THE PHD PROGRAM AT THE

ISTITUTO DI RICERCHE FARMACOLOGICHE

MARIO NEGRI IRCCS

Stefano Fumagalli, PhD

ARC Research Degree Coordinator of the PhD School

Milano, December 2025

Affiliated Research Centre

The International PhD School of the IRFMN, organized in collaboration with the Open University (Milton Keynes, UK), is a Postgraduate Research program of excellence that confers a worldwide recognized PhD title. This PhD Program is part of the educational and training activities taking place at the campuses of Milano and Bergamo. Its major aim is to train students for research careers in the fields of Pharmacology, Toxicology, and Experimental Medicine with reference to Cancer, Neurological, Cardiovascular, and Kidney diseases. Other areas of interest include Environmental Toxicology, Organ Transplantation, Rare Diseases, Molecular Pharmacology, and Public Health.

The PhD Management Team is comprised of the ARC Research Degree Coordinator (ARC RDC) and the PhD Educational Office Administrator. With the support of the latter, the ARC RDC coordinates and supervises the teaching, training, financial, and administrative activities of the PhD School, and is responsible for all communications with the OU Research Degree School. For all relevant matters, the ARC RDC reports only to the Director of IRFMN. The PhD Management Team is currently comprised of Dr. Stefano Fumagalli, ARC Research Degree Coordinator since September 2025, and Head of the Laboratory of Stroke and Vascular Dysfunctions at IRFMN, and Dr. Serena Paganini, the PhD Educational Office Administrator.

The PhD Management Team is supported by a Scientific Advisory Board composed of members selected from the IRFMN permanent scientific staff with prior experience in tutoring and mentoring PhD students. Their term of office is 4 years, renewable if desired by each member.

The procedures of the PhD School, like all the scientific and administrative activities of IRFMN, are certified according to the ISO 9001 European standards.

The teaching and training staff of the PhD School comprises Directors of Studies (DoS), also referred to as "Lead Supervisors", additional internal Supervisors (if deemed necessary), Third Party Monitors, and Internal Examiners, all of which are to be selected among the permanent scientific staff at IRFMN. External Supervisors and External Examiners are identified and selected outside IRFMN in compliance with the OU guidelines and specifications. Finally, Assessors – who are appointed for the student Upgrade Mini Viva – can be selected either within or outside the IRFMN, as long as they are independent and don't influence the design or implementation of the student's research project.

PhD students have full access to all the Institute's computing, administrative, and scientific core facilities, as well as the Institute Library and the online resources provided by the OU.

PUBLICATION OF THE COMPETITIVE CALL

The PhD course is an educational Post-Graduate Research Program of excellence. To guarantee the highest scientific standards, access is generally limited to young investigators with at least one year of experience in any field of experimental or clinical research and proven knowledge of the English language. When exceptions to these general rules arise, a case must be made and presented to the ARC Research Degree Coordinator. Preferential qualifications include one or more original scientific articles published in peer-reviewed international journals.

Access to the PhD Course is regulated by two different procedures: one specifically designed for the "PhD for Africa" project and another one as a "standard" candidate recruitment process (please refer to *PR/O_F 13E* "Selection of candidates for the PhD Course in collaboration with The Open University, Milton Keynes, UK"), both subject to impartial evaluation of the candidates.

For what concerns the "PhD for Africa" project, the PhD positions become available based on dedicated funds, and candidates from African countries are selected based on their CVs and an oral interview with potential P.I.s (internal to the Institute).

For what concerns the "standard" selection process, a competitive Call for applications is open to both internal (already working at IRFMN) and external candidates. The Call can be issued at different times during the year and is subordinated to the existence of projects with available PhD positions. The Call is published on the institutional website and on the official LinkedIn profile of the Institute, together with the project/s abstract/s and the PhD program. It is expected that the calls will be open on a quarterly basis or whenever the number of internal open PhD positions exceeds three. The following aspects must be included in the Call for applications: admission requirements and selection criteria. Among them, all candidates are required to be fluent in English, Italian candidates must possess an Italian master's degree (*laurea magistrale*) in any scientific discipline (though exceptions to the rule may apply), and foreign candidates must possess a graduate degree equivalent to those required for Italian candidates.

In light of the above, the following "Pre-Registration and Evaluation of the Applications" paragraph only refers to the "standard" selection process. The overall management and delivery of the PhD course (starting from the official application for registration process to the OU) is, however, identical for all candidates.

PRE-REGISTRATION AND EVALUATION OF THE APPLICATIONS

In response to the call, the candidate must submit the following pre-registration documents to the Educational Office (phd@marionegri.it):

- the applicant's CV;
- the filled-in and signed *Appendix 1* (also attached to the present Program) to the published competitive call, in which the candidate declares any conflict of interests with the Institute;
- where English is not the applicant's first language, the applicant must demonstrate sufficient proficiency in the English language to support successful study at research degree standard. In this case, it is mandatory to possess a valid IELTS certificate, meeting the minimum requirements of a 6.5 overall score and no less than 6.0 in any of the four areas of competence (reading, writing, listening, and speaking), which has to be obtained no later than two years before the predicted registration date. Applicants, who hold an English certificate other than IELTS at the date of submission, can also take part in the selection process, providing they are awarded the IELTS certificate before the beginning of the academic activities. In the event these applicants pass the selection process, their enrolment on the PhD Course is conditional upon providing evidence that the IELTS qualification has been awarded;
- the PhD project for which they are applying by indicating the corresponding Laboratory. Please refer to the "PhD Project Abstracts" document published along with the Call.

The candidates who meet the eligibility criteria specified in the Competitive Call can be involved in the actual selection process. The latter consists of an oral interview – to be held in English – in which at least two Advisory Board members and the project P.I. will take part. Such assessors impartially evaluate the candidate's profile and suitability for the position with the aid of an Assessment Grid and according to objective criteria.

To comply with the transparency standards established by the ISO quality framework, a final ranking is published on the Institutional website so that each candidate knows whether they can proceed with the following steps concerning the application for registration with the Open University.

In accordance with the international, European, and Italian legislation and the "equal opportunity employer" status of the IRFMN, all candidates are to be treated equally as far as sex, nationality, health status or religious opinion are concerned. Furthermore, the IRFMN has supported the drafting of the Gender Equality Plan (GEP) internal to the organisation. The GEP describes the actions undertaken to follow the guidelines of the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), aiming to "identify and implement innovative strategies to promote cultural change and equal opportunities in Universities and Research Centres".

TERMS OF REGISTRATION WITH THE OPEN UNIVERSITY, UK

The annual tuition fees (currently 2,830 GBP for full-time students and 2,560 GBP for part-time students) for each PhD student are covered by IRFMN for the entire duration of the PhD course and for no longer than the maximum registration date for the PhD Course (four years).

In accordance with the *Reimbursement Clause Letter* (signed by the Applicant and sent to the PhD Educational Office before submitting their application documentation to the Open University), in case of withdrawal or extension requests by the PhD student and approval by the Open University, UK, the student is asked to reimburse the tuition fees advanced by IRFMN.

Throughout the PhD course, the IRFMN provides the student with a monthly stipend in the form of a studentship. The stipend is subject to negotiation and depends on a number of parameters, including availability of funds, prior scientific experience of the candidate, etc.

The PhD Management Team is not involved in any step of the stipend negotiation.

PROCEDURES FOR REGISTRATION WITH THE OPEN UNIVERSITY, UK

Once the selection procedures held at the Institute are completed (please refer to PR/O_F 13E "Selection of candidates for the PhD Course in collaboration with The Open University, Milton Keynes, UK), the PhD Educational Office notifies, via an official email, each candidate of the outcome of the interview and requests the necessary documentation to finalise the application for registration to the OU.

If the candidate accepts the offered position, they must transmit the following documents to the PhD Educational Office:

- the signed *Reimbursement Clause Letter*;

- the *Research Degrees Application Form Affiliated Research Centres* (Encl. 12E/2) – to be filled out by the candidate;

- two reference letters written by the two referees as indicated in the *Application Form*;

- the *Research Degrees Applicant Recommendation Form Affiliated Research Centres* (Encl. 12E/3) – to be filled out by the DoS and the ARC;

- the PhD Project proposal, dated and signed by both the student and the Director of Studies;

- the applicant's CV, dated and signed;

- the CV of the DoS and Supervisor/s (internal and/or external), comprising a full list of publications and specifications on supervisory experience;

- a copy of a valid IELTS certificate (meeting the minimum requirements as outlined in the Call), if required;

- the *Animal Care and Use Committee Approval* - for thesis projects requiring the use of animals (Encl. 12E/4);

- a colour copy of a valid identity document (ID or passport, based on what has been indicated on the *Application Form*);

- the Degree Certificate (both in English and Italian for Italian applicants) with detailed information about the academic career, dated and signed;

After a thorough revision and approval of the documentation by the PhD Management Team, such documentation is sent by the former to the OU within the deadline established for each case. According to the Open University Regulations, "The registration date for all students will be the first day of the month in which they registered" and "on admission to the MPhil/PhD program all students, regardless of the ultimate degree aim, will be registered for the degree of Master of Philosophy (MPhil)" (pp. 25, 33 of the Research Degree Regulations).

Upon approval of the application for registration to the PhD Programme by the *OU Research Degree Team*, an Offer Letter is officially sent (via email) by the OU to the student, who has to sign and return it via email. Once the registration is confirmed by the OU, the student is provided (directly by the OU) with a PGR Manager account and login credentials.

The PGR Manager is a bespoke system for managing the overall PhD journey for each student, recording and storing all relevant information into a single safe and easily accessible system, streamlining administration processes, and simplifying progress monitoring and reporting. It also contains a Calendar that advertises training and development events and a skills audit tool. Relevant guides to support all ARC members with the use of the PGR Manager platform have been created by the OU and made available for consulting and downloading at the following link: https://university.open.ac.uk/students/research/forms-and-guidance.

SELECTION AND TRAINING OF SUPERVISORS

Each PhD Student has to be supervised by a Supervisory Team comprised of at least two scientists (the so-called "Supervisors") – one of whom is necessarily a PI at IRFMN (he/she usually plays the role of "Director of Studies", otherwise called "Lead Supervisor"). They should be experts in the research field related to the PhD research project and have proven experience in dealing with other colleagues and students.

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The supervisory team collectively must have experience of supervising at least one UK PhD from the point of registration to successful completion, and at least one member of the team must be an active researcher involved in research within their chosen discipline as evidenced through peer-reviewed outputs. If the Supervisory Team has no experience in supervising a UK PhD student from the point of registration to successful completion, an additional Internal co-supervisor with enough experience to balance such a lack and provide the minimum supervision experience must be nominated.

The OU PhD School organizes yearly orientation and training sessions (the so-called "Supervisory Training") which all the active and prospective Directors of Studies and Supervisors are required to attend. Such sessions, supervised by the OU PhD School Coordinator, are aimed at providing guidelines and suggestions for the correct mentoring of the student's work, progress, and well-being, in compliance with the general standards set by the Open University, UK.

Each academic year, all Directors of Studies, internal Supervisors, Third Party Monitors, and Advisory Board Members attend the so-called "Induction Meeting" in which specific procedures, insights, and news concerning the management and structure of the PhD school and program are outlined and illustrated. Suggestions on how to improve the PhD conduction scheme are always welcome.

INDUCTION AND TRAINING

The PhD training program is based on a "hands-on" approach and focuses on teaching the scientific approaches and methodology necessary for successful completion of the specific thesis project. The know-how and expertise of the permanent scientific staff in the various fields of interest of the PhD program is witnessed by the amount and quality of the produced scientific literature. The quality of the scientific training of the single PhD student is predominantly the responsibility of the Director of Studies.

The Director of Studies supervises and has the responsibility for the student's scientific work and progress, as well as their well-being, and reports regularly and informally to the ARC Coordinator on the student's progress at a scientific and personal level. As a mandatory part of this mentoring activity, students are required to set and attend at least ten Supervision Meetings per year with their Director of Studies and at least one Supervision Meeting per year with the External Supervisor. To provide evidence of these mentoring meetings, students must update the "Supervision Meetings" section available on the PGR Manager.

The IRFMN Departments and Laboratories are equipped with state-of-the-art scientific instrumentation, which is fully accessible to the PhD students. The Director of Studies ensures that the student has proper training in the use of the instruments and is aware of the general and specific risks and hazards associated with the experimental work, when applicable.

The IRFMN has a regular schedule of scientific seminars and talks (among which are the so-called *Two o'clock Clubs*) that are open to all staff and students and which can be classified as "internal" - when they are presented by members of the scientific staff - and "external" when presented by invited Italian and foreign scientists.

Regularly organized internal and external courses and mini-courses on specific topics are also held – online (via platforms such as Coursera and EDX) or in person – by experienced researchers and professors, who also tutor the participants according to the topic. These are all

important educational opportunities and attendance to a minimum of 3 training courses over the Ph.D. program is recommended for all the PhD students. The list of such courses can be found on the Intranet Page (Risorse > "Offerta Didattica") at the following link: http://intranet.marionegri.it/it_IT/home/istituto/Informazioni/offerta_didattica.

Attendance to Seminars, Talks, and Courses is monitored through the following alternative modalities as part of the documentation necessary for ISO 9001 certification purposes:

- clockings in the classroom, as the preferred method;
- "Modulo Registrazione Incontri", to be filled in and signed by the participants;
- only for virtual Seminars and Talks , it is necessary to register to the meeting by clicking on the dedicated link, available on the Clubs Calendar on the Intranet ("Club delle 2 e Seminari" section: http://intranet.marionegri.it/it_IT/home/istituto/Informazioni/club_intranet) before the meeting has started. This gives the participant the chance to be considered as an actual participant (thus monitoring and certifying the presence to the meeting) and to see the online recording also after the meeting has ended.

    On top of that, an auto declaration of such participation is to be sent via email to simona.rizzardi@marionegri.it.
- For the Educational Courses held online, instructions and participation links will be shared every time an online course is activated.

On top of the above-mentioned opportunities, smaller-scale Department and Laboratory meetings - consisting of individual presentations - are regularly scheduled by the single Departments and Laboratories of the Institute, and are a valuable opportunity for the student to show their results and discuss them with other researchers. To prove their attendance to such meetings, students have to fill in and sign a specific form.

Since January 2006, in conjunction with other ARCs in Milan, IRFMN has been organizing a yearly scientific retreat (the so-called "PhD Meeting") for PhD and Doctoral students, where they have the opportunity to display their scientific work in the form of posters or short oral presentations. The scientific sessions are arranged directly by the students after a scientific committee – consisting of PhD students' representatives – has evaluated the abstracts. Scientific sessions are integrated with seminars and talks by prominent Italian and foreign scientists invited by the organizing committee. The meeting is open to the Directors of Studies and the Supervisors of the students, the Researchers of the Institute, and the scientific staff of the invited Companies.

Modern Science calls for access to, and constant updating of, the literature relating to specific topics of interest. This is an essential part of the training program, and the Director of Studies checks that the student consults the literature regularly and keeps up to date not only in his specific field but also in other scientific domains. The scientific literature is available at the Institute's Pfeiffer Library, and access to scientific publications is guaranteed by the subscriptions and licenses managed by the Pfeiffer Library, which is part of the large network of libraries of the Regione Lombardia.

Another aspect of the PhD training program, emphasized by the IRFMN vision, is the development of the student's communication skills. Students are encouraged and trained by the Director of Studies to present their data at Department meetings and at the Institute's internal seminars. After completion of the upgrade period, PhD students are requested to present at least one Institute internal seminar in English.

Further oral presentations in English can be delivered in the context of Departmental seminars and during the so-called "Passion Talks", which act as an official oral presentation in a public forum during their first PhD year. After the completion of the upgrade period, PhD students are requested to present at least one Institute internal seminar in English.

The Supervisor's role in the training strategy is more limited due to logistic issues and is restricted to general and specific advice strictly connected to the thesis work. For these reasons, the external supervisor is required to meet the PhD student either alone or with the Director of Studies at least once a year. These yearly interactions can also be organized online and, as all supervision meetings, must be recorded using the PGR Manager.

UPGRADE PERIOD

As specified by the Open University, UK, the upgrade period corresponds to the first 11 months after acceptance of registration and serves as a vital interval for assessing the student's scientific and personal skills. During this period, the Director of Studies and the Supervisors monitor the progress of the initial research thesis work and express a final decision about its quality. In addition, the students have the opportunity to evaluate the scientific environment in which they operate and the overall feasibility of the scientific program.

In order to be upgraded from the program of Master of Philosophy (MPhil) to the program of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) – thus overcoming the upgrade period – the student has to both submit their upgrade report and conduct an oral presentation (the so-called "mini-viva") in front of two independent Assessors (to be selected from IRFMN permanent staff members who do not belong to the student's Laboratory and who are not already acting as Third-Party Monitor of the same student), compulsorily by the end of the first year. Therefore, the re-registration for the second year is not only dependent on the positive outcome of the mini-viva, but also on the approval of the overall upgrade process by the ARC RDC and the Open University Progress Board who can confirm one of the following outcomes:

> a) registration for the degree of Master of Philosophy (MPhil); or
>
> b) registration for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD); or
>
> c) the student should be asked to revise their upgrade report to complete any revisions. Revisions must normally be reviewed within the time frames outlined in RD 15.5 and further registration will depend on it having been completed to the satisfaction of the assessors and Associate Dean Research and confirmed by the Progress Board; or
>
> d) the student should be de-registered due to failure to make satisfactory academic progress.

The Upgrade documentation is available for consulting and downloading in the student's "Upgrade" section on the PGR Manager.

SUBSEQUENT YEARS

Normally, research work after the upgrade period continues as before. Each year:

- Full-time students must schedule and record via PGR Manager at least 10 Supervision Meetings with their internal Supervisor/s and at least 1 Supervision Meeting with the External Supervisor;
- Part-time students must schedule and record via PGR Manager at least 5 Supervision Meetings with their internal Supervisor/s and at least 1 Supervision Meeting with the External Supervisor;

At the end of each year, the student is required to complete a "Progress Review" and then proceed with the Re-registration to the following year (both actions via PGR Manager). More specifically, the Progress Review entails the completion of a:

- "Structured report" to be completed directly on the PGR manager;
- "Self-written Progress Report" to be uploaded as a separate document on the same "Progress Review" section on PGR Manager. This document must include a thorough, updated, and extensive description of the student's research project and progress (e.g., Background, Objectives, Methods, Results, References) plus an updated Gantt Chart of all PhD years (including the previous ones).

The OU Research Degrees Team will then assess the student's academic progress, and eventually approves the re-registration for the subsequent year. Upon the OU approval, a record of the student's Progress Review (comprising the Progress Report) and Re-registration will be available for consulting and downloading in the related student section on the PGR Manager.

IRFMN generally discourages applications for extension of registration. However, a student requiring such an extension has to discuss it carefully with their Director of Studies and notify the PhD Management Team several months ahead of the course's end. In such case, the student must submit the request (via PGR Manager) no later than one month prior to the maximum registration date and should provide supporting evidence and a plan of work for completion approved by the Director of Studies and the ARC RDC. The student is notified of approval via PGR Manager.

The procedure for students applying for study break can be initiated by the student or, if the student is indisposed, by the Supervisor(s) or the ARC RDC via PGR Manager. Any request should be approved by the DoS and the ARC RDC, and submitted together with the supporting evidence to the OU Research Degrees Team as soon as possible. Study break is not an automatic right and under no circumstances can it be granted retrospectively.

When a student decides to terminate their registration at the OU, the IRFMN must inform the OU Research Degrees Team using the relevant form via PGR Manager. The procedure can be initiated by the student and confirmed by the DoS and the ARC RDC; then, the OU Graduate School Director will take notice of the decision.

All these procedures are registered and available for consulting and downloading in the student's "Change Request" section on the PGR Manager.

THESIS SUBMISSION, NOMINATION OF EXAMINERS, AND EXAMINATION PROCEDURE

The overall Viva (final examination) procedure comprises the following steps:

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1) <u>Notice of submission</u>: At least three months before the Thesis Submission deadline, the student has to notify the PhD Management Team via email of the intention to submit their thesis before the whole examination workflow (i.e., Notice of Submission, Exam Panel Nomination, Thesis Submission, Viva Scheduling) is started via PGR Manager. Such email has to contain a provisional date for Thesis submission, the thesis title, and a proposal regarding the composition of the Examination Panel.

   All the phases of the examination workflow in anticipation of the actual examination (the so-called Viva Voce) have to be approved by the ARC RDC. As specified by the Open University, the Notice of Submission (provided by the student on the PGR Manager) includes, among other details, the confirmation of the thesis title and provisional submission date, and has to be transmitted at least 3 months before the actual thesis submission date.

2) <u>Exam Panel Nomination</u>: In tandem with the student's Notice of Submission (so at least a minimum of three months ahead of thesis submission) and after consulting the ARC RDC, the Director of Studies proposes the members of the *Exam Panel* via PGR Manager. The internal and External Examiners must collectively have experience of examining a minimum of five UK Doctoral degrees as well as experience of UK research degree supervision to successful completion and/or examination. For a more extensive list of what constitutes potential conflicts of interest that should be taken into account when appointing examination panels, please refer to Appendix 4 of the OU Research Degree Regulations.

   The proposed panel is then evaluated by the OU Progress Board, who can request further information/changes or approve the appointed members. The student is notified by PGR Manager of the approval by the OU Research Degree Team. Once the panel is appointed, all communication with the examiners on matters related to the thesis and or/the examination until such a time as there is a final outcome are carried out through/led by the Exam Panel Chair (EPC) who is currently a member of academic or research staff at IRFMN.

3) <u>Thesis Submission</u>: The "Thesis Submission Student Form" (which comprises a copy of the student Thesis) must be submitted via PGR Manager by the student no later than the thesis submission deadline.

4) <u>Viva Scheduling</u>: Upon approval – via PGR Manager – of the submitted thesis by the ARC RDC, the thesis will be available to the Chair who should get in touch with the Examiners, the student and the observer (where applicable) to schedule the Viva (both informally and formally via PGR Manager) and make sure that each examiner can access/consult the student's thesis. The Viva should normally take place within six weeks of the date of thesis submission. During this phase, the relevant Department assistants provide support with the flight/accommodation arrangement and booking for the External Examiner coming to the Institute.

5) *Pre-Viva* <u>Report Form</u>: the EPC shall make sure that each Examiner completes and submits – in confidence and independently from other parties – the Pre-Viva Report Forms via PGR Manager at least 5 working days before the Viva. These forms are aimed at preliminary assessing the submitted thesis. Upon receipt of the Pre-Viva Report Forms from all of the examiners, the examination panel Chair may share them in confidence across the examination panel. They should not be shared with the student, their supervisors, or the observer.

6) *Viva Voce*: the oral examination takes place on the set date and time. The viva voce examination can take place either <u>face-to-face</u>, with all of the participants in the same location, or, upon the student's consent/request, in a hybrid fashion (some participants online) or fully online (every participant engages online from separate locations). In these latter cases, the student must give signed consent to being examined by a panel where the external examiner(s) is/are participating by video conference or where each participant is engaging remotely.

7) *Post-Viva* Report Form: no later than 2 working days after the viva voce examination, and still via PGR Manager, the panel Chair must confirm that the Viva took place and sit down with the examiners to complete the exam report (*Post-Viva Report form*), which includes the recommendations/comments of the Panel and guidance to the student to amend the thesis, where applicable. Any feedback and guidance for the student needs to be added by the chair. Once the report is submitted, examiners (the Internal Examiner first, and then the External Examiner) should check the report and confirm if it is correct. If they notice any changes, they should return it to the chair and email the chair and other examiner(s). The chair should make the changes and then resubmit.

Once all examiners have confirmed it, the report goes to the *OU Research Degrees Team*, who will check the report and then forward it to the *Research Degrees Examination Result Approval Committee* for ratification. If the committee requires further information, the report will be returned to the chair to make changes. All examiners and the chair will receive an email confirming the result.

8) <u>Possible Outcomes – Corrections and Modifications</u>: Upon receipt of the decision from the *Research Degrees Examination Results Approval Committee*, the *OU Research Degrees Team* will send the examination outcome letter together with a copy of the *Examination Report Form* to the student, the supervisors, and the ARC RDC. Among others, where the outcome awarded is "subject to minor corrections", the student must complete and submit the corrected thesis within three months of the date of the examination outcome letter. Where the outcome of the original exam is "subject to substantial amendments", the student must complete and submit the corrected thesis within six months of the date of the examination outcome letter.

For further details concerning the *Viva-Voce* examination procedures and possible outcomes, please refer to the official *Research Degrees Regulations* (RD 17, RD 18, RD 19, RD 20).

STUDENT FEEDBACK

The PhD Management Team meets all the PhD students twice a year. At the first meeting (the so-called "Induction Meeting"), the ARC RDC illustrates the structure and the characteristics of the PhD Program, seeks ideas and suggestions from the students concerning the organization of specific internal courses, tries to meet some of their needs and answers any questions. The second meeting (usually called "Annual Final Meeting") is mainly intended to obtain the student's feedback on the quality of the individual training and to discuss any specific issues arisen during the first part of the year. On top of such collective meetings, the ARC RDC and the PhD Educational Office Administrator are also available for individual daily meetings.

Each year, every PhD student fills in an anonymous satisfaction questionnaire to express their opinion on scientific and administrative aspects of the OU PhD Course (i.e. the quality of the received supervision, the progress of their project, the support provided by the ARC RDC and the PhD Educational Office, the offered educational opportunities, and so on). A further questionnaire is to be completed by students who already discussed their thesis, and at the end of the PhD Course, the student must also fill in a form on their future job perspectives and career.

STUDENT COMPLAINTS

The main objective of the PhD School as an Affiliated Research Centre is to always opt for <u>amicable</u> and informal management and resolution of complaints and "disputes". This is why each student is highly encouraged to talk and discuss potentially and actually problematic issues (on both scientific and interpersonal levels) directly with the interested party (e.g. the Supervisor/s) as their first complaint management approach.

Another informal step of student complaint management lies in the role of the Third-Party Monitor (TPM). Upon the student's registration to the PhD course, the ARC RDC nominates a Third Party Monitor whose role comprises – even though it <u>is not limited to</u> – being a first "filter" for students' complaints/thoughts/considerations. For this reason, the ARC RDC selects the TPM among the broader scientific staff of the IRFMN (provided that they meet the standards set out by the OU Regulations) according not only to their scientific experience but also to their proven capacity to interact with people and young scientists since they need to provide the student with a communicative, practical, and general support/guidance throughout their PhD years. The Third-Party Monitor is an easily accessible, independent, and impartial person who must act in the student's best interests, irrespective of any professional or social relationship with either the student or the supervisors, and must be available for consultation by the student throughout the year. He/she should allow students to discuss issues in confidence unless it is agreed that further action is needed, should be responsible for monitoring any follow-up, or should involve the Affiliated Research Centre if difficulties arise that cannot easily be resolved.

If the above informal steps do not satisfactorily lead to a suitable resolution of the complaint, a simple and flexible procedure to file more formal internal student complaints has been devised. To activate an internal complaint procedure, the student submits an Internal Complaint Form (*Appendix 2* to the present PhD Program) to the ARC RDC (which is compulsory if the student subsequently intends to file a formal complaint to the Open University, UK). The ARC RDC and the Advisory Board members evaluate the complaint jointly. An answer is returned to the student within ten days from the receipt of the internal complaint.

If the matter cannot be settled internally, a formal complaint is filed by the student and communicated to the Open University according to the guidelines and specifications contained in the relevant section of the "Research Degrees Handbook" and on the OU website at the following link: https://help.open.ac.uk/how-to-make-a-complaint-or-appeal-public.

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STUDENT APPEALS

A student may make a request for the OU academic body charged with making decisions on admission, assessment, student progression or award to review a decision. Students may make such an appeal against a decision providing that they meet the criteria outlined in the Open University Student Complaints and Appeals Procedures.

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ARC Research Degree Coordinator of the PhD School
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APPENDIX 1

To comply with the guidelines contained in the Italian Legislative Decree, D.LGS. 231/2001, the prospective student must declare any previous working experience with the Istituto di Ricerche Farmacologiche Mario Negri. In addition, the prospective student must declare previous collaborations with any Italian Public Administrative Service or Agency. Finally, the prospective student must declare any possible conflict of interest due to family links or associations with members of the Istituto di Ricerche Farmacologiche Mario Negri.

Do you have any conflict of interest to declare?   /__/ **YES**   /__/ **NO**

In case your answer is **YES**, please specify:

....

....

According to Section 7 of the Legislative Decree No. 196/2003, you are allowed to exercise your rights as far as the shared data is concerned.

Date ....   Signature ....

APPENDIX 2

INTERNAL COMPLAINT FORM FOR THE PHD COURSE

Name of the student ....

Registration number   / / / / / / / / / /

Nature of the complaint *(Please describe briefly the reasons for your complaint)*
....
....
....

Date ....   Signature ....

This is an internal Complaint Form to be filled out by the student and submitted to the PhD Research Degree Coordinator. Submission of this document is compulsory if the student is planning to submit a formal complaint form to the Open University, UK. The document will be evaluated by the PhD Research Degree Coordinator, the Director of Studies and Third Party and an answer to the student will be given within ten days from the receipt of this form.