

Applicant Guidelines for MSc by Research Options for UCLan Astronomy DL Graduates.

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INTRODUCTION

As increasing numbers of our Distance Learning (DL) Astronomy BSc cohort graduate they are sometimes looking for further study. This is possible if the student has achieved a high grade in their undergraduate degree and if a suitable supervisor can be found within the JHI, who is willing to consider supervising a DL MSc by research. For students outside the UK (known as off-campus students), there are additional policies and checks. This document describes some initial considerations for potential applicants, about how this recruitment can work effectively.

SUGGESTED REQUIREMENTS FOR ELIGIBILITY

The challenges of carrying out a DL research MSc can exceed those of an on-campus MSc, both for the student and the supervisory team involved. Issues of communication, lack of a peer group, computer management and software support, together with potentially unclear expectations on both sides are just some of the possible pitfalls for a DL postgraduate researcher, as compared to someone working on-campus. With these issues in mind, if a graduate student (UCLan Astronomy DL graduate) is interested in doing an MSc by Research with UCLan, the following conditions are recommended, with reasoning:

- A **maximum** of up to 2 DL MSc by research students (part-time) starting per year is recommended, within the JHI, from our Astronomy DL BSc graduated cohort. This is subject to availability of appropriate supervisors and candidate suitability, competitively selected.
- Should hold at least a **First Class Honours BSc** or higher, achieved in the Astronomy DL BSc. *This level will help to ensure the student's ability to undertake self-motivated study at a distance from their supervisory team, at the level required for postgraduate MSc research.*
- At least **74% grade point average for the dissertation** or project was achieved (equivalent to at least a low First Class Honours grade on the UCLan grade band scale). This shows evidence of required skills (e.g. ability to: critically review research literature; write a coherent report; discuss and answer questions about their work effectively; work effectively and productively with a supervisor; meet deadlines; have proven exceptional communication skills).
- The student undertakes to **manage and maintain their own computer systems**, including all required software installations, upgrades and data handling capacity. In the JHI we do not have enough people power to support remote hardware for students (this is also true for our Astronomy DL undergraduate students, who are generally expected to solve their own computer issues).

- The DL MSc student is fully **self-funded**, plus **part-time** and hence is responsible for all their costs associated with the MSc (including fees, travel, computing etc.). Note that UK residents can apply for a PG loan (students can look at: <https://www.gov.uk/masters-loan>).
- Availability of a **suitable supervisor** (given the areas of interest of both staff and students). The director of studies (DoS) supervisor should be experienced (as per UCLan requirements).
- If the DL student is based in the UK, then the **second supervisor** can be based at UCLan. However, if the student is based abroad, then the second supervisor must be local to the student (e.g. in the nearest city) and it is the responsibility of the DoS to find, and maintain contact with, such a local supervisor.
- A **third supervisor** based at UCLan is recommended for off-campus students. Named collaborators are possible.
- The student may be involved with collaborations, conferences, observing and other research related activities. A self-funded student is expected to fund all such **travel and insurance** and to take all reasonable precautions and notification to UCLan staff of their location and travel plans.
- The usual **UCLan procedures** and timescales will apply to (normally part-time) DL MSc students as they do to on-campus research MSc students (e.g. application, interview, registration, completion of compulsory introduction courses; Research Programme Approval, associated programme of research activities, yearly presentations, thesis deadline, viva).
- If accepted onto a DL MSc by research, the student is expected to **carry out the research, in collaboration** with the supervisory team and collaborators. They are encouraged, as a team, to publish any original results from their work in relevant high impact research journals.
- **Attendance visits** to the main UCLan campus should be worked out with the supervisory team before a formal offer is given to a candidate student. This will include a mandatory UCLan induction week on-campus, for all new postgraduates, annual assessment visits, plus any additional visits thought necessary by the supervisory team.

The above recommendations may evolve as the JHI gains experience of supervising such DL MSc research students. Most recommendations are aimed at working within UCLan regulations and within the resources available among the JHI staff cohort. Information from this document may be made available on the JHI web pages and [studyastronomy.com](http://www.studyastronomy.com) web site.

USEFUL DOCUMENTS AND LINKS

UCLan research degrees information, see links from:
<https://www.uclan.ac.uk/postgraduate-research>

JHI web pages: <http://www.star.uclan.ac.uk/>

Undergraduate Astronomy DL website is at: www.studyastronomy.com

