



Policy framework for part-time graduate provision

Education Committee

Valid from Trinity Term 2015

Preamble

While the University continues to see supervised study for a prescribed period of full-time residence as core to its mission, it recognises that a proportion of its doctoral and Master's courses being open to part-time study is an appropriate and valuable complement to that mission.

Complementarity of provision is assessed in a variety of ways - all of which may be taken into account in the approval, monitoring and review processes of part-time postgraduate programmes. This emphasis on complementarity is to ensure that the responsible academic body considers the development of its new provision in the context of its entire teaching portfolio, and articulates how the new provision advances its educational mission.

This framework is designed to facilitate the development of part-time provision at Oxford whilst at the same time enabling the monitoring of demand and resource implications as provision evolves. It is not designed to preclude broader discussion about the nature and direction of graduate provision at Oxford; rather, it is hoped that the experience of the operation of the framework will help to inform future discussions of this issue.

The framework encompasses all part-time provision at graduate level, both doctoral provision and taught postgraduate courses. It is intended to provide guidance in the development and consideration of proposals for new part-time provision¹, and to support the holistic review of the teaching portfolio in the context of departmental/faculty reviews. The framework is intended in particular to emphasise the value of collaboration and inter-disciplinarity in the development of provision.

Scope

1. Part-time provision may be offered, with the approval of the Education Committee², by any of the following:
 - The Department for Continuing Education solely, or in combination with a faculty or department of the University; or
 - A faculty or department solely, or in combination with one or more other faculties or departments.

Size, shape and structures

2. **Part-time provision must complement the opportunities for full-time study, taking into account the entirety of the teaching portfolio offered by the department or faculty.** This requirement applies to the size and shape of the student body³, as well as to the structure of the courses offered.
 - 2.1 Proposals for part-time provision must take into account the readiness and capacity of colleges to provide appropriate support for the particular needs of such students.

¹ In the context of the process of approval outline in the *Policy and Guidance on new courses and major changes to courses (including closure)*.

² Education Committee's terms of reference give it a specific responsibility for 'the arrangements for part-time study and the oversight of programmes delivered in the name of the University of Oxford other than at degree level' and for 'the consideration of the overall balance of activity and provision of resources between graduate studies, undergraduate studies, and continuing education respectively'.

³ Noting the current exclusion of individual part-time student numbers from Student Number Planning, Council may from time to time establish overall proportions of students studying on a part-time basis for the University as a whole or (after appropriate consultation) for any division, faculty or department therein, to maintain an appropriate relationship between full-time and part-time study at all levels and in all subjects. (This point does not pertain to the Department for Continuing Education where almost all students are part-time.)

- 2.2 Proposals for new part-time opportunities should require all students to observe an attendance requirement for face-to-face teaching in Oxford to be undertaken by academic staff employed by the University and/or the colleges.

Comparability of the quality of the student experience

3. **Students studying on a part-time basis must be provided with academic and ancillary support of comparable quality to students studying on a full-time basis.**
 - 3.1 Proposals must show that the department/faculty has a clear understanding of the needs of teaching students studying on a part-time basis, particularly mature students, and that it has taken this into account in the training and advice it will offer to academic supervisors and course organisers.
 - 3.2 Proposals must demonstrate how course organisers intend to maintain comparability of admission requirements and standards for part-time and full-time students.

Alignment with strategic priorities, disciplines, and responsible bodies

4. **Part-time provision must be aligned with the relevant departmental, divisional and institutional strategic plans.**
 - 4.1 Proposals must be appropriately aligned with the responsible academic body/bodies or the nearest responsible academic body/bodies which most closely oversees the disciplinary or subject area of the proposed new provision.
 - 4.2 Where proposals relate to research degrees undertaken on a part-time basis, the proposal must include a rationale for the appropriateness of the designated supervisory body given the research area or areas to be offered.
 - 4.3 Faculties and departments must ensure that they have considered the possibility of offering their programmes on a part-time basis and can provide a reasoned explanation of their agreed approach.
 - 4.4 Divisional/Education Committee reviews of faculties and divisions should include consideration of the faculty/department's approach to part-time provision, including where a faculty/department does not yet offer part-time courses.
 - 4.5 Where proposals relate to free-standing part-time courses, they must include a rationale for the new course being offered by the proposing body or bodies.
 - 4.6 Where proposals relate to part-time opportunities which depend on access to concurrent full-time provision, they must indicate how the provision might affect full-time students, and how this will be addressed to ensure the needs of both full-time and part-time students are met appropriately.

Consultation

5. **Appropriate consultation must take place with those with appropriate disciplinary expertise and those experienced in the provision and support of part-time education.**
 - 5.1 Proposals from the Department for Continuing Education for new part-time courses must include a comment from the nearest academic faculty or department to the subject area or areas to be included in the courses.
 - 5.2 Proposals for new part-time courses from one or more faculties or departments either solely or in concert should include a comment from or on behalf of the Department for Continuing Education on the proposed arrangements to support part-time study, particularly for mature students. Other departments/faculties which have experience in part-time provision should also be asked to comment where relevant.

Quality assurance and enhancement

6. **Measures should be taken to ensure the standards and quality of the provision offered on a part-time basis are of equal robustness to those provided for the University's full-time provision.**
- 6.1 Proposals for new provision should indicate the mechanisms intended to monitor standards of achievement, quality of learning and teaching, accuracy and completeness of information, and enhancement.
- 6.2 Regulations governing the terms and conditions of part-time study as against full-time study should be consistent across the institution for each level of study with regard to time to completion and allowance for suspensions etc. Exceptions will require justification.