SCONUL Access Policy

Contents

Alternative Format

If you require this SCONUL Access Policy document in an alternative format please [Contact Us](#) (visit www.open.ac.uk/contact), telephone us on +44 (0)300 303 5303, or get in touch with your Student Support Team via StudentHome if you are a current Open University student. If you are studying an apprenticeship please contact the Apprenticeship Enrolment and Support Team (AEST) by email on apprentice-support@open.ac.uk, or telephone (+44 (0) 300 303 4121). Welsh-speaking Students and Learners are welcome to speak with a student support adviser in Welsh on +44 (0) 29 2047 1170. Research Degree Students can contact the Research Degrees Office via email research-degrees-office@open.ac.uk.

Introduction

The Open University is a member of the Society of College, National and University Libraries (SCONUL) Access scheme. SCONUL Access enables eligible Open University students and employees to access space and resources in participating libraries in the United Kingdom (UK) and the Republic of Ireland to support their research, teaching and learning.

The aim of this policy is to define who is eligible, how they apply for SCONUL Access membership at The Open University, and to explain how we respond to infringements at host libraries.

When The Open University was accepted as a member of the scheme, we agreed to abide by the [Membership Criteria](#). These include having responsibility for Open University students and employees making use of the scheme.

The Open University's membership of the scheme was on the condition that our students would be eligible to apply if they are registered on modules of 30 or more credits.

Scope

Who this policy covers

- Undergraduate students registered on a module of 30 credits or more and living in the UK or the Republic of Ireland.

- Postgraduate taught students registered on a module of 30 credits or more and living in the UK or the Republic of Ireland.

- Postgraduate research students living in the UK or the Republic of Ireland.

- Open University employees on permanent or fixed term contracts living in the UK or the Republic of Ireland.

- Open College of Arts (OCA) students.

Who this policy does not cover

- Students registered on modules of fewer than 30 credits.

- Students and employees living outside of the UK and the Republic of Ireland.

- Students in prison and secure units (see 3.2 and 3.3).

- Learners studying a Microcredential

- Vocational qualification learners (see Glossary of Terms).

- Alumni.

- Former Open University employees.

Please consult the [Using other libraries and SCONUL Access page](#) for alternative options.

Support and Information

How to contact us

For specific guidance on how this policy may relate to your personal circumstances, please [contact the Library Helpdesk](#).

Policy

1.   Policy Purpose

1.1   The purpose of this policy is to make transparent to Open University students and employees how we are meeting the [SCONUL Access Membership Criteria](#).

1.2   The objectives of this policy are:

    1.2.1   To define who is eligible to apply for SCONUL Access membership at The Open University.

    1.2.2   To explain how we respond to infringements at host libraries.

    1.2.3   To explain how to apply for SCONUL Access membership.

2.   Policy Principles

2.1   SCONUL Access is a reciprocal scheme and subject to The Open University Library building being open to SCONUL Access visitors from other institutions.

2.2   The SCONUL Access scheme may be suspended by SCONUL. For example, during the Covid-19 pandemic.

2.3   The Open University's membership of SCONUL Access is not guaranteed and may be withdrawn by SCONUL. For example, if we are not meeting the [SCONUL Access Membership Criteria](#).

3.   Eligibility

3.1   The following Open University students and employees are eligible to apply for SCONUL Access:

    3.1.1   Undergraduate students registered on a module of 30 credits or more and living in the UK or the Republic of Ireland.

    3.1.2   Postgraduate taught students registered on a module of 30 credits or more and living in the UK or the Republic of Ireland.

    3.1.3   Postgraduate research students registered on a research degree and living in the UK or the Republic of Ireland.

    3.1.4   Open University employees on permanent or fixed-term contracts living in the UK or the Republic of Ireland.

3.2   Students in prison and secure units are not eligible to apply for SCONUL Access.

3.3   Students released on licence may be eligible to apply for SCONUL Access. This is at the discretion of the Students in Secure Environments (SiSE) team.

4.   Bands

4.1   SCONUL Access member libraries choose which bands of users to accept as visitors. Using the [SCONUL Access Membership Criteria](#), we assign eligible Open University students and employees to the following bands:

    4.1.1   Open University employees and postgraduate research students: Band A

    4.1.2   Undergraduate and postgraduate taught students: Band B

    4.1.3   Those in a probationary period after an infringement (see 6.4): Band R (reference only with no borrowing)

5.   Access Periods

5.1   If you are eligible for the scheme, we will grant you the following periods of access:

    5.1.1   Open University employees: Band A access is up to three years for permanent employees or the contract end date for fixed term employees (but not more than three years at a time).

    5.1.2   Postgraduate research students: Band A access is until the end of the probationary year or thesis submission date (but not more than three years at a time).

    5.1.3   Undergraduate and postgraduate taught students: Band B access is until the end date of the currently registered Open University module(s) worth 30 or more credits.

    5.1.4   Band R reference access is restricted to the agreed probationary period after a cancellation period has been observed.

5.2   When your access period expires you can re-apply, as long as you are still eligible.

6. Infringements

6.1 In line with sections 2.4.1 ("Misconduct that undermines or damages the reputation of The Open University") and 2.4.2c ("Misconduct on premises provided by another institution for the use of Open University students that breaks the regulations of that institution") of the [Code of Practice for Student Discipline](), we may cancel your SCONUL Access membership for a minimum of one year. Examples of conduct that can lead to a cancellation period include:

6.1.1 Failure to pay fines for overdue books or fees for replacement books.

6.1.2 Breaking the host library regulations, including health and safety matters.

6.1.3 Behaving in a manner which is intended to or has the effect of creating an intimidating or hostile environment for others.

6.2 Violent behaviour or threats of violence in the host library may result in a life ban from SCONUL Access membership.

6.3 Cancellation periods are commensurate with the infringement.

6.4 Band R reference access may be granted for a probationary period after a cancellation period has been observed. The probationary period may be based on the original cancellation period.

6.5 Admission to libraries under the SCONUL Access scheme is always at the discretion of the host library. Following an infringement, the host library may not grant you re-admission.

Procedure

7. Applying for SCONUL Access

7.1 If you are eligible, follow the steps on the [Using other libraries and SCONUL Access page]() to apply for or renew your SCONUL Access membership.

7.2 For current guidance on how to plan your visit to a host library, please visit the [Using other libraries and SCONUL Access page.]()

7.3   When you apply for SCONUL Access as a student, the personal information that you supply will be used and processed in accordance with the [Student Privacy Notice](#).

7.4   When you apply as an Open University employee, the personal information that you supply will be used and processed in accordance with the [OU Data Protection Policy](#).

7.5   If you have any questions about your application, please [contact the Library Helpdesk](#).

Definitions

Bands

You will be assigned to a band depending on what type of student or employee you are. SCONUL Access member libraries choose which bands of users they are willing to accept as visitors.

Credit/Credits

This means a value which is related to the workload required to successfully complete a module. One credit represents about 10 hours of study. You will be awarded credits when you successfully complete a module, so if you pass a 60-credit module you will be awarded 60 credits. Some modules have a zero-credit value.

Host Library

This means a library that belongs to the SCONUL Access scheme that you choose to visit.

Module

This means a self-contained unit of teaching, learning and assessment which may be studied as a standalone course or in combination to form qualifications. Each module other than a short course is assigned a credit value and a level of study

Registration

Registration is the process by which you become a student of The Open University. To register you must agree to the Conditions of Registration, signalling your intention to study one or more modules or qualifications, and make or arrange payment for your studies.

SCONUL

The Society of College, National and University Libraries (SCONUL) represents all university libraries in the UK and Ireland, as well as national libraries and many libraries with collections of national significance.

SCONUL Access

SCONUL Access is a reciprocal scheme which allows many university library users to borrow or use books and journals at other libraries which belong to the scheme. The scheme covers most of the university libraries in the UK and Ireland.

Vocational qualification learners

Vocational qualification learners are not registered for an Open University module. They work towards a Vocational Qualification which the Open University delivers content for, but is accredited by an external awarding organisation, e.g. City & Guilds. For more information, see the Vocational Qualifications website.

Related Policies and Legislation

- Open University Code of Practice for Student Discipline

- Open University Student Privacy Notice

- SCONUL Access Membership Criteria

Welsh language standards

Safonau'r Gymraeg (Welsh Language Standards)

The Open University is one of several universities named in the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011. This means that any students in Wales can expect to receive certain services from the OU in Welsh. These are outlined in what's called the OU's Welsh language standards.

This means that you can speak to our student recruitment and support team in Welsh or contact the university in Welsh. You can find out more about your rights as a Welsh language user on the [OU in Wales website](#).

Reporting Bullying and Harassment

The Open University is committed to creating a diverse and inclusive environment where everyone feels safe and is treated with dignity and respect. Unlawful discrimination of any kind across The Open University will not be tolerated. We encourage staff, students, learners and visitors to report incidents of assault, bullying harassment, hate crime or sexual harassment through [Report + Support](#). This platform also provides information about what you can do if you or someone you know experiences such incidents, and where you can find support.

Our Student Charter Values

The [Student Charter](#) was developed jointly by The Open University and the OU Students Association. It is a declaration of our shared values and the commitments we make to each other. This document has been developed with the Student Charter values as its foundation.

Our commitment to Equality Diversity and Inclusion

Our commitment to equality and inclusion is embedded in all that we do and reflects our mission to be open to people, places, methods and ideas. We celebrate diversity and the strengths that it brings, whilst challenging under-representation and differences in outcomes within our institution. We promote and manage equality and diversity to meet both our strategic goals and our statutory equality duties. We achieve this in many ways, including the development of inclusive policy.

Give Us Your Feedback

If you have any comments about this policy document and how it might be improved, please share this with us, by emailing SPR-Policy-Team@open.ac.uk.

Charity Statement

The Open University is incorporated by Royal Charter (RC 000391), an exempt charity in England and 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.

About this Document

Summary of Significant Changes since last version

The following changes have been made

- Added 'Open College of Arts (OCA) students' to the list of who this policy covers.

- FutureLearn references have been removed as The Open University no longer presents microcredentials on that platform.

Policies Superseded by this Document

This document replaces the previous version of SCONUL Access Policy [dated August 2023].

Document Information

Version number: 3.0

Approved by: Student Experience Committee

Effective from: February 2025

Date for review: February 2026