

Progression from remote taught programmes to Postgraduate Research: exploring motivations and barriers

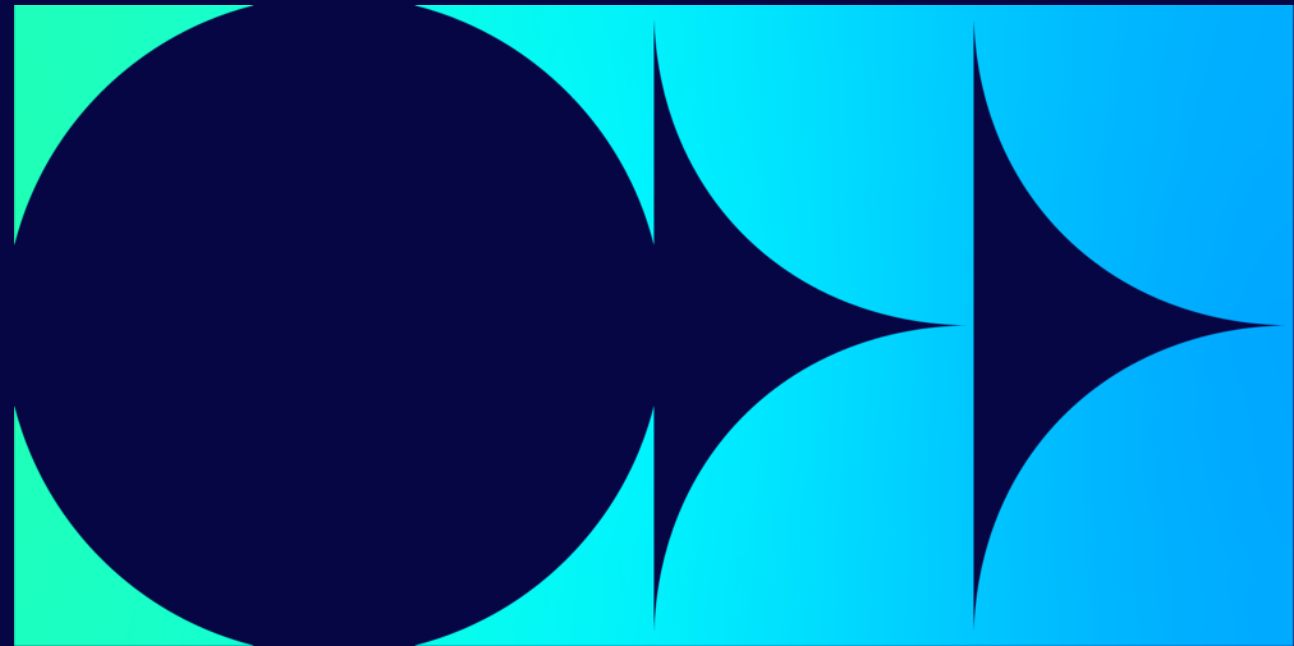
Widening Participation in Postgraduate Research Workshop

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eSTeEM
Centre for Scholarship and Innovation
Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths



Outline

- Project introduction
- Rates of progression
- Demographic data analysis
- Motivations for pursuing PGR
- Barriers to progression to PGR
- Project outcomes and next steps

Project introduction

Aim: Investigate the progression of OU students from undergraduate and taught postgraduate courses to postgraduate research and the reasons for pursuing or not pursuing this pathway.

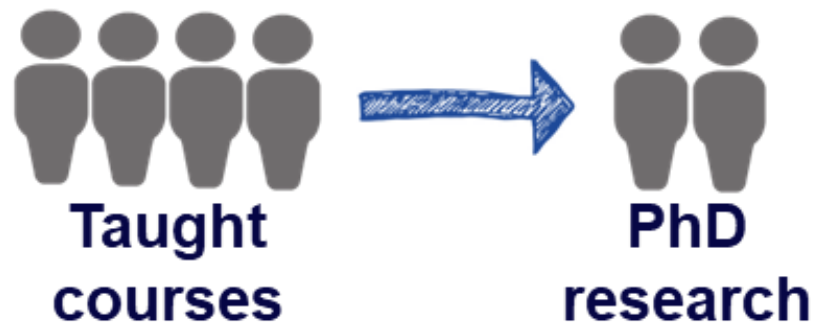
Background and rationale

- Low proportion of OU Postgraduate Research students (PGRs) who have previously completed a taught qualification with the OU.
- Improve understanding of current situation – is there a pathway?
- Widening access to postgraduate research by understanding barriers.

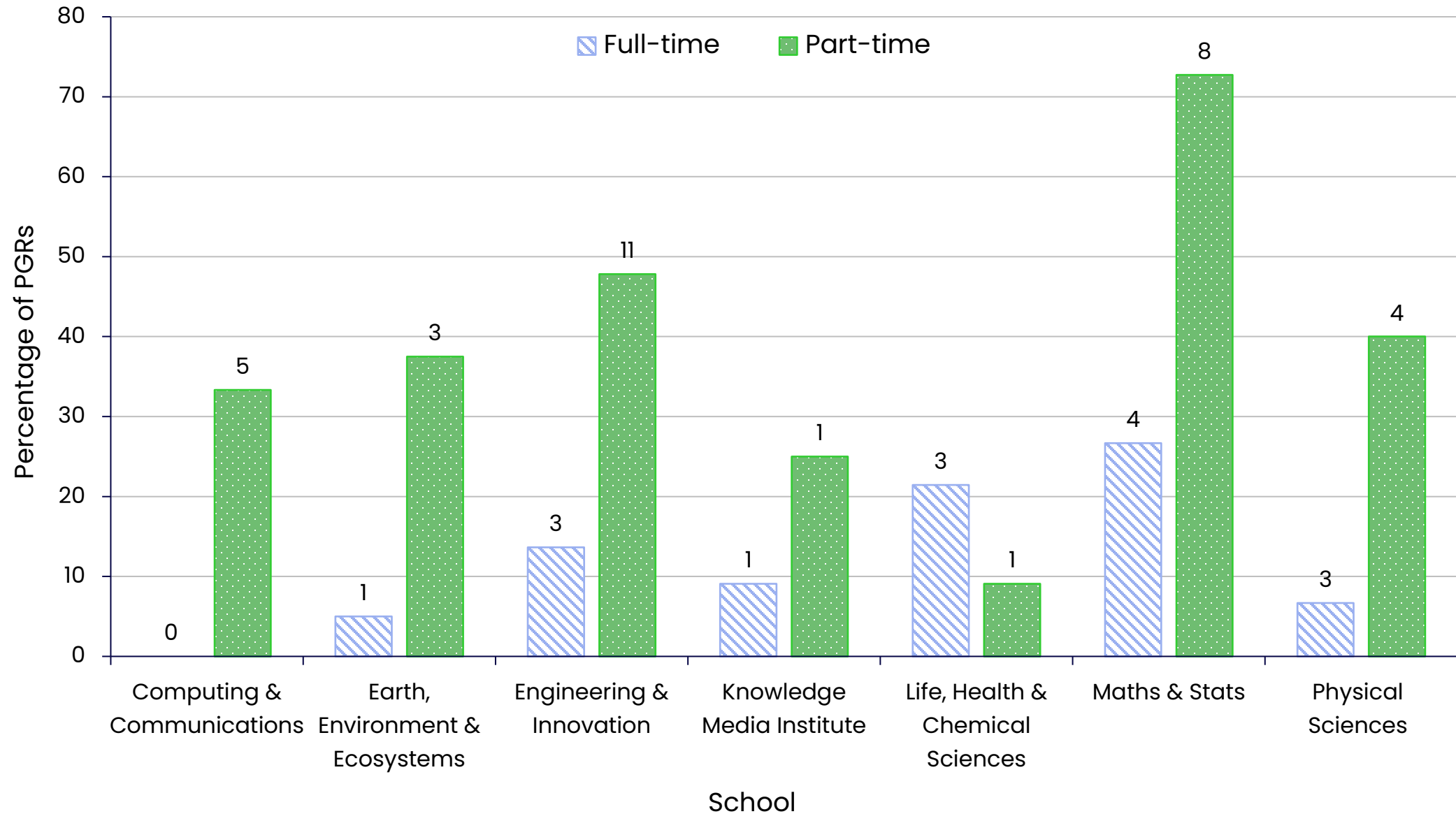
Rates of progression (quantitative)

Objective: Evaluate the current rate of progression from undergraduate and taught postgraduate courses to postgraduate research at the OU (full-time and part-time).

- Obtained data from across STEM Faculty to find out how many current PGRs have previously completed taught courses with the OU.
- Findings for each School (7 within STEM Faculty) and mode of study (part-time and full-time).
- 11% of full-time and 40% of part-time PGRs had completed taught qualifications with the OU.



Percentage of PGRs with OU taught qualifications



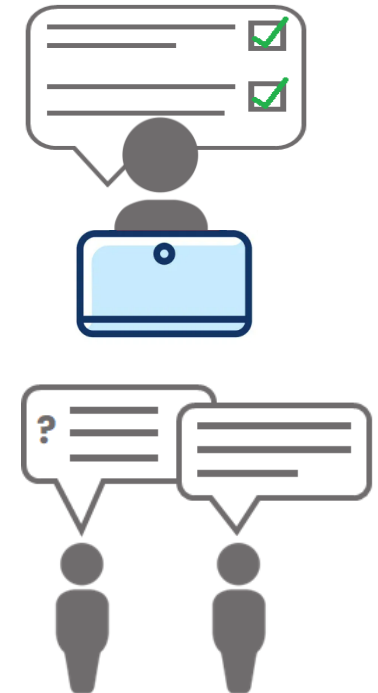
Demographic data analysis

- No significant variation by gender or ethnicity.
- Strong correlation between having studied at least one OU taught course and being a part-time PGR student, rather than full-time.
- PGR students with previous OU study significantly older than those without.
- Students who declared a disability were more likely to have previously studied an OU taught course.

Motivations for pursuing PGR

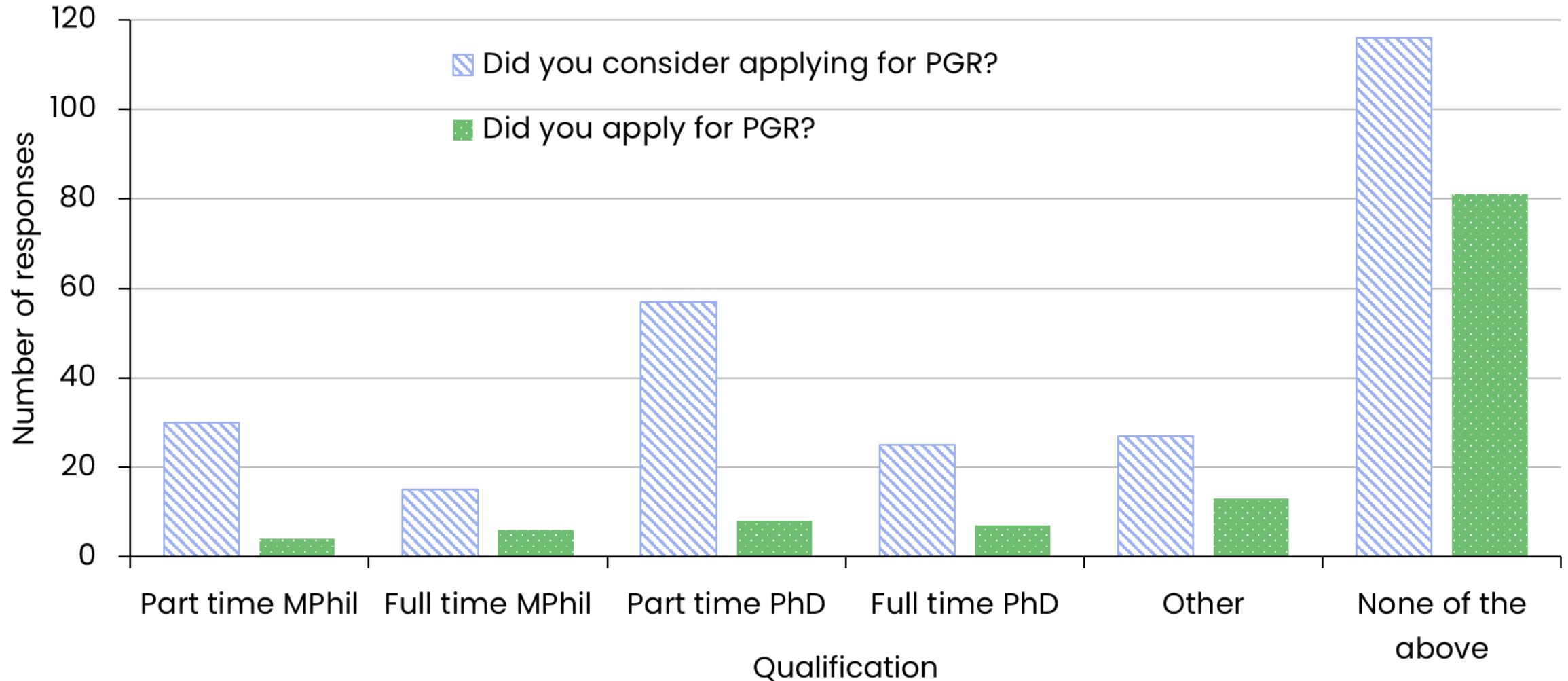
Objectives:

- Conduct student surveys and follow-up interviews to obtain information about student decisions relating to the pipeline to postgraduate research.
 - Conduct thematic analysis to identify the common themes and topics in responses to surveys and interviews about progression to postgraduate research.
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- Surveyed and interviewed **students studying/completed OU taught courses**
 - ↳ Awareness of PGR
 - ↳ Whether they considered/would consider PGR
 - ↳ How well taught qualification prepared them for PGR
 - ↳ Barriers in transitioning from taught study to PGR



Motivations for pursuing PGR

Comparison of students who considered applying for PGR at *any* university with students who did apply (graduates only).

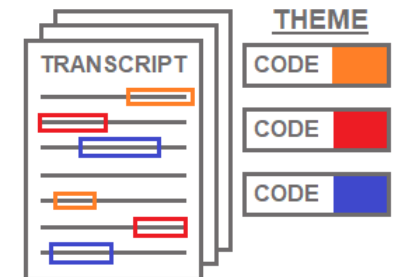
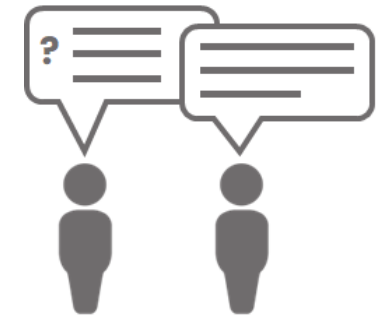


Student experiences – current PGRs

Objectives:

- Conduct student surveys and follow-up interviews to obtain information about student decisions relating to the pipeline to postgraduate research.
- Conduct thematic analysis to identify the common themes and topics in responses to surveys and interviews about progression to postgraduate research.

- Interviewed **current OU PGRs** who hold previous OU qualifications
 - ↳ Experiences of PGR
 - ↳ How well taught qualification prepared them for PGR
 - ↳ Barriers in transitioning from taught study to PGR



Barriers to progression to PGR

Cost and time



Cost – both in terms of finance and time taken away from other work



I have to work full time at the moment to support my household and family



Lack of flexible opportunities for those with caring responsibilities



Barriers to progression to PGR

Location and study mode



...it is necessary to be close enough to a university to study for a PhD.



Ability to reside, work and study at the country/state of research/study.



There should be more robust part-time options



Barriers to progression to PGR

Preparation and experience



Limited or no face to face opportunities to enhance the distance online learning



The lack of practical experience, e.g. laboratory experience



Barriers to progression to PGR

Confidence and support



I don't think I am good enough to undertake a research qualification. How do you even know?!



No contact was ever made about the options and how I could do this



Barriers to progression to PGR

Health/Mental health



Worries about my mental health.



Intensity of study with disability



Project outcomes and next steps

- Understanding of current pipeline to PGR for OU students on taught courses, including reasons for students' decisions and possible barriers
- Recommendations:
 - ↳ Develop networking or mentoring schemes
 - ↳ Introductory courses/sessions to outline what PGR involves
 - ↳ Investigate funding sources for part-time PGR opportunities.

Thank you

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