

Faculty of Earth & Life Sciences

Postgraduate Research Student Handbook

2019-2020

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1. Introduction

Welcome to the Faculty of Earth and Life Sciences. The Faculty consists of three departments: Biological, Environmental and Rural Sciences (often referred to as IBERS), Geography and Earth Sciences and Psychology.

This handbook introduces Postgraduate Research at Aberystwyth University, and the support provided within the Faculty.

Successful completion of your research training will be dependent on a range of skills that you will develop through the course of your studies:

- ability to develop a close working rapport with your supervisor(s) and other staff members
- developing experimental design procedures
- writing concise and relevant literature reviews
- collating results and interpreting data
- honing presentation and written communication ability

Your relationship with your supervisory team will help you to acquire new knowledge, insight, develop your technical and research skills, and build your capacity and confidence to establish valuable academic networks. Whilst the academic mentoring procedures and your day to day experiences will provide you with the vast majority of skills required for a successful career in science and beyond, there are a number of modules and workshops available through the Graduate School that offer wider skills training. The Aberystwyth Graduate School modules will provide you with a platform of essential transferable skills that will assist you in your postgraduate research studies and subsequent career. For a PhD you are required to complete 40 credits worth of Graduate School modules during years 1 and 2, for an MPhil 10 credits during your 1 year course.

The choice of modules taken is mostly free, decided in consultation with your supervisors.

IBERS recommends PGM2810 (Skills in Bioinformatics for Biologists) and PGM1520/PGM2310 (*Research Skills and Personal Development for Scientists*)

DGES: Students to discuss with Graduate School stipulations as per required credits for PhD arts and PhD sciences.

PSYCH: Students to discuss with Graduate School stipulations as per required credits for PhD arts and PhD sciences.

We want you to enjoy your time with us, to take full advantage of the considerable professional and personal opportunities that are available, and to develop into a valued member of the Aberystwyth postgraduate community. At the same time, completion of your research and of the written thesis itself will require you to develop and display considerable levels of dedication and commitment to your studies; these are the universal qualities of successful academics of all disciplines, and will subsequently leave you well-placed to pursue a successful career.

The main aim of this handbook is to provide you with general information about the Faculty of Earth and Life Sciences and to introduce you to the Faculties Research Postgraduate Monitoring Scheme. There is also some useful information on support structures within the Faculty and at Aberystwyth University and some advice on how to conduct your research and thesis write-up.

Whilst every effort has been made to ensure the information contained in this handbook is up-to date, changes in University and Faculty procedures do occasionally occur. If you have any questions or comments about this handbook, please speak to or e-mail the FELS Postgraduate Administrator, Michelle Allen (felspgr@aber.ac.uk, extension 2315).

The handbooks, and other useful materials, are available as pdf versions via the Graduate School at <http://www.aber.ac.uk/en/grad-school/docs-handbooks/>

Other useful information for PGR students can be found on the Academic Registry site at <https://www.aber.ac.uk/en/aqro/students/pg-issues/research/>

Students are also reminded that the Rules and Regulations of the University apply at all times including term and vacation: <https://www.aber.ac.uk/en/aqro/handbook/regulations/>

We wish you every success with your research postgraduate studies in the Faculty of Earth and Life Sciences.

Faculty of Earth & Life Sciences – key staff



Pro Vice-Chancellor for the Faculty of Earth and Life Sciences

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Head of Postgraduate Research, Geography and Earth Sciences (Earth Science)

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Faculty Registrar

[Dr Rebecca Edwards flstaff@aber.ac.uk](mailto:flstaff@aber.ac.uk) +44 (0) 1970 621651



FELS Postgraduate Administrator

[Mrs Michelle Allen felspgr@Aber.ac.uk](mailto:felspgr@Aber.ac.uk) 44 (0) 1970 622315

FELS Research Groups by Department

Geography and Earth Science: <https://www.aber.ac.uk/en/dges/research/>

Biology, Environmental and Rural Science: <https://www.aber.ac.uk/en/ibers/research-and-enterprise/research/research-groups/>

Psychology: <https://www.aber.ac.uk/en/psychology/research/>

2. Responsibilities of Postgraduate Research Students

An important part of your development as a professional researcher is to take individual responsibility for your research outputs, your working practices and your conduct – **we expect you to take responsibility, jointly with your supervisors, for monitoring of your progress, attendance and meeting deadlines.**

For AU Regulations for the degree of PhD see:

<http://www.aber.ac.uk/en/regulations/contents/phd/>,

and for MPhil see: <http://www.aber.ac.uk/en/regulations/contents/masters-phil/>

Whilst there are no prescriptive working hours for research postgraduates, there is an expectation that full time students will usually be researching for 37 hours per week over at least 44 weeks per year. **Unavoidable absence** from the Institute for more than a week must be notified in writing to your supervisors and to [FELS Postgraduate Administrator](#). Medical certificates are required after an absence of seven days or more. **Notification of absence away from Aberystwyth is particularly important for Overseas students (Tier 4 visa), to stay within regulations for UKBA visas, and for students in receipt of a research council or other external grant, as we may be asked to provide evidence covering periods of absence by your sponsor.**

Research Seminars in FELS

Each department holds research lectures and seminars throughout the year, advertised via email. This programme includes both internal and external international speakers. Research postgraduate students are expected to give at least two seminars on their own work as part of the seminar series. **ALL Postgraduate students are expected to attend department research seminars.**

Demonstrating to Undergraduate Practical Classes

There are opportunities for PGR students to demonstrate to undergraduate practical classes. This gives postgraduates experience in practical instruction and the design and management of practical classes, while at the same time making a valuable contribution to teaching. Before the start of each session, postgraduate students are invited to take part and to indicate in which undergraduate modules they would be prepared to demonstrate. Participation is, of course, dependent on approval from the student's supervisor. Details of the responsibilities of IBERS demonstrators and the rates of pay are given at the Demonstrators' Workshop to be held during the University Postgraduate Induction Programme at the start of the academic year. **Postgraduates wishing to demonstrate must have attended the training workshop beforehand.** Demonstrating responsibilities for DGES modules will be communicated via DGES Directors of Postgraduate Studies.

Reporting / Assessment

If you are asked to produce any formal reports or assessment these should be submitted as WORD documents. You have access to the University computer system to allow you to produce good quality

documents. Assignments will invariably carry deadlines. It is important from a professional point of view that you learn to meet deadlines. If you feel there is a legitimate reason for late submission you may be allowed an extension to the deadline. Initial enquiries about deadlines should be made to the [FELS Postgraduate administrator](#).

Safety Regulations

Safety Regulations must be complied with at all times. You must complete all necessary risk assessments, training and Health and Safety measures before beginning any practical or field work. You should discuss and agree appropriate measures with your supervisory team. You may also ask for advice from the following:

- Aberystwyth Health, Safety and Environment Team
- IBERS Health and Safety Officer: [Jane Richards](#)
- Psychology Health and Safety Officer: [Matt Wilby](#)
- DGES Health and Safety Officer: [Elaine Lowe](#)

Supporting you

If you are having problems keeping up with your studies, for any reason, it is important to talk to your research supervisor(s) **at the earliest opportunity**. If you prefer, you may choose to talk with the Postgraduate Coordinator for your department (listed above) or the FELS Postgraduate Administrator. Alternatively you can speak with [Student Support](#) or Student Union Advisor, [Angela Terry union.advice@aber.ac.uk](mailto:Angela.Terry@aber.ac.uk)

Accessibility

In FELS we are committed to making new or revised teaching materials produced in-house compliant with Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) Accessibility Regulations 2018. Some materials originate outside AU and are beyond our control. Material that predates the change in legislation will be checked for accessibility on revision. If you are experiencing accessibility problems with any learning materials or assessments please contact disability@aber.ac.uk in the first instance.

Department Postgraduate Research Committee

The Postgraduate Research Committee is there to provide advice, guidance and monitoring of your progress through your studies.

Photographic And Imaging Facility

Students need to contact the Design Studio. Please consult your Supervisors prior to making formal requests for work.

Conferences and Travel

Research students as part of their training are expected to attend and present at conferences relevant to their research interests. Some award-supported students may be able to claim expenses from their

grant-awarding body. In addition many conference organisers have funds specifically designated to support less experienced scientists. Please check with your supervisor well in advance of the conference date to discuss the procedure for funding applications.

Postgraduate Student-Staff Consultancy Committee

Liaison between staff and research students is important and encouraged. In addition to the lines of communication already outlined, the Postgraduate Student-Staff Consultancy Committee in each department provides a medium through which students may express constructive criticism of research postgraduate degree courses, research and related matters. It is composed of staff and elected members of the research postgraduate cohort. Items for discussion should be brought to the attention of the Chairperson of the committee via the [FELS Postgraduate Administrator](#).

3. University Research Monitoring

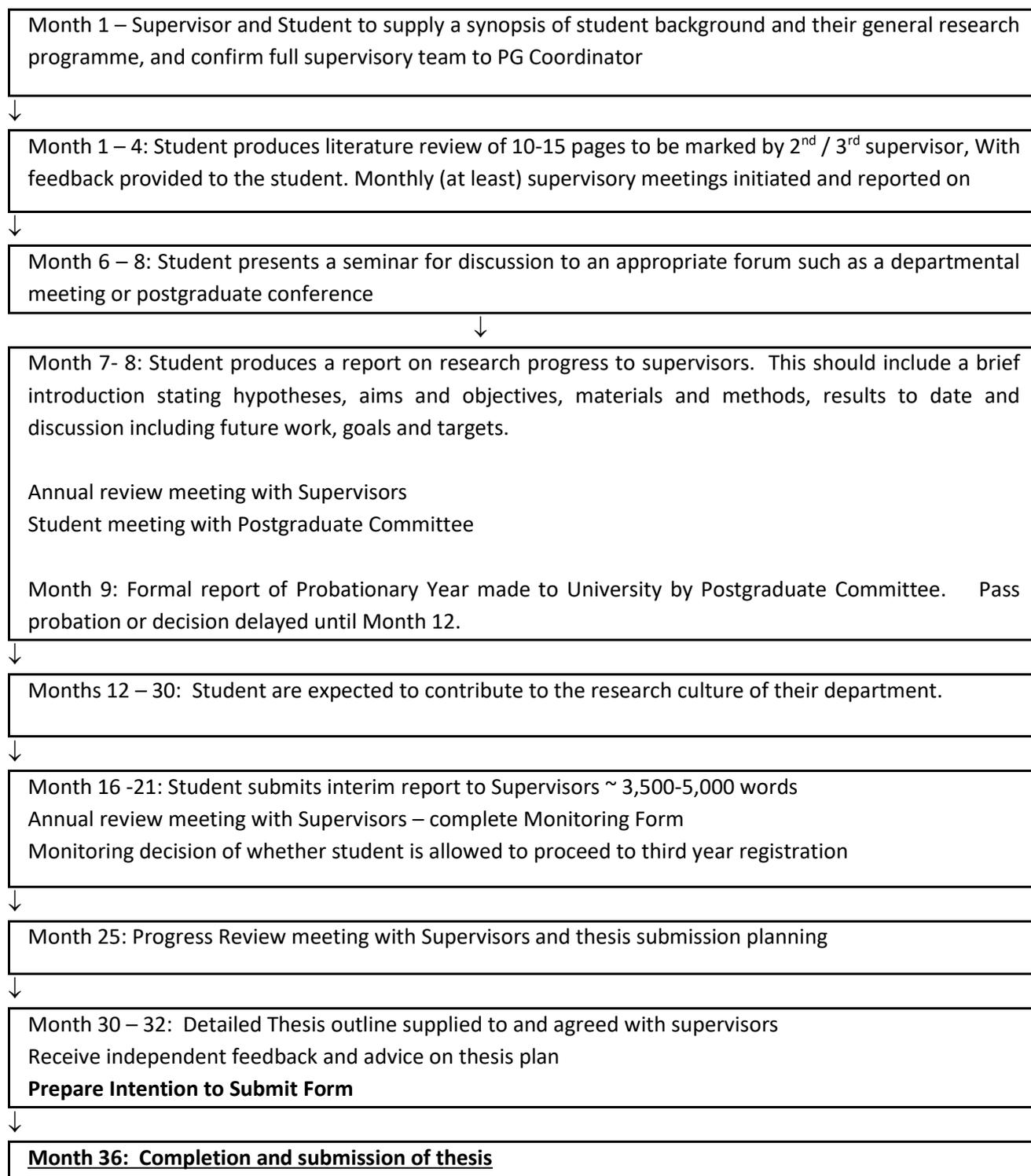
Monitoring Progress

Full detail can be found on the Aber Graduate School webpages. The University will ensure that the progress of every research student is monitored at appropriate stages and as a minimum requirement at the end of each year of a student's registration. The monitoring process will be based on a system of reports, by both the student and supervisors, to be considered by the relevant department and the Research Monitoring Committee. Monitoring includes assessment against an action plan agreed at the previous monitoring meeting.

In addition, students will usually submit **a signed summary of the outcome of monthly target setting meetings between supervisors and students**. The summary is completed on a form provided by and returned (for annual monitoring) to postgraduate administrator for FELS (felspgr@aber.ac.uk)

Key Timelines For Research Postgraduate Monitoring Scheme

The guide below is intended only to give new PhD student a broad understanding of typical PGR progress. Each research project and PhD is unique, and therefore you should discuss appropriate progress rates with your supervisory team.



Guidelines For Thesis Presentation

For AU Regulations for the Degree of PhD see <http://www.aber.ac.uk/en/regulations/contents/phd/>, and for MPhil see <http://www.aber.ac.uk/en/regulations/contents/masters-phil/>

Generic Thesis Structure

Based on a scheme devised by Dr Rowena Murray, University of Strathclyde.

NB AU now allows submission for a PhD by alternative (published material) formats – see <http://www.aber.ac.uk/en/student/pg-issues/research/alternateformatphdthesisinformation/>

This generic structure provides a useful framework for thesis writing. It provides the basis whereby students can adapt a structure to suit an individual project. For example the results section can be subdivided into chapters or divisions. Where the thesis comprises a number of areas that uses essentially non-overlapping methodology the thesis may be divided into a general introduction, chapters each containing a brief introductory statement of aim, materials and methods, results and discussion. The thesis is then made coherent by a final general discussion chapter. Some information may be appropriately placed in Appendices for instance detailed methods of data analysis. Care should be taken in the use of appendices to ensure that critical results are not omitted from the main body of the text.

Specific items within a thesis

Although individual theses vary there are certain elements that are essential and others that are commonly adopted.

Abstract

This should contain a concise statement of the goals and outcomes of the study.

Table of Contents

This should be designed to help the reader locate a particular section quickly. A hierarchical structure of chapter headings and sub-headings within each chapter is useful.

List of Figures and or Tables

A list of displayed items including title and page number is a helpful addition to future readers of the thesis.

List of Abbreviations

Any abbreviations that you use should be defined in a list at the front of the thesis. International committees often provide unambiguous abbreviations that form part of an international shorthand, non-standard abbreviations should be used sparingly and only if they save substantial space.

Acknowledgements

It is customary to include acknowledgements and some students may also opt to write a short dedication.

References

A poorly constructed reference list gives a bad impression and implies carelessness. The majority of examiners check the list for accuracy and ensure that citations in the text are included in the reference list and vice versa.

The most common scheme adopted for referencing is the '[Harvard System](#)'. An alternative is to use a numbering scheme where citations are given a unique number, usually in square brackets. References should be numbered in the order in which they appear in the text. However, some caution is required and many believe that this system has little to commend it. Although good bibliographic software packages are available, mistakes are often made when adding further citations and in re-numbering successive ones. In addition numbers give no information at all about the work.

Whichever bibliographic presentation is used the format should be consistent throughout.

Where appropriate a list or collation of publications where the candidate is the author/co-author should be included.

Thesis Writing Style

You will have the opportunity to attend a brief training session on thesis writing style where the relative merits of structured writing and free writing will be discussed. You may find the handouts on writing style and punctuation of help in getting started.

Statistical Analyses

You should discuss the appropriate way to present statistics and other data with your supervisory team to ensure that you are working within departmental and discipline norms.

Appendix

If it is necessary to include large amounts of original numerical data or details of a computer program these are often best included as an Appendix (plural Appendices).

4. Health and Safety Information

Emergency Procedures

Fire

If you hear the fire alarm, leave the building (do not use lifts) and proceed to the nearest assembly point. Do not re-enter the building until instructions are given by the Institute Fire Marshalls that it is safe to do so.

If you discover a fire set off the fire alarms at the nearest “fire alarm call point” and leave the building as explained above.

First Aid

There are two ways of getting first aid when required:-

- Call AU Security Office at 222 (24 hours) on internal phones.
- Call the relevant reception for your campus
 - Penglais: 0 (normal working hours)
 - Gogerddan: 01970 823000 (normal working hours.)

Medical Questionnaire

First year students will be issued with a medical questionnaire in their first meeting with their supervisor. This should be completed and returned to the FELS PG Administrator during the first week of term to ensure that staff can be made aware of underlying health problems that may impact on your participation in activities that form part of your course. If there are any changes to your health during your time in Aberystwyth please update your online record.

HSE Practice

There can be a risk of injury or illness from a number of hazards associated with aspects of academic life on and off the campus. Some of the higher risks are associated with laboratory work, field trials, work experience, farming activities and road safety. Potential risks can be controlled through the risk assessment process. Further information is given below and on the [Aber Uni HSE webpages](#). Any other queries should be taken to your supervisor or the department H&S contact.

DGES: Elaine Lowe (ell@Aber.ac.uk; ext. 2631)

IBERS: Rob Darby (rmd@aber.ac.uk, ext. 2311)

Psychology: Matt Wilby (mlw11@aber.ac.uk, ext. 2940)

Risk assessment

A “hazard” is anything that may cause harm, such as chemicals, electricity, vehicles, slippery floors etc. “Risk” is the chance, high or low, that somebody could be harmed by these and other hazards, together with an indication of the potential seriousness of the harm.

A risk assessment is not about creating huge amounts of paper work, but rather about identifying sensible measures to control the risks in a workplace or place of study.

How to assess the risks in your workplace

- Identify the hazards
- Decide who might be harmed and how
- Evaluate the risks and decide on precautions
- Record your significant findings
- Review your assessment and update if necessary

The Health & Safety Executive's pragmatic view of risk management is:

“Risk management is about taking practical steps to protect people from real harm and suffering - not bureaucratic back covering”

Taking a sensible approach to risk management is about:

- ensuring that workers and the public are properly protected
- enabling innovation and learning not stifling them
- ensuring that those who create risks manage them responsibly which is likely to lead to robust action
- providing overall benefit to society by balancing benefits and risks, with a focus on reducing significant risks - both those which arise more often and those with serious consequences
- enabling individuals to understand that as well as the right to protection, they also have to exercise responsibility

It is not about:

- scaring people by exaggerating or publicising trivial risks
- stopping important recreational and learning activities for individuals where the risks are managed
- creating a totally risk-free society
- generating useless paperwork mountains

COSHH Assessments

A COSHH assessment concentrates on the hazards and risks from hazardous substances in your workplace. Hazardous substances which may pose health risks are not restricted to chemicals. They also include products containing chemicals, fumes, dusts, vapours, mists, nanotechnology, gases and asphyxiating gases, biological agents and germs e.g. Zoonoses are diseases that can be transmitted from animals to humans.

A Safety Data Sheet (SDS) and a Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) risk assessment on chemical and biological materials will be available from a member of staff. The SDS for each chemical contains information relating to its properties, stability, reactivity and toxicology, handling, storage and transportation and measures relating to First Aid, firefighting and accidental release. While a SDS identifies particular aspects of a chemical or substance, COSHH Assessments are task related assessments and assist in the identification of hazards associated with how you are using a substance, such as quantity, transportation etc.

Laboratory Work

A member of the academic or technical staff will make you familiar with Safe Laboratory Practice, carrying out specific scientific techniques, handling, storing, dispensing and safe disposal of chemical and biological materials.

You will be advised on what protective clothing and footwear is appropriate in a laboratory setting. Eating and drinking are forbidden in all laboratories.

Academic and technical staff will advise on safe working practice associated with particular experimental practices, use of specialist equipment, hazardous waste disposal and recycling. Damaged and faulty equipment should also be reported to the laboratory staff.

In particular you must not carry out work involving animals, GMOs (genetically modified organisms), pathogens or ionising and non-ionising radiation (laser related) without consulting your supervisor.

Access and keys: if you need to work outside of “normal office hours” (8am-6pm) you will need to complete a risk assessment of the work you are doing which includes lone working, and then contact the relevant department contact to arrange card access to buildings out of hours and keys/fobs for particular room access (including offices).

DGES: Elaine Lowe (ell@Aber.ac.uk; ext. 2631)

IBERS: Rob Darby (rmd@aber.ac.uk, ext. 2311)

Psychology: Matt Wilby (mlw11@aber.ac.uk, ext. 2940)

Fieldwork and Work Experience

Students taking part in field work, work in plots or greenhouses and work experience will be required to assist staff in conducting a risk assessment relevant to their activities and adhering to particular measures designed to reduce significant risks. Potential hazards may be associated with samples, crops, animals, equipment, machinery and specific scientific or commercial activities.

Road Safety & Travel

Please take particular care when moving around the University Campus whether driving, cycling or on foot at any time of the day or night. If you are proposing to drive a University vehicle, a member of staff will inform you of the relevant rules and insurance restrictions associated with this activity.

Incident Reporting

All incidents, whether accidents, ill health, near misses, damage to equipment, property or vehicles should be reported immediately. Near misses are just as important as accidents as the cause and the actions put in place to prevent reoccurrence will be the same as if an accident had occurred. Incident forms are available via the University webpages: <https://www.aber.ac.uk/en/hse/proc-prac/incident-reporting/>

Health and safety responsibilities for students are set out in sections 2.12 and 2.20 of the AU Health Safety Policy. This can be accessed on the University Health and Safety Environment web site: <http://www.aber.ac.uk/en/hse/>

5. Appeals, Complaints And Unfair Practice

Academic Appeals: <https://www.aber.ac.uk/en/academic-registry/handbook/appeals/>

Complaints: <https://www.aber.ac.uk/en/academic-registry/handbook/complaints/>

Regulations around Unacceptable Academic Practice: <https://www.aber.ac.uk/en/academic-registry/handbook/regulations/uap/>

6. Useful Facilities

[National Library of Wales](#): this Copyright library is located next to Penglais Campus. You may apply for a Reader's Ticket and access the archives, collections, books and other resources.

University Libraries: <https://www.aber.ac.uk/en/is/library-services/>

Subject librarians: <https://libguides.aber.ac.uk/c.php?g=660416>

IT Support and Services: <https://www.aber.ac.uk/en/is/it-services/>

Online journals and other e-resources: <https://www.aber.ac.uk/en/is/library-services/electinfo/index.html>

The [Careers Service](#) is open to all students, and can offer help and advice on making job applications, interviews, developing skills and confidence, and matching your skills to graduate level jobs.

[Student Learning Support](#) offers free postgraduate courses on writing and information skills, and employs a [Royal Literary Fund Writing Fellow](#) who offers individual support to all students.

[The International English Centre](#) provides English language and academic skills tuition for students of AU. Professionally experienced staff work in co-operation with academic departments to help students achieve their full potential. During the academic year a range of seminars and workshops focusing on key language and skills issues is offered free to students. Special seminars are available for postgraduate students to improve their writing style or to organise information effectively for dissertations or theses, or to improve their presentation skills. Students may contact the centre to request an individual consultation.

7. Student Support And Welfare Services

Student Support

The [Student Welcome Centre](#) houses the Advice, Information and Money Service; the Wellbeing Service and the Accessibility Service and is your one-stop shop for advice and information on a range of support.

Our Welcome Desk is your first port of call for general enquiries about these services and the desk is open Monday to Thursday, 9am–5pm and Friday, 9am–4pm.

Further information can be found here: <https://www.aber.ac.uk/en/student-support/>

Equality and Diversity

Aberystwyth University are committed to developing and promoting equality and diversity in all our practices and activities. We aim to work, study and provide an inclusive culture, free from discrimination and upholding the values of respect, dignity and courtesy. Every person has the right to be treated in accordance with these values.

We are committed to advancing equality on the grounds of age, disability, sex and sexual orientation, gender identity, race, religion and belief (including lack of belief), marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, and to embrace intersectionality and raise awareness between and across different groups.

Our Strategic Equality Plan 2016-2020 promotes equality and equality improvements across the University as required under the Equality Act 2010. Progress Reports measured against this plan will be available in our annual monitoring reports.

Our current Strategic Equality Plan (and accompanying Strategic Action Plan) can be found on the Plans section of the Equality web pages: <https://www.aber.ac.uk/en/equality/>

Should you have any questions please send an email to egustaff@aber.ac.uk.

The International Office

The International Office offers a comprehensive range of services to international students from organising welcome events to specialised immigration advice. Further information is available from our international pages <https://www.aber.ac.uk/en/international/>.

Faith Provision

Multi-faith and prayer room spaces

There are faith spaces available for prayer on the Penglais and Llanbadarn Campuses. The Penglais Campus prayer room is situated in the Faith Centre, Arts Centre. The Llanbadarn Campus prayer room is above the Blas Padarn cafeteria, room number 1.01.

Halal provision

Our catered establishments offer a selection of hot and cold dishes that are suitable for a Halal diet. All food is clearly marked for ease of identification.

University Accommodation Help

If you have any problems in your room or flat, e.g. you are locked out, are unwell, need a repair or have a problem with a neighbour, we have staff on hand 24 hours a day to help. All Residences are served by the Residences Team, and you can also contact our friendly porters out of office hours. For more information please refer to the following webpages: <https://www.aber.ac.uk/en/accommodation/living-residences/help/>