

STUDENT PROTECTION PLAN 2025-26

Provider's name: Oxford Centre for Mission Studies (Collaborative Partner of Middlesex University [MU])

Legal address: St. Philip & St. James Church, Woodstock Road, Oxford, OX2 6HR

Contact point for enquiries about this student protection plan: cducker@ocms.ac.uk

Frequency of review: Annual

1. An assessment of the range of risks to the continuation of study for your students, how those risks may differ based on your students' needs, characteristics and circumstances, and the likelihood that those risks will crystallise

OCMS is a faith-based academic charity with a global outlook. It currently has candidates from more than 30 different countries. In facilitating their research, OCMS remains focussed on enabling scholarship that reflects the candidates' specific contexts and cultures and yet contributes to wider scholarship. It aims to continue to achieve its mission through the important collaborative partnership with MU towards MPhil/PhD degrees, its non-degree postgraduate research and study through the Guided Research Programme (GRP) and International Mission Leadership Programme (IML).

In its university validated MPhil/PhD programme, OCMS operates within the regulatory frameworks prescribed by its collaborative partner and has a robust annual reporting mechanism covered through the Educational Monitoring and Enhancement Report (EMER). OCMS is also bound by the same stringent regulation and quality standards which are assessed both internally by OCMS and by MU's AQS annual and periodic reviews.

In pursuing its mission, OCMS strives to 'put students first'. Each student is supervised by a team of two supervisors: one/two internal and one/two external. Every student is assigned an OCMS-based Director of Studies. This ensures that if anything happens to one (or two) supervisors, the student is never left without support. This model highly reduces the risk of PGR candidates not completing as is evident from consistent completion rates at OCMS and a happier student body (as evident from PRES results). As OCMS is not entirely reliant on the in-house resources, PGR candidates registered with MU receive the most qualified supervision support possible for their topic.

OCMS currently has 13 internal faculty members and a support staff team who work collaboratively with an extensive dispersed community of external supervisors. In case of contingency, the supervisory teams can easily be maintained or adjusted without major disruptions or adverse impacts on the PGR candidates or colleagues in MU.

External academics from around the world join the supervisory teams of the OCMS-MU PGR candidates because of the cutting edge, socially relevant contextual themes they address in their research. The following examples should suffice:

- Professors Jo Westbrook and John Pryor (University of Sussex) supervised a West African candidate Sosthene Maletoungou: 'Schooling as a Field of Practice: exploring teacher pedagogy and student learning in private secondary classrooms in the Republic

of Guinea'. Sosthene is now the Africa Director for ACSI Global which engages with teachers, school administrators and church leaders in West Africa.

- Professor David Stephens (University of Brighton) supervised a South Sudan candidate, Elioba Lubari: 'The Role of Parents and Community in the Education of their Children in Episcopal Church schools in Yei County in the Context of a 'Post-Independent Conflict' South Sudan (2011-2022)'. Elioba is now the Managing Director, Education and Training Department, Episcopal Church of South Sudan.
- Professor Habtamu Wondimu (College of Education, Addis Ababa) supervised Wondimu Abebe's thesis on 'Curriculum for Ministerial Education: A Critical Appraisal of the Curriculum of Amharic Bible Schools of the Ethiopian Kale Heywet Church (EKHC)'. Wondimu now oversees 14 colleges and 175 theological schools in South Sudan.
- Professor Terry Ranger (University of Oxford) supervised Barbara Mahamba's thesis on 'The Roman Catholic Church and girls' and women's education in South-Western Zimbabwe, 1887-1965.' Barbara now teaches gender and education history at the University of Zimbabwe.
- Dr David Johnson, Reader in Comparative and International Education (University of Oxford) supervised the thesis of James Kepo on 'The Civil War and Education Continuity in Southern Sudan (1983-2005)'. The thesis was examined by Dr Niki Kindersley (Cardiff University) and Dr Naomi Pendle (University of Bath). He currently serves as the Principal of the Yei Teacher Training College in South Sudan.

This list continues but, as noted, OCMS has a large community of external supervisors like the ones mentioned above who work in partnership with OCMS faculty. This is partly what makes our joint programme so successful.

If some of OCMS's key staff/faculty leave the institution, the OCMS management and board are flexible enough to address gaps in the team quickly and efficiently. The Trustees of OCMS recognise their responsibility to identify, review and manage risks the charity may be exposed to and its Risk Register is constantly reviewed and updated. This has enabled OCMS to grow and expand its footprint across the world without interruptions for over 40 years.

In the unlikely scenario whereby OCMS needs to make drastic cuts necessitating the scaling down of its operations, the first step would be to close enrolments of new candidates in the OCMS Stage. Those already in the OCMS Stage would be given an opportunity to withdraw (see details in section 3 below). This would give OCMS the opportunity to focus on the PGR candidates registered with the university and plan appropriate internal arrangements for their teach-out.

As noted above, OCMS currently runs three separate programmes. Of these, the university validated programme remains its flagship. This is because OCMS began in 1983 as a research centre for research towards MPhil/PhD awards. This means that the validated MPhil/PhD programme will be the last to be adversely impacted. OCMS's chief priority will be to focus on enabling those in the programme to continue to make progress towards completion.

If it ever became necessary to make substantive reduction in the number of academic staff in its MPhil/PhD programme, OCMS would endeavour to maintain a skeletal team for managing external supervisions and other necessary functions concerned with PGR progressions; this is so the PGR candidates in the programme are supported for as long as it is institutionally possible for OCMS and prevent the programme from becoming a burden on the university.

In the very unlikely scenario whereby OCMS ceases to function, having taken the steps described above, OCMS would make sure all supervisory team details of the remaining PGR candidates are transferred to the University. Since many supervisors are external, they represent an hourly-paid body of academics who can continue to be used by the University to provide the remaining PGR candidates the opportunity to complete their programme. At all stages of such unlikely scenarios described above, OCMS would keep the PGR candidates and all stakeholders informed of developments.

2. The measures that you have put in place to mitigate those risks that you consider to be reasonably likely to crystallise

The risk that OCMS will no longer be able to deliver its joint MPhil/PhD programme is negligible because it has:

- a robust cash flow together with adequate reserves to cover unforeseen circumstances. Its accounts are independently audited; an assessment of its finances is made annually and reviewed by the auditors. The OCMS accounts can be scrutinised by the public on the Charity Commission website.
- a proactive council/board which is committed to supporting the continuity of programmes. This is reflected in the institutional Risk Register which is constantly reviewed by the Senior Management Team and assessed periodically (6-monthly) by the Board of OCMS.
- a strong team led by a Senior Management Team including the Executive Director, Chief Operating Officer, and the Academic Dean.
- a motivated and experienced team of faculty (FT/PT) and staff from diverse backgrounds, skills and expertise.
- a coherent practice of supporting MU-OCMS students through a carefully crafted structure of stages (Pre-university/MPhil to PhD Stages).
- an active student representation and requirements for student engagement in key programme matters such as Student Forums, Board of Studies (BOS) and the Programme Governance Board (PGB).
- a clear Complaints and Grievance Procedure that complies with MU regulations.
- a clear management and governance structure that meets good practice standards and ensures decision-making is evidence-based and transparent.

As the MPhil/PhD programme is jointly delivered in part-time mode with the PGR candidates living abroad, contingencies similar to Covid-19 could theoretically limit their physical access for their required 6-week annual residency to Oxford, where OCMS is located. This is mitigated through:

- A substantively renewed 12-18 month Postgraduate Research Development & Training (PGRD&T) which consists of the cohort based 5-week OCMS Programme for Research Induction (OPRI) and three periodic seminars leading to the development of the portfolio for the university registration. This can all be run entirely via Zoom (or similar) if physical attendance becomes impossible.
- Online submission of supervisory and candidates' reports (biannual), submissions of alternative residency plans etc.
- Possibility of online tutorials with supervisory team members.
- Access to the weekly seminars/lectures offered in hybrid mode.
- Annual Transfer Panel Intensive workshops (MPhil Stage) – available in hybrid mode.
- Annual Thesis Writing Workshops (PhD Stage) – available in hybrid mode.

- A refreshed Virtual Learning Environment that is fit for purpose.
- A librarian with the ability to help PGR candidates' access to digital resources.
- Provision of facilities for the in-person and online assessments of students starting with the admissions interviews, transfer, annual progression reviews and examination.
- Facility for supporting the completion of all actions involved in the appointment of supervisors, nomination of examiners, and final MU examinations both in-person and online.

The risk of changes to UK regulatory arrangements that affect overseas recruitment of PGR candidates is mitigated by our collaborative partner, MU's standing as a public university. However, even if the regulations restrict movements of students, its impact on students is likely not to be serious. This is because the majority of OCMS-MU PGR candidates are already in full employment and are therefore engaged in part-time research in their home countries; they are thus not in need of long-term student visas. Their primary sources are largely generated in their own local contexts and so whilst there is a brief annual residency requirement as agreed jointly with MU, students are able to access secondary resources locally or via the online MU and/or other platforms.

OCMS has already reduced the maximum intake of PGR candidates to 90 (all stages). This is intended to improve the quality of the programme as is already evident in large annual completions relative to the size of the student body. This is also a number that OCMS can easily manage in case of contingencies as described above.

3. Information about the policy you have in place to refund tuition fees and other relevant costs to your students and to provide compensation where necessary in the event that you are no longer able to preserve continuation of study

OCMS and its financial state is regularly assessed alongside academic quality by competent staff and a proactive board. As noted, the annual statement of accounts is audited independently and available publicly on the Charities Commission website. This means the financial health of OCMS is transparent to all stakeholders.

For all scholars who enrol in the OCMS Stage before the University registration, the normal principle of a 14-day money back guarantee will be in place and a refund will be issued only if:

- Students who intend to withdraw submit their request within the 14-day cooling off period.
- Students requesting a refund should not have accessed or started the course.
- The 14-day cooling off period begins when the students pay the fees before the start of OPRI.
- Once a student at this stage withdraws, their access to the programme will be removed and they will not be able to access any part of the course or take part in any tests.
- After the 14-day period, the PGR candidate will no longer be eligible to receive a refund.

4. Information about how you will communicate with students about your student protection plan

We publicise our Student Protection Plan in the following ways:

- On our website (<https://www.ocms.ac.uk/>) as an externally facing document.
- We will make clear reference to the Student Protection Plan in our terms and conditions, shared with applicants prior to them accepting their offer of a place of study.
- We will ensure the Student Protection Plan is made part of the enrolment process.
- We will share this information with all of the programme heads including the Admissions Tutor, Stage Leaders, Student Representative as part of their ongoing awareness.
- We will ensure this is clearly identifiable on the student facing webpages of our website.
- Student engagement is critical to the ongoing development of this plan. We will work with our Student Representative and through the Board of Studies/Programme Governance Board (which has both externality and student representation built into them) to:
 - keep things updated and all concerned informed of changes or cancellations as soon as this decision is made.
 - ensure that students are aware of the rights as stipulated in this plan.
 - ensure students have access to advice should they require support.