collaboratively with supervisors
- The ability to work independently and manage time effectively to ensure completion within the funded period.

Full-time students normally study on campus and are required to live within easy commutable distance from Milton Keynes.

2 APPLYING FOR A STUDENTSHP

Section 2.1: How to apply

Application form

Complete the application form. The form has been designed to give the information needed at this initial stage and allows candidates to be considered in an even-handed way. The application form can be found at http://www.open.ac.uk/postgraduate/research-degrees/how-to-apply/mphil-and-phd-application-process or email creet-student-enquiries@open.ac.uk.

Email a copy of your application and research proposal to anne.foward@open.ac.uk or CREET-Student-Enquiries@open.ac.uk
Applications must send with their application form a research proposal of approx. 1,500 words explaining the nature of their interest in the subject, with details of any previous work in this area or any related areas.

Email to anne.foward@open.ac.uk or CREET-Student-Enquiries@open.ac.uk

Candidates are advised to read the full details on How to Apply in the Research Degrees Prospectus http://www.open.ac.uk/postgraduate/research-degrees/how-to-apply.

Two academic referees should be nominated. Please provide full contact details in the Referee section of the application form, stating any reservations you may have about our approaching them.

Please be advised that the CREET Postgraduate Office is responsible for requesting references from your referees.

Email the application and research proposal to anne.foward@open.ac.uk or CREET-Student-Enquiries@open.ac.uk, to arrive by the closing date.

Section 2.2: Selection process

Eligibility

Please see person specification in section 1.5

Non EEA (European Economic Area) International Applicants should look at the current requirements of the points-based immigration system which can be found at http://www.bia.homeoffice.gov.uk/studyingintheuk/adult-students/

Closing date

1 July 2015

Pre-applications enquiries

If you have any queries about the role and nature of the studentships prior to applying, please contact:

The Director of Postgraduate Studies through anne.foward@open.ac.uk

Shortlisting

Shortlisting will be completed as soon as possible after the closing date.

Interviews

Interviews will be held from July 2015. Candidates will be asked to provide a copy of a recent piece of academic writing.

Disabled applicants

The Open University welcomes applications from disabled people. A map and access guide for the disabled indicating routes to buildings, lift access and reserved parking on campus is available on request.

Recruitment procedures

The appointment process reflects the University’s and CREET’s commitment to Equal Opportunities and the need to ensure these principles are reflected in all aspects of the appointment procedure.

If you have any comments or concerns about any stage of the recruitment process, please write to the Director of Postgraduate Studies in CREET. If, after this, you still do not feel that your concerns have been addressed, please contact the Research School.

Selection and interview

Applicants are shortlisted for interview on the basis of the following criteria:

- appropriate qualifications
- the quality of the proposal
- fit with CREET research
- availability of two appropriate supervisors

The interview panel usually consists of the Director of Postgraduate Studies, the Associate Dean (Research) or the Associate Director for IET (where appropriate), one or more prospective supervisors and possibly an invited member of staff who may have a particular interest in the application concerned. At interview, the panel will discuss your research proposal and may ask you to expand on aspects of the proposal. Information is also sought concerning your previous training in research methods, (i.e. the nature of any taught courses you have taken in research methods, final-year project and/or masters’ dissertation work). The research proposal and interview performance are evaluated according to the following criteria:

- Fit with CREET research and the Technology Enhanced learning initiative reflecting potential for research to impact on student learning at the University
• 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 scope and context of the research; proposed sampling methods; data collection methods and possible sources of bias)
• 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
• Knowledge and understanding of the process of research and knowledge generation (i.e. the need for research to be generalizable and replicable).

At the end of the interview, the panel chair will explain the admissions procedures and give a brief overview of supervision practice and research training provision. It is important that, if offered a studentship, you are fully informed of what is involved in undertaking full-time PhD study in CREET and that this information feeds into any decision you make about acceptance.

Section 2.3: Preparing your proposal

Developing your outline research proposal

As part of your application you need to submit a research proposal indicating a possible topic or area that you would like to research. Don’t worry if your ideas are rather broad at this stage. Once you have been admitted, your supervisors will provide help and support in refining your initial area of interest. It is almost certain that your original outline will be significantly amended in the early stages of the work itself. Your research proposal, however, is an important part of your application since it enables the academic staff responsible for selecting applicants to assess your knowledge of the proposed field of study and your ability to frame a project conceptually and propose an appropriate methodology.

Content of research proposal

Your proposal should be approx. 1,500 words in length and should include:

1 The basics
Your name and the title of your proposed thesis.

2 The relevance of your project (approx. 300 words)
Good proposals include some explanation of why the project is worth pursuing. Perhaps recent advances in the area have made a previously unresolved problem solvable; perhaps a solution to the problem that you have identified would help to answer some larger question; perhaps the issue that you would like to investigate has some urgent practical importance. Whatever the answer may be, it would be good to include some motivation for your project.

3 The question (approx. 100 words)
You should state clearly and precisely the question that you intend to address. Bear in mind that a research thesis is not a book. A book can address a series of loosely related topics, but a thesis is more tightly focused. Research proposals — including successful ones — are almost always over-ambitious, but the more broad-ranging a proposal is, the harder it is to see how a coherent thesis might develop from it.

4 A conceptual framework (approx. 300 words)
This provides you with a theoretical take on the issue you are hoping to research and helps to link various aspects of your proposal (e.g. problem, literature review, methodology).

5 The literature (approx. 500 words)
It is helpful to indicate some of the literature that you are going to use. This need not involve giving a long bibliography: it might be appropriate to mention some key articles or books that you regard as particularly relevant to your project. You should explain how they relate to your proposal: perhaps they contain an argument or position you intend to attack or defend, or an idea that could help you to answer your question.

6 Approach and Methodology (approx. 300 words)
You should give some sense of how you intend to go about answering your question(s). This need not involve saying what your answer is going to be: it may be a matter (for example) of explaining what other questions need to be answered first.
Additional information
If accepted, your project is likely to develop under the guidance of your supervisors. In many cases, the thesis that emerges bears only a partial resemblance to the original proposal. You are not committed to everything that you say in your proposal; only to producing the thesis that develops out of it. Again, do not worry if you do not know exactly how your thesis will develop: you can signal areas you are uncertain about, or try out a particular line that may be modified later on.

Please note that you may be asked to adapt your research proposal in line with the requirements of an external funder.

Recommended references

3 BENEFITS AND FACILITIES
The following provides information about some staff benefits and facilities. Full details are available on appointment.

Facilities
- Catering facilities at Walton Hall provide meals, snacks and drinks
- Open University Club (offering a number of club and society events, sports and social outlets)
- Library
- NatWest bank sub-branch
- Shop selling general provisions

Local education facilities
- Information on local schools can be obtained from the Learning and Development Directorate, Milton Keynes Borough Council on 01908 691691.

Nurseries
- There are a number of nurseries in the Milton Keynes area including one on site at Walton Hall, the Open University Mulberry Bear Day Nursery and Pre-School. There is a waiting list for some age groups and an early application is advised. Since the Mulberry Bear is independent of the Open University, appointees cannot be guaranteed a place for their child. For further information telephone the Mulberry Bear on Milton Keynes 01908 653867. There is also a Borough of Milton Keynes nursery at nearby Kingston where the University has reserved places.

Pre-school child care subsidy scheme
- The Open University has a means tested childcare subsidy scheme. Those eligible are provided with a Childcare Voucher that can be used as part payment for the care of children under 5 years of age. For further information about the scheme look on the Mulberry Bear website or phone 01908 653867