Open University Statement on Open and Engaging Research
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1. Statement Purpose

In line with its mission, The Open University (OU) believes that the ideas and knowledge from its research should be made available and accessible to everyone. With our distinctive open mission, we should lead the way in fostering an open and engaging research culture.

Our [Research Plan 2022 to 2027](#) states that:

‘Research should be shared openly and widely to maximise its impact, enhance integrity, and minimise waste. With our distinctive, open mission, our University should lead the way in fostering an open research culture.’

Our [Knowledge Exchange Plan 2022 to 2027](#) (internal link only) states that:

‘Engaged research encompasses the different ways that Open University (OU) staff meaningfully interact with various ‘publics’ ... from issue formulation, the production or co-creation of new knowledge ... to knowledge evaluation and dissemination.’

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1 ‘Publics’ may include user communities, citizens, institutional actors, Non-Governmental Organisations, representatives from economic or societal entities, and/or groups who pre-exist, come into existence, or develop an identity in relationship to the research process.
Through the OU Research Code of Practice and our research policies we encourage and support our academics to be as open and engaged as possible in their research practices.

This statement commits the University to actions that will enhance the openness of our research, where legally, commercially and ethically appropriate.

2. The OU Open Research Journey

A. Research Project Conception

The research journey begins with the planning a new project, partnership or programme. Openness at this conception stage involves discussions with colleagues across the University and with external partners where appropriate. Exploring issues of representation, utility and emergence will help to identify who should have a voice in the research process, and who has been excluded in the past.

Being open to different viewpoints requires careful consideration of ethics and sensitivity to pre-existing structural inequalities. Taking account of published data and evidence are also essential in the conception phase. Initiatives such as Open Societal Challenges create an environment to encourage open discussions on the goals of future research and planning for impact to create positive changes, effects and/or benefits. We will endeavour to involve our
students, staff and interested and affected parties beyond the University in more planning processes.

**Actions we will take**

- Maintain an online platform for sharing projects at conception stage and encourage the formation of diverse, inclusive and multidisciplinary teams.

**B. Live Projects**

The OU research community encourages all research projects to be conducted in an open and engaging fashion. Researchers should agree how the research should be conducted in ways that can engage interested and affected parties in meaningful ways, what evidence can be gathered through the research process to demonstrate positive change, and at what points in the research cycle these interventions could be appropriate and useful.

We will make epistemologies, methodologies, methods and protocols open and accessible beyond the reporting in a traditional ‘Method’ section. For research to be open and engaging, descriptions of the research must be comprehensive, honest, rigorous and transparent with access provided to ethical processes, relevant artefacts, tests, tools, materials, protocols and software. When engaging with external partners researchers should agree on how findings should be shared in appropriate ways for different constituencies.

We will pilot and promote the pre-registration of studies to encourage transparency and enhance reproducibility. We will employ citizen science methodologies, create citizen panels and consider other innovative methods to
engage people within and outside of the OU in research and research projects in the future.

**Actions we will take**

- Create citizen panels to get feedback on live Open Societal Challenges.
- Increase the use of nQuire to promote public engagement in research.
- Pilot pre-registration of experiments and protocols.
- Explore the role of the OU in improving the accessibility, transparency and rigour of the use of Artificial Intelligence tools across all stages of the research journey, internally and externally.

**C. Data and Analysis**

The Open University Research Data Management policy sets out the expectations for the management of research data and outlines the responsibilities and requirements of the University and its researchers. Research data should be as open and accessible to other researchers as soon as appropriate, subject to the application of appropriate safeguards relating to the sensitivity of the data and legal and commercial requirements.

All researchers are encouraged to write a data management plan describing the data (or similar evidence) that a project will collect, how it will be stored during the project, how it will be shared with external partners, how it will be archived at the end of the project and how access will be granted (where appropriate).
Primary data should be made FAIR (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable and Reusable) and should be deposited in an appropriate data repository. The UK Data Service provides guidance on anonymisation of quantitative and qualitative research data.

The OU supports the management and sharing of research data through the research data management service provided by the University Library and Open Research Data Online, the OU’s research data repository.

**Actions we will take**

- Increase deposition of research data and improve discoverability.

**D. Outputs**

Foundational to the premise of open research is the principle of making our research outputs freely available to disseminate the University’s knowledge, increasing its impact and benefit to other researchers and society. In recent years our open access (OA) and research data management policies have supported the move to make research papers and research data more accessible. We will expand this drive to increase transparency and reproducibility and to broaden the definition of outputs to include, for example, monographs, research software and research tools.

Increasing access to knowledge offers the potential for a wider range of constituencies to scrutinise the outputs from research processes. The inclusion of ‘plain language’ summaries and/or open data sets in a ‘publication bundle’ is helpful, but the University also encourages other forms of open and engaging research communication. Researchers are encouraged to develop
sophisticated communication and engagement strategies in negotiation with external partners to ensure that research is shared in ways that are appropriate to interested and affected parties.

The policies of research funders and research organisations are increasingly moving towards Open Research being the default expectation. The Open University provides support for researchers through Research, Enterprise and Scholarship and Library Services in the form of platforms (Open Research Online and Open Research Data Online) and advice and guidance on open access publishing.

To support open access publication researchers are encouraged to utilise funds provided by funders to support open access publication. Transitional agreements with publishers are also being taken out by the Library to offer a free or lower cost route to open access article publication for all researchers and postgraduate research students. New models for open access book publishing are also emerging and the University will continue to review and engage with these new models.

**Actions we will take**

- Extend the open publication of outputs to include monographs, software and tools.
- Explore the possibility of a central, institutional Open Access publication fund.
- Publish statistics on open publication.
• Maintain access to social media platforms, and support contributions to relevant outlets (e.g. BBC, The Conversation) to promote forms of open and accessible research communication.

• Support open publication by providing advice on the appropriate use of licensing frameworks and endeavouring to facilitate where possible the non-commercial use of new knowledge to maximize public benefit.

E. Careers

The Open University is committed to creating and valuing a research culture that promotes, enables and rewards open and engaging research practices. From recruitment through to career development we will recognise a commitment to open and engaging research.

We are committed to the principles for researcher career development as outlined in the UK Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers; we are a recipient of the European Commission’s HR Excellence in Research Award and a signatory of DORA.

Actions we will take

• Ensure the value and importance of Open and Engaging Research practices are explicit in our recruitment, performance evaluation and career advancement policies.

• Embed open and engaging research principles in our research assessment systems, recognising Open Research approaches such as OA
publishing, data/code/reagent sharing, recognising pre-prints, etc. as indicators of research excellence.

- Offer appropriate support, resources, professional development and training opportunities to enable our staff and postgraduate research students to engage with Open and Engaging Research. These will be aligned with the different needs of our research community, taking account of disciplinary differences, career stage and other relevant factors.

- Promote the University's Knowledge Exchange Profile for academic promotion and ensure that appropriate support is in place for all career stages.
Annex

Useful Resources

Library Research Support

Open Science: a practical guide for PhD students

UK Data Service

UK Reproducibility Network

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