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Postdoctoral Researcher: RePOWER project

RePOWER: Investigating the barriers and pull factors facing students returning to postgraduate study in Mathematical, Physical and Life Sciences PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Central University Research Ethics Committee Reference: 2378995

1. Introductory paragraph

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask the researcher via email (edward.penn@conted.ox.ac.uk) if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether you wish to take part.

2. Why is this research being conducted?

Life and environmental sciences students who are returning to postgraduate research after a period away from academia (for instance for work or caring responsibilities) are underrepresented on UK Research and Innovation (UKRI)-funded programmes, and at the University of Oxford. As part of the Interdisciplinary Life and Environmental Science Landscape Award (ILESIA) the University of Oxford is conducting a research project called RePOWER which aims to better understand what motivates such students to return to postgraduate research, what barriers they might face, and how universities and funders could better support such students during the application process and whilst they are on course.

3. Why have I been invited to take part?

This project uses 'inclusion criteria' to identify its participants, which means that participants are selected specifically because of their identity or life circumstances. Only participants who meet these criteria are invited to take part in the research. You have been invited to take part in the research because you are an applicant to the ILESIA programme, and your age at the point you would start your course (25 or older) suggests you may have spent three or more years away from academia between your previous academic programme and starting your current course. (We are also inviting current students on the ILESIA programme, and its predecessor programmes, who returned to postgraduate study to take part in the research.) Potential participants who do not meet these criteria are 'excluded', meaning they will not be invited to take part.

4. Do I have to take part?

No. It is up to you to decide whether to take part. You can withdraw yourself from the research, without giving a reason, and with no consequences by doing so, by advising the researcher of this decision. The deadline by which you can withdraw any information you have contributed to the research is 30th June 2026. If you decide to withdraw, your personal data and the data you have contributed to the study will be permanently deleted immediately using file-shredding technology.

5. What will happen to me if I take part in the research?

If you choose to take part in the research, you will be asked to complete an online survey about your experiences in deciding to return to postgraduate study, the application process, and your thoughts about your likely experiences on-course. Some of the questions will ask about how your specific identity and personal circumstances (for instance, your professional history or any caring responsibilities) are shaping or might shape these experiences.

- You will be asked to read an online page explaining what you are consenting to, and indicate your consent by ticking a box indicating that you understand each aspect of the research and signing your name.
- The survey should take 20-25 minutes to complete.
- Some questions will be multiple-choice, while others will ask for free-text responses.
- The research project will run until 28th September 2026. However, once you have completed the survey your participation in the research will be complete unless you also opt to take part in an interview.
- You can opt to cease completion of the survey at any time, with no consequences. There is no time limit on how long you can take to complete the survey.

6. What are the possible disadvantages and risks in taking part?

There are no physical or financial risks to taking part in the research. It is possible that some participants might find discussing their journey to postgraduate research emotionally uncomfortable if it has been particularly challenging for them, or touches on issues of structural inequality. Choosing to take part in the research has no bearing on your application; your participation and any data you share through it will not be available to assessors, and your participation will have no effect, positive or negative, on the outcome of your application.

7. Are there any benefits in taking part?

While there are no immediate benefits for those people participating in the research, it is hoped that this research will lead to better understandings of the barriers facing students returning to postgraduate research, which will help in the development of better support systems being implemented at the University of Oxford and in the wider higher education sector. To reiterate, your participation will have no effect, positive or negative, on the outcome of your application.

8. What information will be collected and why is the collection of this information relevant for achieving the research objectives?

We will collect information about:

- How you are currently occupied (for instance, whether you are employed or fulfilling caring responsibilities)
- What has motivated you to return to academia to pursue postgraduate research
- Any barriers your status as a returning student is imposing upon you during the application process or that you foresee on-course
- What support or structural changes would be helpful to make accessing postgraduate research easier for returning students

- Whether you would be happy for us to contact you to take part in a more detailed research interview on the same topics. We will select a sub-group of participants to interview from the survey respondents to ensure representation of participants from different backgrounds in the interview data.

We will also collect the following demographic information about you. This is to help us understand if specific groups of returning students face specific barriers, and to help us select a broad sample of interviewees.

- Age bracket
- Sex and gender
- Ethnicity
- Socioeconomic background
- Disability status
- Parental and/or carer status
- Refugee status
- Care leaver status

The researcher will have access to the research data.

Identifiable data (including consent forms) will be stored as password-protected files on the ILESLA programme's SharePoint site, in a specific location which is protected by two-factor authentication. No local copies of data will be stored, and devices which have access to the data will not be left unlocked while unattended. Identifiable data will be stored . Project data will be stored on a secure SharePoint site until the end of the ILESLA programme on 30th September 2034, when it will be securely deleted using file-shredding technology.

9. Will the research be published? Could I be identified from any publications or other research outputs?

The findings from the research will be written up in the form of reports for internal use within the University of Oxford and the ILESLA programme, for external sharing with the wider higher education sector and UKRI, and peer-reviewed publications.

I would like your permission to use direct quotations, but without identifying you, in any research outputs.

It is not possible to be absolutely certain that you will not be identifiable in research outputs – for instance, because an anecdote you share is recognisable to other people you know. However, stringent precautions will be taken to ensure that any data which could identify you is either omitted or changed in any research outputs.

10. Data Protection

The University of Oxford is the data controller with respect to your personal data, and as such will determine how your personal data is used in the research. The University will process your personal data for the purpose of the research outlined above. Research is a task that is performed in the public interest. Further information about your rights with respect to your personal data is available from the University's Information Compliance website at <https://compliance.admin.ox.ac.uk/individual-rights>.

11. Who is funding the research?

The research is funded by the ILESIA partnership, which is in turn funded by the Natural Environment Research Council, part of UKRI.

12. Who has reviewed this research?

This research has received favourable opinion from a subcommittee of the University of Oxford Central University Research Ethics Committee. (Ethics reference: 2378995).

13. Who do I contact if I have a concern about the research or I wish to complain?

If you have a concern about any aspect of this research, please contact Dr Ed Penn (edward.penn@conted.ox.ac.uk), and we will do our best to answer your query. We will acknowledge your concern within 10 working days and give you an indication of how it will be dealt with. If you remain unhappy or wish to make a formal complaint, please contact

the University of Oxford Research Governance, Ethics & Assurance (RGEA) team at rgea.complaints@admin.ox.ac.uk or on +44 (0)1865 616480.

14. Further Information and Contact Details

If you would like to discuss the research with someone beforehand (or if you have questions afterwards), please contact:

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