

Open University Student Accessibility Policy

Introduction

The Open University's (OU) mission of being “open to people, places, methods and ideas” reflects our commitment to supporting all of our students to achieve success in Higher Education, regardless of background, circumstances or disabilities. Our aim is to reach students with life-changing learning that meets their needs and enriches society. We embrace equal opportunities for all within a diverse and inclusive environment, which recognises and responds to the needs of all of our students. This policy sets out our commitment to supporting all of our students in ways that effectively meet their needs, and aligns with the Student Charter and the OU's overall strategies such as the Students First Strategy, the Equality Scheme, the Learning & Teaching Vision & Plan, the Widening Access & Success (WAS) Strategy and the Academic Strategy.

Aims

This policy confirms the OU's approach to promoting accessibility and ensuring that all of our students are effectively supported in achieving success in Higher Education.

The OU has more undergraduate students who have declared a disability than any other University in Europe. We will work proactively to reduce any attainment gap to ensure that disabled students, as well as students facing accessibility issues for other reasons, are effectively supported to achieve their study aims, in line with all other students.

This policy reflects the centrality of open access, inclusion and social responsibility to the OU's mission. It aims to:

1. Ensure that we sustain and develop accessibility as a key component of our strategy.
2. Respond to changes in legislation relating to accessibility in Higher Education.
3. Set out a clear direction for maintaining and enhancing accessible learning.

Scope

This policy applies to all prospective and current students with specific accessibility needs that arise from the interaction between their studies and their particular circumstances and/or conditions. It applies to students across access, undergraduate, postgraduate and doctoral (research) levels as well as those students not studying for a formal qualification. It includes students with disabilities or long term health conditions, whether these have been declared to the OU or not, students in restricted or secure environments, and students who face accessibility issues due to other circumstances and / or conditions.

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The Open University is incorporated by Royal Charter (RC 000391), an exempt charity in England & Wales and a charity registered in Scotland (SC 038302). The Open University is authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority in relation to its secondary activity of credit broking.

Whilst we commit to anticipate accessibility needs, it is recognised that, owing to the breadth of accessibility requirements, there may still be occasions where specific needs may not have been anticipated. In such circumstances, we will be responsive to requests for reasonable adjustments. Where adjustments are requested and it is unclear whether they may be considered reasonable, the requests will be referred to the OU's Accessibility Referrals Panel.

This policy informs the development of good practice and provides an underpinning framework for evaluation. We will address the accessibility needs of our students, ensuring that we are meeting such needs wherever reasonable and practicable by:

1. Setting out our commitment to supporting and working in partnership with all of our students to improve accessibility.
2. Communicating to students what they can expect from us in relation to their accessibility needs.
3. Ensuring we effectively and proactively anticipate and make reasonable adjustments in response to the needs of our students, wherever reasonable and practicable to do so.
4. Regularly reviewing, and improving where possible, the effectiveness of our accessibility support mechanisms.

Principles

To promote an inclusive environment, we will:

1. Adopt the Social Model of Disability in proactively identifying and removing, or minimising, barriers to effective study over which we have a degree of control.
2. Be receptive to students with accessibility needs and work in partnership with them in the design, development and evaluation of accessible resources and services.
3. Maintain an inclusive, supportive, positive and proactive culture in which each student is treated as an individual with a unique combination of needs, without placing undue emphasis on the conditions from which these needs arise.
4. Ensure that we do not discriminate unlawfully against, or treat unfairly, any students or enquirers based on their accessibility needs.
5. Provide appropriate, effective and accessible training, guidance and support for all staff. Ensure staff engage with training through processes including induction and CDSA.
6. Provide a confidential, supportive and positive environment in which students and enquirers feel secure to declare their accessibility requirements without fear of being adversely affected.

To ensure proactive and responsive processes and procedures, we will:

7. Minimise and, where possible, remove undue administrative burdens and delays for students in obtaining support with accessibility needs.
8. Offer accessible, effective, fair and clearly communicated procedures to:
 - Initiate the process for requesting adjustments according to the student's needs.
 - Address adjustments, issues and complaints around student accessibility-related needs, in line with existing procedures.
 - Provide effective support for students and enquirers throughout the process to reduce any negative impact on the student while the adjustment, issue or complaint is being addressed.
9. Adopt a proactive as well as responsive approach to putting in place adjustments to support students with accessibility needs and include regular review and reporting of student needs.
10. Make accessibility a key consideration in decision making and innovation from early inception and design of our curriculum all the way through to presentation, drawing on Universal Design for Learning principles and practices.
11. Make every effort to ensure that accessibility provisions are put in place in a timely and appropriate manner, where possible before these are encountered.
12. Ensure wherever possible that all physical and digital spaces with which students can reasonably be expected to engage, including those from third-party providers, are accessible for students.

To enable effective communication, we will:

13. Provide effective, proactive and timely communication with students with accessibility needs from initial enquiry all the way to the completion of their studies.
14. Engage with students and enquirers directly and through the provision of timely and relevant information about accessibility-related provisions and ensure these forms of engagement are consistent and suitable for students' needs.
15. Ensure that all students and enquirers with accessibility needs are informed of the provisions that they can expect from us in supporting them in their studies.
16. Offer support in how to make effective use of accessibility-related provisions and engage relevant students in further developing such provisions where appropriate.

Appendix

Glossary

Us/we

Refers to The Open University: all staff are responsible for ensuring that their work contributes effectively and appropriately to the accessibility of our services and provisions.

Student

A student is defined as an individual who studies with the Open University as a formal learner at access, undergraduate, postgraduate or doctoral level or as an informal learner using our open access resources including FutureLearn and OpenLearn.

Enquirer

An enquirer is anyone who intends to study, but has not yet registered with the Open University as a formal learner at access, undergraduate, postgraduate or doctoral level or as an informal learner using our open access resources including FutureLearn and OpenLearn.

Accessibility

Making study materials and support services useable by everyone regardless of disabilities or other circumstances that impact on a student's ability to take part in their studies.

CDSA

Career Development and Staff Appraisal.

Disability

Any long term health condition, specific learning difficulty or mental health difficulty which affects a student's ability to study.

Social model of disability

A model which recognises disability as a consequence of the barriers resulting from the way society is organised rather than resulting from a person's impairment. This view emphasises the need for society and institutions to remove or reduce such barriers.

Reasonable adjustment

Where barriers cannot be completely removed, a legal requirement for an appropriate change to a study-related arrangement, including assignments or exams, in order to enable a disabled student to complete their studies on a level playing field with their peers.

Curriculum

All aspects of learning and teaching which form a part of the student learning journey, including materials, activities, assessment, learning outcomes, tools and media.

Universal Design for Learning

An educational framework that guides the development of flexible learning environments that can accommodate individual learning differences.

Inclusion

The state of being included in a group or framework. In the context of education this means that the needs and characteristics of all participants in education are recognised and taken into account in the design of curriculum and support mechanisms.

Further reading

- [Students First: Strategy for Growth \(2016\)](#)
- [Equality Act 2010](#)
- [Seven principles of Universal design](#)