

Information, Advice and Guidance Policy at The Open University

1. Our purpose

The purpose of the Information, Advice and Guidance Service is to support enquirers considering study with The Open University (OU) and to support students in achieving their aspirations, including their study and career goals through OU study.

In the delivery of Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG)¹, we support enquirers and students in making decisions about their OU study and career planning based on their individual needs, circumstances and interests.

We place an emphasis on opportunities for independent self-assessment and decision making by providing online information and advice that is easy to access, clear, relevant and up to date.

Our service is consistent with the agreed University approach to educational support and guidance and is delivered in accordance with the principles of the nationally recognised **matrix**² quality standard (www.matrixstandard.com) and the University's Data Protection Policy.³

We contribute to the University's commitment to "deliver an outstanding student experience".⁴

2. Aim

The Service aims to deliver IAG to enquirers and students who are registered on, or considering registering for, a qualification or module with the OU.

3. Objectives

Our objectives are to:

- 1) empower enquirers and students to achieve their study and career goals and to develop independence in their decision making
- 2) ensure that the delivery of IAG within the University is responsive to changes and developments both internally and externally, including changes to our student markets
- 3) support the improvement of students' completion and progression rates

¹ A definition of Information, Advice and Guidance is given in Appendix 1.

² The **matrix** standard is the national quality standard for information, advice and guidance sponsored by the Department for Business, Innovation, and Skills. www.matrixstandard.com.

³ The Open University Data Protection Policy www.open.ac.uk/students/charter/essential-documents.

⁴ The Open University Strategic Plan 2012-15 Securing the Mission.

- 4) work proactively and collaboratively internally to enhance the effective delivery of IAG.
- 5) identify and work in partnership with external organisations to inform and enhance our service to students.

We will achieve these objectives by:

- raising awareness of the service so that enquirers and students know what they can expect and how to access it
- producing and regularly reviewing an annual development plan to ensure we continually improve our service
- providing timely and targeted IAG to students at key points along the student journey that recognises and is responsive to diverse and distinct need
- ensuring our online information and advice is personalised, accessible, accurate, up to date and applies innovative technology
- providing opportunities for students to access advice and guidance in a variety of ways including online discussion forums, email and telephone
- ensuring members of staff have the training, skills and knowledge appropriate to their roles
- encouraging and acting on student and staff feedback
- identifying key internal and external stakeholders and agreeing processes by which we can work collaboratively.

4. Delivery of IAG

Members of staff in Student Services, including nations, regions, and Student Recruitment work collaboratively to deliver IAG to enquirers and students in line with service standards.

A yearly IAG development plan outlines how the IAG policy is translated into services and actual practice.

In addition, IAG is provided by a number of other departments in Student Services offering specialist IAG support to enquirers and students. All provide IAG in accordance with the standards and principles referred to below in Section 5. The Student Services departments providing specialist IAG are listed in Appendix 3.

We actively work to ensure that our IAG provision aligns with the support available to students from their tutors.

5. Our principles

The principles that underpin the delivery of IAG to enquirers and students are informed by the standards and principles of the organisations listed in Appendix 2. In April 2011, Student Services were awarded **matrix** re-accreditation for the quality of our IAG services.

6. Impartiality

We aim to provide IAG which respects the needs of the individual enquirer or student and is in their best interests. As an IAG service within The Open University our IAG is underpinned and informed within the context of OU study.

7. Entitlements

The service entitlements for enquirers and students are outlined in our Statement of Service, available at www.open.ac.uk/students/charter/essential-documents/our-statements-of-service

OU students are from a diverse range of backgrounds and educational experience. Consequently, we deliver a service that is targeted to the specific needs of enquirers and students at different stages of their student journey.

8. Continuous quality improvement and staff development

We are committed to developing the IAG service through continuous quality improvement and to ensuring the expertise of staff using appropriate University frameworks.

The Open University Student Services April 2012

Appendix 1: Definitions

Information: Information is a range of resource material available online that is presented in a way that encourages self assessment and independent decision-making whilst also delivering factual data.

Information is also provided to students and enquirers by members of staff who contribute to enquirers' and students' understanding and interpretation of the information available and how and where to research information themselves. Members of staff may also need to interpret, clarify or contextualise information and assess when signposting to more specialist support or guidance is needed. Members of staff at all levels engage in information giving as part of the IAG process.

Advice: Advice may be delivered online, for example straightforward advice may be delivered via diagnostic tools and person-mediated advice via email and forums. Advice from a member of staff involves the same support as that listed above under Information; it may also include appropriate questioning to gain an understanding of circumstances that will enable clarification and identification of need. Advice will contribute to decision - making through suggestions on available options, or how to go about a course of action. Advisory work is usually provided on a one-to-one basis by telephone or email, but in certain circumstances can be provided through appropriately mediated information and advice forums

Guidance: Guidance is the process of providing in-depth and personalised advice and support to students and enquirers. It involves a complex interaction between practitioner and student that depends on the skill of the practitioner to elicit, interpret and feed back from both verbal and non-verbal responses and clues. Guidance should be provided by members of staff trained and competent in guidance work.

Guidance involves identifying and clarifying needs and exploring ideas and values in relation to study opportunities and career goals. Students and enquirers are encouraged to assess appropriate options and make decisions that are in their best interests, will facilitate learning and progression, and contribute to their development as independent and autonomous learners. In the process, guidance should involve challenging unrealistic expectations and advocacy on behalf of the student as well as referral to more specialist guidance and support.

Elements of guidance may be delivered online by email and through forums; some complex guidance queries may be most effectively addressed via telephone and, exceptionally face-to-face. Opportunities should be available online for referral to person-mediated guidance within the IAG decision-making framework.

Appendix 2: Policies, standards and codes of practice that underpin the provision of IAG

Internal:

Model of Integrated Learning and Learner Support (MILLS) Handbook
Further information on the Model for Integrated Learning and Learner Support (MILLS) handbook is available upon request from lss-ldt@open.ac.uk.

Open University Student Policies
www.open.ac.uk/students/charter/essential-documents

These include the policy on:

- [Data protection](#)
- [Freedom of information](#)
- [Student employability statement](#)
- [The Open University equality scheme](#)

These policies are supported by the IAG Statement of Service and the Student Charter which are also accessible from the website.

External:

The matrix quality standard for information, advice and guidance services
www.matrixstandard.com

The Career Development Institute
www.thecdi.net/

Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services
www.agcas.org.uk

Quality Assurance Agency code of practice for Careers Education Information, Advice and Guidance
www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/quality-code-B4.aspx

Appendix 3: Student Services departments providing specialist IAG

Assessment: www.open.ac.uk/students/charter/essential-documents/assessment

Credit and Qualifications: www3.open.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/qualification/index.htm

Careers Advisory Service: www2.open.ac.uk/students/careers

Disabled Student Services: www2.open.ac.uk/study/support/disability/orientation

Student Fees: www3.open.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/qualification/ways-to-pay/index.htm

Initial Teacher Education Support Centre:

www.open.ac.uk/education-and-languages/main/study/initial-teacher-education

Vocational Qualification Assessment Centre:

www.open.ac.uk/choose/vocational-qualifications/