

UNIVERSITY RESEARCH STUDENTSHIPS (URS)

1. This document should be read in conjunction with the most up to date versions of the University's [Academic Regulations](#) and the [Research Degrees Handbook](#).
2. University Research Studentships (URS) are awarded by Faculties (or any part therein – for example, Schools or Research Groups) to postgraduate research (PGR) students for training in the methods of research and to undertake research in particular areas of study under the guidance of named supervisors. It is expected that the recipient of the award will submit a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD), Master of Philosophy (MPhil), Research Masters (ResM), Doctor of Medicine (MD), Professional Doctorate in Education (EdD), Doctor of Engineering (EngD), or Doctor of Business Administration (DBA).
3. A PGR student is considered in receipt of a URS, when either
 - a) This is identified in their Offer Letter or other formal communication from the University; or else
 - b) When all of the following conditions are in place:
 - i) the recruitment and selection process is organised and run solely by the University (although this may involve the participation of external partners);
 - ii) stipends are paid directly by the University to the student (even if these are reimbursed by an external funder);
 - iii) the student is registered for a UoP research degree;
 - iv) tuition fees (during full fee paying period) are not paid to the University by or on behalf of the student (with the exception of any difference between home and international level fees);
 - v) the funder(s) do(es) not have their own terms and conditions for studentships/training grants that supersede the University's;
 - vi) the student is not part of a doctoral training partnership, centre of doctoral training or consortium that is part or wholly funded by UK Research & Innovation (UKRI).
4. Selection criteria for studentships must be clearly stated in the primary description or advertisement inviting applications (or else it must be clear how/where these criteria can be read). These criteria must be used to arrive at shortlists for interview and for appointment. All advertisements for studentships must state the University's commitment to equality and diversity.
5. It is necessary to adhere to the Doctoral College's 'Interview Policy for Postgraduate Research Studentships' (see Appendix B).
6. The funds for these studentships may derive from internal sources or from externally funded support that the Faculty has secured (or any combination of the two). Faculties are encouraged to seek collaborative funding to "top-up" studentships and/or be used to fund fees, equipment, travel or consumables.

7. Faculties must provide funds from their own resources to include stipend, tuition fees and all other costs, including consumables, field work, travel, conferences and supervision, as and if appropriate. The level, nature and conditions of this support (especially related to other costs) must be indicated to the student in their offer letter.
8. All members of supervisory teams for candidates in receipt of University Research Studentships must complete the requisite supervisor training prior to student enrolment.

Stipends, Fees, Costs and Payments

9. The minimum stipend to be offered to any full time URS recipient in 2025/26 academic year will be £19,215.00, and pro rata for part-time awards.
10. Should a URS funded student incur additional expenditure in undertaking a research degree as a result of a disability, the University may consider paying a disabled students' allowance (see Appendix A).
11. Students will normally be responsible for the preparation and presentation of, and costs associated with, all aspects of their own theses. In doing so, students are encouraged to use the resources available to them including networked computers, specialist programmes, technical support, printers, and so on.
12. Student fees will be charged to the Faculty in which the student is registered (normally on the basis of the location of their Director of Studies) for the duration of the entire period of funding (see paragraph 15).
13. Any bench fees associated with the project should be costed and managed according to the University Bench Fee Policy (accessible via the [Student regulations, policies and procedures](#) webpage).
14. Stipends will be paid in advance by direct transfer to the student's account by the BACS system where possible. Students should contact the relevant Faculty Office to ascertain the dates when payments will be made and ensure the University has their bank details. The Doctoral College is not responsible for the payment of stipends to the student.
15. Unless otherwise noted in writing to the candidate, funded studentship periods are as follows, depending on each type of degree and mode of attendance:
 - a) Full-time:
 - i) PhD: 3 years
 - ii) MPhil and MD: 2 years
 - iii) ResM: 1 year
 - iv) EngD: taught phase (excluding repeat stages) plus 2 years from start of research phase
 - b) Part-time for students that started their degree prior to 1st August 2024:
 - i) PhD: 4 years
 - ii) MPhil and MD: 3 years
 - iii) ResM: 2 years
 - iv) EdD and DBA: 5 years (excluding any repeat stages)
 - c) Part-time for students that started their degree on or after 1st August 2024:
 - i) PhD: 6 years
 - ii) MPhil and MD: 4 years
 - iii) ResM: 2 years
 - iv) EdD and DBA: 3 years from start of research phase

16. In cases where the thesis is submitted prior to the end of the funded period in paragraph 14 above, if the student continues to undertake work that is directly linked to their thesis, it is permissible for the award funding to continue to the end of the quarter in which the thesis is submitted. If the student submits on or after the original end date, then the funding must cease on the end date.
17. Any student who has not submitted a thesis for examination before the end of their studentship award period will be required to pay fees to the University to continue their registration until they submit (see paragraphs 18 and 19).
18. Students who have completed the studentship period according to paragraph 14 above (or as per times indicated in their offer letter, if different from paragraph 14) are entitled to a 'writing up' period (if appropriate), during which they are required to pay 'writing up' fees published on the University website. Faculties may agree in advance to pay such fees on behalf of the student; in such cases, this commitment should be noted in the student's offer letter. Maximum writing up periods are as follows:
- a) Full-time:
 - i) MPhil, PhD, MD and EngD: 1 year
 - ii) ResM: 0.5 years
 - b) Part-time for students that started their degree prior to 1st August 2024:
 - i) PhD: 2 years
 - ii) MPhil, ResM, EdD, DBA and MD: 1 year
 - c) Part-time for students that started their degree on or after 1st August 2024:
 - i) PhD, MPhil, MD: 2 years
 - ii) ResM, EdD and DBA: 1 year
19. After the maximum registration periods, it is the student's responsibility to pay fees incurred for any extensions to their registration, whether formally approved or not (see University [Tuition fees for postgraduate research students 2025-26](#) page for current 'extension fee' rates).
20. Students who began their programmes of study after 1 September 2018, and who are required to resubmit their thesis, whether or not they attend a second *viva voce* examination, must pay a resubmission fee (see University website for current rate) to the University.
21. Full-time and part-time students (including those who move between modes of attendance) on the same programme of study should receive the same total stipend, although this amount may be spread over different periods of time and should take into account any annual increases in payment levels over that period of time. Registration periods cannot be extended to accommodate stipend payment schedules.
22. See paragraphs 45 and 46 below for payments related to Maternity, Adoption, Ordinary Paternity, Shared Parental Leave and other interruptions to study (including illness)¹.

¹ Please note that award payments during interruptions due to Maternity, Ordinary Paternity, Adoption, Shared Parental Leave, or illness (see paragraphs 45 and 46 below) can only be made for periods of interruptions that began on or after 1 September 2019; payments cannot be made retrospectively or for periods of interruption prior to this date.

Probation, Progress and Conditions

23. Full-time students are subject to a six-month probationary period in the first year of the studentship. Part-time candidates are subject to a twelve-month probationary period. By the end of this period, they are expected to have formally completed the project approval (RDC.1) milestone, where required.
24. All research students are appointed in the first instance for one year, renewable annually, up to the studentship periods in paragraph 15 above. For all students, funding is subject to satisfactory progress, evidenced by annual monitoring processes, and, where required, successfully completing project approval (RDC.1) and the confirmation of route milestone (RDC.2) within the regulatory timescales.
25. The period of notice to terminate the studentship prematurely is one calendar month, in writing, by either the student or the University.
26. It is a condition of all awards made under this scheme that the students must accept the University's arrangements for [Intellectual Property](#) Rights (IPR).
27. Full-time research students are entitled to 8 weeks leave per year (pro-rata for part-time students), including public holidays. Leave will be taken at times agreed with the Supervisory Team and notified in advance via GradBook.
28. A full-time URS award cannot be held by any employee of the University (with the exception of employment referred to in paragraph 33 below).
29. Full-time students are expected to devote their whole time during the working week (subject to paragraph 33 below) to their studies (pro rata for part-time study).
30. Full-time URS award holders cannot hold a full-time job during the period of their award. If a full-time student takes up paid full-time employment before the expiry date of their award, the award will terminate on the date of appointment.
31. It is understood that students may need to make some modifications to the original programme of research and/or project title as their research progresses. Major change of topic or direction, however, will only be allowed in exceptional circumstances.

Teaching and Demonstrating

32. Research students may be given an opportunity to undertake teaching and/or demonstrating and/or consultancy duties, subject to the [University of Plymouth's Teaching, Qualifications and Recognition Policy](#). Payment will be made for such duties at rates agreed by the University Human Resources department. This will not entitle the students to any staff discounts for fee paying purposes.
33. An average of 6 hours per week of teaching and/or demonstrating and/or consultancy relevant to the student's training is allowed for full-time students in receipt of a studentship (pro-rata for part-time students). Please note that payments over the personal tax allowance may result in tax deductions.
34. In their teaching, demonstrating or consultancy duties, research students are responsible to the relevant Head of School or designated line manager.

Mode of attendance and Changes of registration

35. A transfer from part-time to full-time studies cannot involve employment that would prevent the student from working on the research degree on a full-time basis (see also paragraphs 29 and 30 above).

36. A transfer from full-time to part-time mode of attendance will be considered if a change in personal circumstances means that a student can no longer continue full-time studies. A student who takes maternity, paternity, shared parental or adoption leave is entitled to return to study on a part-time basis as long as it is 0.5 FTE.
37. Part-time URS award holders may hold a part-time job during the period of their award; however, the studentship and separate employment contract together should not add up to more than 1.0 FTE.
38. Students do not receive stipend payments during their writing up period. The exception may be where a student changes their registration from full time to part time, or *vice versa*; the stipend amount allocated to the student will be re-distributed according to their registration status, which could result in some stipend payments being made during the writing up period.
39. If a student changes registration from full-time to part-time shortly after receiving a stipend payment, repayment will not be sought by the Faculty but will be deducted from future payments. If the student wishes to repay their stipend at this point, they may do so.
40. Studentship end dates and final thesis submission deadlines will be amended following changes to registration related to mode of attendance.
41. If a student on a PhD programme chooses, prior to the confirmation of route process, with supervisor (and external funder, if relevant) consent, to transfer to the MPhil programme (i.e. to submit an MPhil thesis instead) or when the outcome of the confirmation of route is MPhil, the total period of the studentship changes in line with paragraph 14 above. If the decision is made post confirmation of route, a discussion will happen with student and supervisors. Students will not normally be asked to repay any stipends and fees that were paid to them, or on their behalf, prior to this programme transfer.

Interruptions

42. If the registration of the student is interrupted or suspended for any reason other than for Maternity, Ordinary Paternity, Adoption, Shared Parental Leave, or illness (see paragraphs 45 and 46 below), the studentship, including payment and any other allowances, will be suspended for the same period (subject to existing regulations, visa requirements and procedures).
 - a) Where it has been agreed that a student may interrupt their studies, and that student has recently received a stipend payment, repayment will not be sought by the Faculty but will be deducted from future payments.
 - b) If the student wishes to repay their stipend at this point, they may do so.
43. If a student interrupts and then subsequently withdraws from their programme of study, the Faculty should consider the recovery of the overpaid stipend payment for that interruption period.
44. Studentship end dates and final thesis submission deadlines will be amended following interruptions to the programme of study.
45. In case of interruptions due to illness, stipend payments can continue during absences that are covered by medical certificates for up to 13 weeks, within any 12-month period.

- a) Students may self-certify for periods of illness up to 10 working days (i.e. 2 weeks) within any 12-month period and award payments may continue for this absence; however, a student may only receive award payments for periods of absence due to illness up to 13 weeks *in total* within any 12 month period (that is, combining self- and medical certification).
 - b) Students may interrupt their studies due to illness for up to 12 months; however, stipends will only be paid as above for up to 13 weeks within any 12 month period. Under exceptional circumstances, an interruption may be extended for up to a further 12 months; no stipend will be payable during such extensions.
 - c) Studentships, including stipend payment and any other allowances awarded, will be extended by a commensurate period for absences due to illness that are covered by medical certificates (i.e. not self-certified), up to a total of 39 weeks.
- 46.** If a student becomes pregnant such that the expected date of confinement will occur during the period of their studentship (see paragraph 15 above), they are entitled to 52 weeks of maternity or shared parental leave.
- a) The first 26 weeks will be paid at full stipend rate. The following 13 weeks will be paid at a level commensurate with employee entitlements to statutory maternity pay; this is approximately 41% of the minimum doctoral stipend. The final 13 weeks are not paid. Additionally, their studentship, including stipend payment and any other allowances, will be extended by a commensurate period.
 - b) Adoption leave will be granted on the same basis as maternity leave.
 - c) Partners are entitled to up to 10 working days paid Ordinary Parental Leave on full stipend; these may be taken at any time during a partner's pregnancy or within three months following the birth.
 - d) Partners may be entitled to up to 50 weeks of Shared Parental Leave; this may include paid and unpaid leave. Depending on the individual circumstances, any paid leave should be at full stipend. While recognising that students are not employees, Shared Parental Leave should be calculated on the same basis as an employee with an employment contract (excluding the qualifying period). Further information can be found on the government website [Shared Parental Leave and Pay: employer guide](#).
 - e) The qualifying period for Maternity, Adoption, Paternity, or Shared Parental Leave is six months from initial registration on the programme of study (i.e. the start of the studentship).
 - f) There is no limit to the number of periods of Maternity, Ordinary Paternity, Shared Parental or Adoption Leave that can be taken during a studentship.
- 47.** Any student who has interrupted for more than 6 months, for any reason, should be offered at least 2 'keeping in touch' meetings during their period of interruption and have a documented 'reintegration' meeting with their supervisory team within 2 weeks of resuming studies to discuss support structures available.

Externally funded studentships

- 48.** Externally funded research studentships will not normally be 'top-sliced' by the University.
- 49.** Externally funded studentships may be subject to contractual arrangements and external partners will be consulted before an agreement to change registration, interrupt or extend is made.
- 50.** When external funding of studentships is fixed, it is the Faculty's responsibility to ensure that any additional payments to the student due to interruptions outlined in paragraphs 45 and 46 above, are fulfilled.

Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA)

Where a URS funded student incurs additional expenditure in undertaking a research degree, as a result of a disability, they may wish to consider applying to Student Finance England for a Disabled Students Allowance (DSA).

In the case of a URS funded student who is not eligible to apply for DSA (e.g. non-U.K. students), the University will consider paying support requirements on an individual basis.

A request for the disability allowance should be accompanied by medical evidence of need. As far as possible, claims should be made at the beginning of the studentship. The level of any allowance agreed by the University will reflect the student's personal circumstances.

The University may consider one allowance to meet all costs of up to the same level as the DSA from Student Finance England. This allowance can be used, for example, for specialist equipment or non-medical personal helpers.

Further information can be found on the Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) pages at <https://www.gov.uk/disabled-students-allowance-dsa>.



Interview Policy for Postgraduate Research Studentships

All shortlisted applicants must attend an interview to be considered for a studentship (whether internally or externally funded).

If it is not possible for the applicant to attend in person, then a remote video interview, held on the same day(s) as the other interviews, is possible in exceptional circumstances. The interview panel must strive to ensure that applicants who are interviewed by video are neither advantaged nor disadvantaged.

The following notes describe the Doctoral College's expectations for the selection of studentships.

Advertising

Selection criteria for studentships must be clearly stated in the primary description or advertisement inviting applications (or else it must be clear how/where these criteria can be read).

These criteria must be used to arrive at shortlists for interview and for appointment. All advertisements for studentships must state the University's commitment to equality and diversity.

Shortlisting for Interview

Shortlisting applicants for interview must be carried out by a minimum of two people, one of whom must be a member of the interview panel.

Agreed shortlist scoring against criteria must be recorded and decisions for rejection must be clear and factual.

No greater than 4 applicants should *normally* be shortlisted for a single studentship opportunity.

Training of panellists

All University of Plymouth staff involved with shortlisting and interviewing applicants must have completed the University's mandatory Equality & Diversity and Unconscious Bias training. (It is recognised that external members of panels may not have completed such training or the equivalent).

The Chair of the Interview panel must have completed Recruitment & Selection training.

Interviews

Each interview selection panel must have a minimum of 3 members, one of whom will Chair the panel. All interview panels must include both men and women.

If an applicant is known to a member of the panel, in a personal or close working professional capacity, they are required to declare that to the other panel members to ensure any potential bias, negative or positive, is managed. A panel member or chair cannot take part in selection processes if a member of family is being considered as an applicant.

Travel expenses within the UK (and, if required, overnight accommodation) must be met for each shortlisted applicant to attend interview. These are the responsibility of the relevant School/Faculty (if not covered by an external funder). If possible, travel should be booked for the applicant in advance to ensure that no-one is excluded due to lack of means to pay up front to attend an interview.

There should be at least 10 days from the invite letters being issued to the actual interview.

All interviewees must be asked by the administrator organising interviews if they have any reasonable adjustments that are required to enable them to participate fairly and fully in the recruitment process. The Chair should be notified of the nature of any adjustments and must ensure that no confidential data is shared with the rest of the interview panel without the applicant's approval.

The interview should focus on gaining evidence that demonstrates how the applicant fulfils the selection criteria. The Chair, with input from the panel members, should plan broad questions in advance; these questions should be asked to all candidates, which can then be explored in more depth, depending on how the candidate initially responds.

Each panel member must complete an interview notes template for each candidate. Notes should reflect the essence of how a candidate responds to the question. They should be factual, unambiguous and impersonal, from which judgements about suitability for the studentship can be made against the selection criteria.

Outcome and feedback

The Chair should lead a full discussion with the panel members regarding each applicant's suitability, taking into account feedback from any other elements used in the selection process as appropriate (e.g. sample writing, presentation, etc.).

The Chair records the interview outcomes; summary paperwork should be given to and kept by the Doctoral College for a period of one year (in the case of unsuccessful interviewees). Interview notes for successful applicants will be attached to their Admissions Proforma.

All interviewed applicants should be informed of the outcome as soon as possible. This may be done by email. All unsuccessful applicants who attended interview should be given the opportunity to receive feedback in relation to the selection criteria.