



Policy for the admission of applicants under the age of 18

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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.

Summary of policy

An Open University student must normally be aged 16 or over by the start date of the module for which they wish to enrol or register. This Policy sets out the exceptional admissions criteria for students under 16.

This Policy also sets out a number of entry conditions for all students who are over 16 years old but under 18 years old which are needed in order to comply with safeguarding requirements and to take into account limitations on the student's contractual capacity (see [Section 6 Contractual issues](#)).

Summary of significant changes since last version

- a) Inclusion of reference to FutureLearn.
- b) 'Assistant Director' replaced by Assistant Director in Wales or Ireland, or the Depute Director in Scotland or Head of Student Support, as required.
- c) Amended to specify 'local authority school'; registrations are made through the school; website address.
- d) Updated funding information for students resident in Wales, Northern Ireland, and Scotland.
- e) References to related documentation
- f) References to microcredentials

Policies superseded by this document

This document replaces the previous version of the Policy for admission of applicants under the age of 18, dated February 2016.

Scope

What this document covers

This document covers the exceptional admissions criteria for accredited study for applicants under 16 years old, applicants aged over 16 and under 18, and students under 18 years old who wish to continue Open University study.

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What this document does not cover

- Students in prison or in a secure environment are under the remit of the relevant nation's Students in Secure Environments team. For more information, see our [Supporting Students in Secure Environments](#) website.
- Specific Open University study programmes and placements with employers that, in some cases, are overseen by faculties, and may involve contact with children and young people, such as Social Work and the Apprenticeships Programme.
- The study of short courses or OpenLearn modules.

Related Documentation

Other documentation relevant to the admission of students under the age of 18 at The Open University include:

- [Policy on safeguarding children and vulnerable adults](#)
- [Advocacy: guidelines and procedure](#)
- [Code of Practice for Student Discipline](#)
- [Fitness to Practice](#)
- [Fee Rules](#)
- [Conditions of Registration](#)
- [Academic Regulations](#)

The Open University Student Charter Principles

This policy aligns with the following [Open University Student Charter](#) Principles:

- Principle 2: We aim to inspire and enable learning

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Introduction

The Open University wishes to ensure that study at The Open University is right for you. If you have not yet reached the age of 18 by the start of your programme of study, The Open University's style of teaching – 'supported open learning' - may be very different from your previous learning experience. We want to ensure that studying with The Open University is a positive experience and that young students will be equipped to gain the intended educational benefit from our provision.

Studying at university level at a distance, in your own time and on your own, is demanding, and will involve activities such as working through a variety of media, (e.g. printed material, software, websites and podcasts, online conferencing, DVDs and home experiment kits) to facilitate your learning.

Policy

1. Purpose

1.1 This policy sets out what you can expect from The Open University as an applicant to study under the age of 18. As an Open University student, you will need to be able to manage your time effectively and develop strong study and organisational skills, follow strict timetables, plan ahead and meet deadlines.

All applicants under the age of 18 should be aware that:

- no special academic support is offered on grounds of age;
- studying with The Open University involves not just understanding what is being read, but also the ability to communicate that understanding through university-level assignments and through discussion with others, who will mainly be adults;
- you, rather than your parent/guardian/carer, will be expected to interact with your tutors or with other Open University staff see [Section 6 Contractual issues](#).

2. Policy principles

2.1 Suitability of modules

2.1.1 The majority of students at The Open University are adults. Some Open University modules may contain material which is inappropriate for students under the age of 18 on safeguarding grounds. Such modules may contain material which has been externally rated as suitable for adults only (for example, including a discussion of an "18" film) or where the learning leads to a qualification only open to an adult (for

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example, social work) or involves access to vulnerable adults (for example, counselling). All modules are scrutinised for their suitability for students under 18 as part of the module approval process under the above criteria and will be identified accordingly.

- 2.1.2 Some modules may be considered 'unsuitable' because the materials, which are suitable in their own right, may lead to a discussion of an adult nature – either at a face-to-face tutorial or in an online forum. Therefore you and your parent/carer will need to be aware that you may encounter such content.
- 2.1.3 Some modules may require a level of 'life experience' in order to optimise the learning experience. If you apply for such programmes of study and are under the age of 18 you will be given advice and guidance about the appropriateness of your module choice.
- 2.2 There may be other methods of study that are more appropriate for you under the age of 18 than The Open University. For example, studying by distance learning through the [National Extension College](#) (NEC) or taking up one of the wide range of activities for gifted and talented children in England, including taster modules or residential schools offered by other universities. In Scotland you may be referred to [Skills Development Scotland](#). You may also wish to consider our [OpenLearn](#) modules as a taster of Open University study generally. This admissions policy does not apply to the study of short courses or OpenLearn modules, but you should still satisfy yourself that the content is suitable. In addition, you may wish to explore [FutureLearn](#) free online courses from top universities and specialist organisations. See the Contacts section for more sources of information.
- 2.3 If the application is for a module with an embedded residential school, specific consideration will be given to whether it is appropriate and in your best interests to attend and, if so, whether any specific arrangements should be made. This might include the attendance of a chaperone. This consideration will also include the exploration of alternative learning experiences (where these exist) which provide the same core learning outcomes as the residential school.

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Admissions process

3. Admissions process for applicants under the age of 16

Part A How to apply

- 3A.1 The Open University will exceptionally consider applications to register to study with The Open University from young people who are under the age of 16. Each application will be considered on its own merits.
- 3A.2 An application must be made in writing and emailed to the Educational Adviser with responsibility for young applicants in the relevant Student Support Team or nation support team at least six weeks before the final enrolment date of the chosen module. As part of the registration process, you will receive contact details via the appropriate nation registration team. This will ensure that you are able to meet all the requirements of the application process. During the Christmas period, please allow up to eight weeks.
- 3A.3 The application must include:
- A statement in your own words giving your reasons for wishing to study with The Open University, explaining your interest (and the reasons for your interest) in your chosen field of study
 - a record of any previous academic achievement
 - a statement from your headteacher or head of year supporting your application if you are in full-time education. This should confirm your readiness for undergraduate-level study and your capacity as an independent learner. If you are home-schooled, a supporting statement from a tutor or educationalist may be considered.
- 3A.4 You will be required to provide a short piece of writing in answer to a question appropriate to your academic interest, for which you may be referred to a section of The Open University's [OpenLearn](#) website.
- 3A.5 Once this information has been received, you will be invited with your parent, guardian or carer to meet and discuss your application with a Head of Student Support (Assistant Director in Wales or Ireland, or the Depute Director in Scotland), or an Educational Adviser and a Staff Tutor/academic member of staff relevant to your appropriate Student Support Team.
- 3A.6 Meetings may be held face-to-face at one of our UK offices or Dublin in the Republic of Ireland, or via phone or Skype, if other methods are unavailable or not possible.

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- 3A.7 If you disclose a disability, you will be advised about the support available. In advance of the meeting, we will ask what reasonable adjustments are needed to ensure that you are given the opportunity to demonstrate your readiness for university-level study. The meeting will provide a further opportunity to discuss with you whether any specific arrangements should be made if you were to study at The Open University (for example, in relation to a disability or attendance at tutorials, residential schools or day schools) (where appropriate).
- 3A.8 The aim of this meeting is to assist staff in considering your application more fully and for them to be assured that the proposed study is right for you. It will also provide you with an important opportunity to explore what study at The Open University will entail; the appropriateness of your chosen programme of study; what alternative opportunities might be available; and whether, in the light of this exploration, you wish to proceed with your application.
- 3A.9 Parents, guardians or carers will often be involved in and support the application. However, you will be required to confirm yourself that it is your own firm wish to undertake Open University study.
- 3A.10 Written notes of the meeting will be taken and, where appropriate, these will include details of any reasonable adjustments that have been made to take account of a disability.

Part B Consideration of applications

- 3B1 Following the meeting, the application will be considered by a National Director or nominee (for national centres Scotland, Ireland and Wales) and Head of Student Support of the relevant Student Support Team, to whom a recommendation will be made as to whether or not you should be permitted to register as a student with The Open University for a particular module or qualification. If permission to register is given (see Section 3B.4), any specific arrangements in connection with the proposed study at The Open University (for example, in relation to a disability or attendance at tutorials, day schools or residential schools) will be taken into account.
- 3B.2 To be permitted to register, you will have demonstrated:
- an interest in your chosen subject area
 - the ability to work unsupervised at university level, e.g. by the completion of a set task or other external academic achievement
 - effective communication skills, both oral and in writing, to enable you to make progress in your chosen programme of study, e.g. through a discussion of the set task
 - ability to manage your time and to meet deadlines
 - the ability to learn independently, seeking help appropriately when it is needed.

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- 3B.3 If you are permitted to register for a standalone module you will normally be required to start your Open University studies with a first-level module which is the equivalent of study at a conventional university.
- 3B.4 You will be notified in writing of the decision of the National Director/Head of Student Support or their nominee. The notification will include details of any conditions that may be applied to your study. If the decision is that you are not to be permitted to register as a student, you will be provided with an explanation of that decision.
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4. Applicants aged over 16 and under 18

Part A Applying through your school or college

- 4A.1 If you have reached the age of 16, are in full-time education and reside in England, you may register for a standalone module through your school or college and you will receive in-school support. Your school or college would need to be willing to make a group booking and should do so through The Open University's Young Applicants Team (see [Contacts/Further Clarification](#) section).
- 4A.2 If you reside in Scotland and are in S6, at a local authority school you may be able to register through the [Young Applicants in Schools Scheme \(YASS\)](#). Registrations are made through the school you attend.
- 4A.3 If you reside in Wales you may be eligible to register via the [Seren Network](#) or STEM Talent Programmes (science, technology, engineering or mathematics). Further information is available by contacting wales-support@open.ac.uk.

Part B Individual applications

- 4B.1 If you are over 16 and under 18, whether or not you are still in full-time education, you may register as an individual through the The Open University's Young Applicants Team in your nation and you will be entitled to advice and guidance to ensure that you are making the right decision and choosing an appropriate course of study. However, if you are still in full-time education you should seek permission from your school or college before registering with The Open University.
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5. Students under 18 – continuing study

- 5.1 If you have been accepted for a qualification and are still under the age of 18, you will be covered by The Open University's [general regulations](#) and, subject to those regulations, will be allowed to progress through the qualification without requiring further permission.

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- 5.2 If you have registered for a standalone module and are successful in that module, you will be permitted to register for a further standalone module if you wish, even if still under the age of 16, without repeating the full admissions process. Advice and guidance will be provided by your Student Support Team.
- 5.3 If you wish to register for a further standalone module, not having passed the first, you will be required to repeat the full admissions process (see [Section 4](#) above).
- 5.4 The Open University offers some online, non-accredited [short modules](#). You will not be required to go through the above admissions process for these modules. If, however, you subsequently wish to continue your Open University studies by enrolling on a credit-bearing module including microcredentials, that admissions process will apply.
- 5.5 If you enrol on a Microcredentials standalone module the admissions process will apply
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6. Contractual issues

- 6.1 If you are under the age of 18 you may enter into contracts for education without the consent of your parents, guardians or carers. In this case, The Open University's contract for the services we provide will rest directly with you (see also [Section 7](#) Financial support for students under the age of 18).
- 6.2 The Registration Agreement for students under the age of 18 will ask for a signature from a parent, guardian or carer to confirm that they have read and understood The Open University's [safeguarding guidelines](#) for students of this age.
- 6.3 Support from parents, guardians or carers during study is valuable, but it should be recognised that the teaching relationship is between you and The Open University, and you must be responsible for your own academic progress and for complying with The Open University's rules and regulations. The Open University's guidelines and procedure on [Advocacy](#), having someone to speak on your behalf if you wish, apply to students under 18.
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7. Financial support for students under the age of 18

- 7.1 If you reside in England or Wales and are aged 16 or over, you may be eligible for a part-time fee loan if you register for a qualification. You should be aware that taking a student loan is likely to affect your ability to take out a further student loan in the future, and you should check the position with the Student Loans Company. See also [Fee Rules](#). NB: Microcredentials do not attract any financial support.

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- 7.2 If you reside in Northern Ireland, financial support takes the form of a non-repayable part-time fee grant and/or a part-time student loan. If you are not eligible for a Part-Time Fee Grant or if your Part-Time Fee Grant does not cover the full cost of your tuition fees, you can apply for a Part-Time Tuition Fee Loan. A course grant is also available for help with other costs of study.
- 7.3 In Scotland financial support for fees is a Part-time Fee Grant and this is only available if you are over the statutory school leaving age. If you are in full-time education you are not eligible for help with your fees (this also applies to students over the age of 18 in full-time education and potentially to those in training elsewhere). Funding is also accepted from employers for students under 18. Please contact The Open University in Scotland for specific information (scotland@open.ac.uk).
- 7.4 If you live in Wales, you may be eligible for financial support in the form of a loan or grant. Please contact wales-support@open.ac.uk for more information.
- 7.5 Although the contract for the services The Open University provides is directly with you, if you are under the age of 18 payment can only be accepted from your parent/guardian/carer on your behalf. It is not possible to accept payment by instalments by a third party through the Open University Student Budget Account.
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8. Right of appeal

- 8.1 Any decision made in respect of a refusal of admission or any conditions applied to an admission may be appealed in accordance with the Open University's [Complaints and Appeals Procedure](#).
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9. Implementation and enforcement of procedure

- 9.1 Failure to comply with the admissions policy and procedures will be investigated and may result in dismissal or exclusion from The Open University.
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10. Non-compliance

- 10.1 Breaches of codes of conduct may lead to disciplinary action under the [Code of Practice for Student Discipline](#) for students and disciplinary procedures for staff (available via the Human Resources website). See [Conditions of Registration](#) for more information.

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Glossary of terms

Alternative learning experience (ALEs)

ALEs deliver the same core learning outcomes as a residential school; they take a variety of forms including written assignments, online projects and/or conferencing.

Child

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child defines a child as any human being under the age of 18 unless the age of majority is attained earlier under the relevant national legislation. The UK has ratified this convention and although there are a number of different laws across the four nations which specify different age limits whereby young people may be permitted to do different things, England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland all agree that anyone who is under 18 should be protected via child protection guidance.

Continuing student

A person who has previously registered for Open University study (but not necessarily completed any module).

Educationalist

A professional educator who has a special knowledge of principles, theories and methods of teaching.

First level module

Undergraduate degree-level of study usually undertaken at the beginning of the study journey.

Parent/carer/guardian

An adult who has legal responsibility for a child.

Residential school

A study session for Open University students which usually requires face-to-face participation and at least one over-night stay in an approved location.

S6

The final year of school in Scotland during which students typically study Advanced Higher and/or Higher courses.

Supported open learning

A blend of learning materials such as books, videos and online forums, underpinned by tutor support from a distance (for example, online or over the phone at specified times).

YASS

Young Applicants in Schools gives S6 students in Scotland the opportunity to study a range of university-level modules in school alongside their other studies.

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Contacts/Further clarification

For more information about how to apply for study under the age of 18:

- England/Outside UK/General: srs-young-applicants@open.ac.uk
- Northern Ireland: northernireland@open.ac.uk
- Republic of Ireland: ireland@open.ac.uk
- Scotland: Scotland-YASS@open.ac.uk
- Wales: wales-support@open.ac.uk

If you have a safeguarding concern: safeguarding-referrals@open.ac.uk

Alternative format

If you require this document in an alternative format, please contact your Student Support Team via [Contact Us](#) (phone +44 (0)300 303 5303) or via [StudentHome](#) if you are a current Open University student.

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Appendix A

Privacy Notice

1. Scope

- 1.1 This section sets out additional actions The Open University carries out with personal data specifically relating to students under the age of 18 from the point of enquiry.
- 1.2 This section applies to you if are involved with the application to register for Open University study for an individual under the age of 18.

2. Who we are

- 2.1 The Open University is the data controller in relation to the processing activities described below. This means that the Open University decides why and how your personal information is processed.
- 2.2 Where this policy refers to “we”, “our” or “us” below, unless it mentions otherwise, it is referring to The Open University.

3. How do we use your personal information

- 3.1 The Open University [student privacy notice](#) provides general information regarding the personal data we collect on our students, and what we do with it.
- 3.2 For a student under the age of 18, we may share your data (for example, during the registration process) with a named contact in your school as part of our public task to deliver higher education qualifications. There may be other situations where we will share information and/or date of birth with other statutory bodies as required according to The Open University’s Safeguarding Policy.
- 3.3 Names and contact details pertaining to schools connected to your application for study will be deleted after you reach the age of 18.

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