

Policy for the admission of applicants under the age of 18

1. Introduction

- 1.1 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.
- 1.2 This Policy also sets out a small number of entry conditions for all students who are over 16 but under 18 which are needed in order to comply with safeguarding requirements and to take into account limitations on their contractual capacity (see section 6).
- 1.3 The University also has a separate [Safeguarding Policy](#) to protect its students who are under 18.

2. General

- 2.1 The 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 University's style of teaching – 'supported open learning' which was designed to support adults - may be very different from your previous learning experience. We want to be as sure as we can that studying with The Open University will be a positive experience and that as a young person you will be equipped to gain the intended educational benefit from our provision.
- 2.2 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, CD-ROM and software, websites and podcasts, online conferencing, DVDs and home experiment kits) to facilitate your learning.

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 support is offered on grounds of age;
 - that studying with The Open University involves not just understanding what is being read, but also the ability to communicate that understanding through assignments at Higher Education level and through discussion with others, who will mainly be adults;
 - that you, rather than your parent/guardian/carer, will be expected to interact with your tutors or with other University staff (see section 6 below).
- 2.3 Suitability of modules
 - The Open University is primarily a university for 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 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.

- Some modules may be considered ‘unsuitable’ because the materials, which are not unsuitable in their own right, may lead to a discussion of an adult nature – either at a face-to-face tutorial or on an online forum. Therefore your attention and that of parents/guardians/carers will be drawn to the risk of being confronted by ‘adult content’ as a result of contributions from other students for these modules.
 - Some programmes of study may require a level of ‘life experience’ in order to do them justice. 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.
- 2.4 Before applying as a student under 18 you should also consider alternatives to study with The Open University, (perhaps as a precursor to studying with The Open University) for example, studying by distance learning through the National Extension College (NEC) (www.nec.ac.uk/) 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 (www.myworldofwork.co.uk/). You may also wish to consider our [OpenLearn](#) modules as a taster of OU 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.

3. Admissions process for applicants under the age of 16

Part A. How to apply

- 3.1 The 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.
- 3.2 An application must be made in writing and sent or emailed to the student 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 qualification or module for which you want to apply starts, to ensure that you are able to meet all the requirements of the application process (this will be up to 8 weeks during the Christmas period due to office closures).
- 3.3 The application must include
- a written 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 written record of any previous academic achievement
 - (in line with the University’s general Conditions of Registration) a written statement from your headteacher or head of year supporting your application if you are in full-

time education, confirming your readiness for undergraduate-level study and your capacity as an independent learner.

- 3.4 Once this written information has been received, you will be invited along with your parent, guardian or carer to meet and discuss your application with an Assistant Director (in the case of Scotland, the Depute Director), or an educational adviser and a Staff Tutor relevant to your student support team.
- 3.5 In exceptional circumstances this meeting may take place by telephone (for example, if you have a disability or would have to travel a substantial distance to attend in person and it would be unreasonable to expect you to make the journey).
- 3.6 If you disclose that you have a disability, you will be advised on the support available. In advance of the meeting, it will be necessary to ask what reasonable adjustments are needed to ensure that you are given the opportunity effectively 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).
- 3.7 You will be required in advance of the meeting 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 University's OpenLearn website (www.open.edu/openlearn/).
- 3.8 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 more fully 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.
- 3.9 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.
- 3.10 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

- 3.11 Following the meeting, the application will be considered by a National Director/Assistant Director of the relevant student support team ¹, 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, 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.
¹ National Director (for national centres in Scotland, Ireland and Wales) and Assistant Director, student support teams (for England)
- 3.12 To be permitted to register, you will have demonstrated:
 - a real interest in your chosen subject area

- the ability to work unsupervised at undergraduate 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.
- 3.13 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 first-year study at a conventional university – see www.open.ac.uk/courses.
- 3.14 If the application is for a 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, including 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.
- 3.15 You will be notified in writing of the decision of the National Director/Assistant Director, student support team. 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 for that decision.

4. Applicants aged over 16 and under 18

Part A. Applying through your school or college

- 4.1 If you have reached the age of 16, are in full-time education and reside in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, you may register for a standalone module through your school or college. In this way 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 University's Young Applicants Team (srs-young-applicants@open.ac.uk).
- 4.2 If you reside in Scotland and are in S6, you may register through the Young Applicants in Schools Scheme (YASS). Registrations should be made to The Open University in Scotland (scotland@open.ac.uk).
- 4.3 If you reside in Wales you may register by contacting wales-support@open.ac.uk.

Part B. Individual applications

- 4.4 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 University's Young Applicants Team in the appropriate nation of residence and you will be entitled to additional advice and guidance to ensure that you are making the right decision and choosing an appropriate course of study. If you are still in full-time education you should seek permission from your school or college before registering with The Open University.

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 University's general regulations and, subject to those regulations, will be allowed to progress through the qualification without requiring further permission.

- 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 the student support team. If you wish to continue studying with the OU and are still under 16 years of age, this support may be enhanced.
- 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 University offers some online, non-accredited short modules in science. 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, that admissions process will apply.

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 and the University's contract for the services we provide will rest directly with you (see also section 7).
- 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 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 University, and you must be responsible for your own academic progress and for complying with Open University rules and regulations. The University's guidelines on [Advocacy](#) apply to students under 18.

7. Financial support for students under the age of 18

- 7.1 If you reside in England and are aged 16 or over, you may be eligible for a part-time fee loan if you register for a qualification starting in or after September 2012 (2014 for Wales). 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. In Wales you may also be eligible for a means tested course grant based on any income you may have and, if you have one, your partner's (this does not include your parents' income). There also may be extra support for those with caring responsibilities.
- 7.2 The normal transitional arrangements will otherwise be in place for eligible students in England. See the [Fee Rules](#) for details.
- 7.3 For students in England and Wales who are eligible for transitional arrangements and for those in Northern Ireland, financial support is in the form of non-repayable fee and course grants and is based on any income that you may have and, if you have one, your partner's (but not parental) income. As the support is in the form of grants, there are no upper or lower age limits on the support offered by the University. Financial support is not available if you are studying with the University as part of a group or programme organised by your school or college.
- 7.4 In Scotland financial support for fees is through an ILA Scotland £200 learner account or Part-time Fee Grant. Neither of these is available if you are under 16. In addition, 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). Funding is also accepted from employers for students under 18. Please contact The Open University in Scotland for specific information (scotland@open.ac.uk).

- 7.5 Although the contract for the services the 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.

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 University's [Queries and Appeals](#) procedure.

Approved by the Director, Students, March 2015

Summary of changes

March 2015

1. General amendments to update URLs
2. 'Student Services' amended or added to read 'student support team', sections 3.2, 3.4, 3.11, 3.15
3. Section 2.4: Link to OpenLearn included.
4. Section 3.2: Notice of closure period over Christmas added.
5. Section 3.11: New sentence to replace footnote.
6. Section 3.15: Information included regarding details of any conditions to your study to be included in notification.
7. Section 4: Moved to after Section 5
8. Section 5: Moved to replace Section 4 and renumbered
9. Sections 4.3 and 7.1: Information regarding residing in Wales added
10. Section 7.4: Information added regarding being in full-time education you are not eligible for help with your fees.

February 2016

1. Editorial amendment to remove reference of Student Regulation.
2. Section 2.4: Admissions policy does not apply to the study of short courses or OpenLearn modules added.

Note

Certain terminology relating to senior roles outlined in this policy will be updated shortly. This in no way invalidates the content or the meaning of the policy itself.

January 2017