



Student Accessibility Policy

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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

This policy sets out The Open University's commitment to supporting all of our students in ways that effectively meet their needs. This policy defines the principles The Open University will follow in order to:

- promote an inclusive environment
- ensure proactive and responsive processes and procedures
- enable effective communication

This policy specifically 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 objectives of this policy are:

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.

Summary of significant changes since last version

There are a number of significant changes from the previous version of this policy (Version No. 2.0). These are:

- Additional detail has been added to the Summary of policy, such that it describes the purpose and objectives.
- Links to Related Documentation have been expanded and updated.
- Text added on Commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and Safe Space Reporting as per updated policy requirements.

Policies superseded by this document

This document replaces the previous version of the Student Accessibility Policy dated October 2019.

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Scope

Who and which circumstances this policy covers

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.

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.

Regularly reviewing, and improving where possible, the effectiveness of our accessibility support mechanisms.

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Who and which circumstances this policy does not cover

This policy relates to students in a study context, and does not cover staff or students in other types of engagement with the Open University. Please see the [glossary](#) for a definition of who is considered as a student.

Members of staff can access the OU's [Code of Good Practice on the Employment of Disabled People](#) to understand how they or colleagues can be supported. This code also provides information about support for recruitment processes.

If you have another form of engagement with the university, you may find the [guidance on Disability from the OU's Equality and Diversity website](#) useful.

Related Documentation

Refer to the following documentation in conjunction with this document:

Further reading:

- [University Strategy 2022-2027](#)
- [Equality Act 2010](#) in England, Scotland and Wales
- [Disability Discrimination Act 1995](#) in Northern Ireland
- [Seven principles of Universal design](#)
- [Public Sector Bodies \(Websites and Mobile Applications\) \(No. 2\) Accessibility Regulations 2018](#)

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The Open University Student Charter Values

This document specifically aligns with the following Open University Student Charter Values:

1. We treat each other with courtesy and respect, respecting the rights of individuals to hold different beliefs and views and to express them appropriately.
2. We value diversity and challenge inequalities and we are stronger for doing so.
4. We communicate with each other in ways which are clear, relevant, accurate and timely.
5. We actively support student engagement in University decision-making, ensuring the feedback loop is closed, and commit to building partnership between staff and students.
7. We act ethically and transparently, providing and making use of fair and open means to deal with our concerns and grievances, learning from them.
8. We challenge bullying and harassment and are committed to supporting the mental health and wellbeing of all members of our University community.
10. As staff, we each play our role in enabling high-quality learning and advancing knowledge and understanding through research and scholarly activity, ensuring every student is supported.

Commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion at The Open University

Policies are inclusive of all Open University Students, Learners, Enquirers and Alumni, regardless of age, civil status, dependency or caring status, care experience, disability, family status, gender, gender identity, gender reassignment, marital status, marriage and civil partnerships, membership of the Traveller community, political opinion, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, socio-economic background, sex, sexual orientation or trades union membership status.

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Safe Space Reporting

The University is committed to creating a diverse and inclusive environment in which everyone feels safe and is treated with dignity and respect. Unlawful discrimination of any kind across our University will not be tolerated. Safe Space Reporting is available through [an online tool](#) through which staff, students, learners and visitors are encouraged to report incidents of assault, bullying, harassment, hate crime, or sexual harassment. It also provides information about what you can do if these incidents happen to you, or to someone you know, and where you can find support.

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.

For specific guidance on how this policy may relate to your personal circumstances, please contact your Student Support Team via StudentHome who are specially trained to advise on the implementation of policy.

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Policy

1. Purpose

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. 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.

1.1. The objectives of this policy are to:

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

2. Policy 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.

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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.
7. Aim to be compliant with the [Public Sector Bodies \(Websites and Mobile Applications\) \(No. 2\) Accessibility Regulations 2018](#), and to comply with our obligations under [the Equality Act 2010](#) in England, Scotland and Wales, the [Disability Discrimination Act 1995](#) for Northern Ireland or any other statutory duty or obligation.

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

8. Minimise and, where possible, remove undue administrative burdens and delays for students in obtaining support with accessibility needs.
9. 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.
10. 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.
11. 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.

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12. Make every effort to ensure that accessibility provisions are put in place in a timely and appropriate manner, where possible before these are encountered.
13. 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:

14. Provide effective, proactive and timely communication with students with accessibility needs from initial enquiry all the way to the completion of their studies.
15. 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.
16. 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.
17. Offer support in how to make effective use of accessibility-related provisions and engage relevant students in further developing such provisions where appropriate.

For specific guidance on how this policy may relate to your personal circumstances, please contact your Student Support Team via StudentHome.

Or, if you are studying a course delivered through FutureLearn and experiencing barriers related to this, you should contact support@futurelearn.com. If you have an issue related to OpenLearn, guidance can be found on the [Contact OpenLearn page](#).

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Glossary of terms

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.

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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 clarification

If you have any queries around the content provided within this document and how to interpret it, please contact your Student Support Team via StudentHome who are specially trained to advise on the implementation of policy. Alternatively, you can contact your Student Support Team through the 'Contact Us' option on the [Help Centre](#) if you are a current Open University student.

If you have any comments about this policy document and how it might be improved, please submit these to SPR-Policy-Team@open.ac.uk.

Alternative format for Student Accessibility Policy

If you require this policy document in an alternative format, please contact the Student Support Team via <http://www.open.ac.uk/contact/> (phone +44 (0)300 303 5303), or your dedicated Student Support Team via StudentHome if you are a current Open University student.

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