

# Changing your studies: Deferral and Withdrawal Policy from the Academic Year 2016/17 and 2017/18

---

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 What the policy covers

This document sets out the policy that will govern how we will respond if you want to take a break in your studies or wish to change your study plans. This policy applies to students registering for standalone modules and modules within qualifications from 1 August 2016 onwards.

### 1.2 Who this policy applies to

This policy applies to all undergraduate students except Apprenticeship students in England and to all postgraduate students except Research Students (who should refer to the [Research Students Handbook](#)).

### 1.3 It is a long document. Does it all apply to me?

This section and [Section 2](#) apply to all students.

If you are currently studying and you:

- started studying a module as a standalone course and you now want to count it towards a qualification - see section 3
- are studying for a qualification and you want to change that qualification or continue your studies on a standalone basis- see section 4
- are studying a module and you want to study a different module or an extra module – see section 5
- want to take defer or withdraw from study of a module – see section 6
- wish to take a break from your studies – see section 7
- want to give up your studies with The Open University – see section 8

## 2 How to change your study plans

### 2.1 Cancellation procedure

If, after reading this policy, you wish to consider changing your qualification, changing your module choice or deferring or withdrawing from your studies, you should refer to the [Cancellation Procedure](#) which explains the procedure you will need to follow in order to do this. It is important that you follow the correct procedure so that your request is properly recorded and can be dealt with promptly.

Published September 2016 for qualifications and modules starting from 1 August 2016. Reviewed February 2017.

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.

## 2.2 Important things to consider if you are changing your studies

Choosing your qualifications and modules is an important decision and you should take just as much care when you change your plans as you did when you made your initial decision. You will find the information about OU qualifications and modules that you need to help you plan your studies on [StudentHome](#).

## 2.3 Will there be any academic consequences of changing your studies?

There are a lot of things to consider when you change your studies; these are just some suggestions of the kind of things you should think about:

- Are there any academic reasons to change as you learn more about what you are good (or not so good) at and what interests you?
- How will it affect your study goals?
  - Will all your credit count?
  - Does the order you plan to study modules in matter?
  - Is there a final presentation of a module and this is your only chance to study it?
  - Will it affect your academic progress? (You may not be permitted to study again if you do not complete and pass any modules for 3 presentations in a row.)
  - Will it affect the class of your qualification?
  - Will the disruption affect your ability to study effectively?
  - Are there any time limits specified which you might not still be able to meet?
  - Will it affect any 'professional recognition' for your qualification?
- If you are a disabled student
  - Will any additional support needs be affected by the change?
  - Will it affect your eligibility for a Disabled Students' Allowance?

If you think you should change what you have planned to study you will find more information and support to help you with your decision if you follow the '[Changes and problems while you study](#)' link via the StudentHome [Help Centre](#) or you may wish to talk to a member of our student support team before taking action. When you contact us to make a change, we may refer you to a member of our student support team to discuss any implications if you have not done so already.

## **2.4 Will there be any financial consequences from your change of plans?**

This document needs to be considered in conjunction with the current [Fee Rules](#) available from the [Essential Documents](#) website which will explain your liability for fees and whether you may be eligible for any fee refund or fee credit. There may be substantial extra fees payable in some circumstances if you change your studies and it can also affect your eligibility for loans and grants.

There is more information about the financial consequences available from the [‘Changes and problems while you study’](#) section of the Student Help Centre.

You can also contact Student Fees or, if you are a student in Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, Scotland or Wales, your national centre for further information.

## **3 Changing from standalone module study to studying for a qualification**

### **3.1 Who this section applies to**

This section applies if you have registered for any modules as standalone courses which do not form part of any qualification and you now wish to link your modules to a qualification.

### **3.2 Linking modules to a qualification**

If you decide that you would like to start counting your module credit towards a qualification you may do so at any time. The qualification must be available for registration or declaration, you must satisfy any specified entry requirements, be able to complete the qualification within any specified time limit and be eligible to register for or declare that qualification.

### **3.3 Undergraduate students**

- a) If you are an undergraduate student and you have not studied with The Open University before 1st August 2012 you may be able to register for a qualification and apply to migrate your OU credit to that qualification. Please see the Qualification Choices information under the Next Module link on StudentHome for more information;
- b) If you are an undergraduate student who has studied with The Open University before 1st August 2012 you may either:
  - i) be able to register for a qualification and apply to migrate your OU credit to that qualification - please see the Qualification Choices information on the ‘Plan your studies’ link on StudentHome for more information; or
  - ii) declare a qualification and link your credit to it. If this option is available to you, you will be able to do this from the ‘Study’ link on StudentHome.

### **3.4 Withdrawal of declared undergraduate qualifications**

- a) If you are intending to declare a qualification, but have not yet done so, we recommend that you do this as soon as possible, so that we can keep you informed about any developments that are relevant to your qualification.
- b) Please note that most of the undergraduate qualifications that you are able to declare under the pre August 2012 academic framework will be withdrawn by 31st December 2017 unless an earlier withdrawal date has been notified. Qualifications in the Open Programme will still be available under that framework until 31st December 2019.
- c) If you have not declared and achieved a qualification by the date it is withdrawn you will no longer be able to claim it and you must either declare a different qualification that is still available or register for a qualification. You may not be able to count all the credit you have been awarded to the new qualification – so you should think carefully about whether any change to your study plans will affect your ability to achieve your qualification aims.

### **3.5 Postgraduate qualifications**

If you are a postgraduate student you may declare a qualification, subject to meeting any entry requirements for that qualification, and link your credit to it.

## **4 Changing or cancelling your qualification**

### **4.1 What this section covers**

This section sets out the arrangements that will apply to you if you have declared or registered for a qualification and wish to change your qualification or, if you intend to continue with your studies, but no longer wish to count them towards any qualification.

In order to change your qualification the new qualification must be available for registration or declaration, you must satisfy any specified entry requirements, be able to complete the qualification within any specified time limit and be eligible to register for or declare that qualification.

### **4.2 Changing your qualification if you are registered for an undergraduate qualification or an integrated masters' degree**

#### **4.2.1 How to change your qualification**

You may change the qualification you are registered for at any time by telling us following the [Cancellation Procedure](#). If you are receiving a loan or a grant you may also need to notify the loan or grant provider and the change of qualification may affect your eligibility.

#### **4.2.2 Changing your qualification before you have started any studies**

You must contact us to change your qualification. If you also want to change the modules you have enrolled for please see [section 5](#) below;

### **4.2.3 Changing your qualification after you have started your studies**

- a) You must contact us to change your qualification;
- b) It is your responsibility to check with us whether any credit you have been awarded can be counted to the new qualification;
- c) If you are enrolled for a module that does not count towards your new qualification and you wish to continue to study it as a standalone course, you may do so;
- d) If you also want to change the modules you have enrolled for please see section 5 below.

### **4.2.4 Cancelling your qualification and continuing to study**

- a) This paragraph applies if you intend to continue with your studies, but no longer wish to count them towards any qualification. Please see section 8 below if you wish to give up your Open University studies completely.
- b) If you are enrolled for a module you wish to continue to study, but cancel your qualification registration, you may do so and study that module as a standalone course;
- c) If you wish to change your choice of module after cancelling your qualification please see section 5 below.

## **4.3 Changing your qualification if you have declared an undergraduate or postgraduate qualification**

### **4.3.1 Changing your qualification after you have started your studies**

- a) You may change the qualification you have declared and are linking your credit to at any time by following the Cancellation Procedure to tell us or, where available, through your StudentHome page. If you are receiving a loan or a grant you may also need to notify the loan or grant provider and the change of qualification may affect your eligibility.
- b) You must either contact us or update your qualification(s) on StudentHome to change your qualification on our records;
- c) It is your responsibility to check with us whether any credit you have been awarded can be counted to the new qualification and that you can complete the qualification within the time limits;
- d) If you are an undergraduate student who is eligible for transitional arrangements the new qualification must comply with the eligibility requirements at the start of and throughout the transitional period in order for you to remain eligible. Please see the Fee Rules for details;
- e) If you are registered for a module that does not count towards your new qualification and you wish to continue to study it, you may do so;

- f) If you also want to change the modules you have registered for please see section 5 below.

#### **4.3.2 Changing to a registered qualification**

If you are an undergraduate student you may be able to register for a qualification and apply to migrate your OU credit to that qualification. If you wish to transfer to a registered qualification please see the Qualification Choices information on the 'Plan your studies' link on StudentHome. If you are eligible for transitional arrangements you must contact us to discuss your plans if you wish to transfer to a registered qualification.

#### **4.3.3 Cancelling your qualification declaration and continuing to study**

- a) This paragraph applies if you intend to continue with your studies, but no longer wish to count them towards any qualification. Please see section 8 below if you wish to give up your Open University studies completely.
- b) If you are registered for a module you wish to continue to study, but no longer want to link the credit for that module towards your qualification, you may do so. You may be able to make this change yourself from your StudentHome page. If you are an undergraduate student eligible for transitional arrangements you must contact us to do this and it may affect your eligibility for transitional arrangements;

## **5 Changing the modules that you are studying**

### **5.1 This section applies if you wish to change your study plans after you have registered or enrolled for your modules, by:**

- changing the modules that you study;
- reducing the number of modules you are studying, or studying modules with a lower credit value;
- increasing the number of modules you are studying, or studying modules with a higher credit value;

### **5.2 Changing modules before the final enrolment date**

- a) Subject to the rules that apply to your qualification (if any) you may change your module at any time up to the final enrolment date which is published in the module description. You can do this by contacting us on 0300 303 5303.
- b) If you wish to add additional modules, or study modules with a higher credit value, there will be an additional fee payable and you may need to notify your loan or grant provider.
- c) If you wish to study fewer modules, or modules with a lower credit value, you may be eligible for a fee refund or a fee credit. Please see the current [Fee Rules](#) for details.

### **5.3 Changing modules after the final enrolment date and before module start date**

- a) If you no longer wish to study one or more of the modules you are enrolled or registered for you must tell us before the module start date or you may become liable for fees.
- b) You cannot change a module or apply to study additional modules after the final enrolment date is passed, unless a late registration is approved under paragraph (c) below, paragraph 5.4(e) or paragraph 6.6(c) applies.
- c) If you wish to change your enrolment or registration to a different module or to study additional modules you must contact us and request a late registration. This will be subject to the availability of places and to you satisfying one or more of the late registration conditions.

### **5.4 Changing modules after the module start date**

- a) If you no longer wish to study one or more of the modules you are enrolled or registered for you must tell us as soon as possible. The circumstances in which fees may be refunded after module start date are limited and become more limited the later you leave the change. Please see the current Fee Rules for details.
- b) You cannot change a module or apply to study additional modules after the final enrolment date has passed, unless paragraph (c) or (e) or paragraph 6.6 (c) below applies.
- c) If you wish to change your enrolment or registration to a different module or to study additional modules within the same presentation you must contact us and request a late registration. This will be subject to the availability of places and to you satisfying one or more of the late registration conditions. Requests to change to different modules or study additional modules will not be considered if received more than 28 days after module start date. If a request to change is accepted under this paragraph the change will be treated for fee liability purposes as having been made on the day before the module start date.
- d) Only one request for change of module(s) enrolment or registration may be approved under paragraph (c) above in any one module presentation period.
- e) A request to change a module enrolment or registration will be approved under paragraph (c) above if it is made following the notification of a fail result in a previous module and that notification is received after the final enrolment date and not more than 28 days after the module start date.

## **6 Deferring and withdrawing from study of a module**

### **6.1 What this section covers**

This section applies if you wish to

- defer study of a module, either before or after it has started and before the final deferral date, until a later presentation;
- cease to study a module either before or after it has started and before the final deferral date.

### **6.2 Definitions**

#### **Deferral**

Deferral means ceasing to study a module with the aim of returning to complete your studies of that module later. It can only take place after you have enrolled or registered for the module, and before the final deferral date. This date will be the last working day before you sit the examination or submit the end of module assessment, or for modules which do not have an end of module assessment, the last working day before the final TMA (Tutor Marked Assignment) submission deadline.

#### **Withdrawal**

Withdrawal means ceasing to study a module when you do not intend to resume study of that module. It can only take place after you have enrolled for the module, and before the final deferral date which is the last working day before you sit the examination or submit the end- of-module assessment or;

If you defer a module and you do not return to study that module within 13 months of the start date of the module that you deferred, it will be treated as a withdrawal.

### **6.3 Time Limits**

If you are thinking of deferring or withdrawing from your studies you should give particular attention to the time limits for your qualification (if any) and for returning to your studies after deferral.

NOTE: If you are an undergraduate student and you have declared a qualification under the old academic framework, it will be withdrawn by 31st December 2017 unless an earlier withdrawal date has been notified. The Open Degree will still be available under that framework until 31st December 2019. If you have not achieved your qualification by the date it is withdrawn you will no longer be able to claim it and you must transfer to a different qualification that is available. You may not be able to count all the credit you have been awarded to the new qualification – so you should think carefully about whether a deferral will affect your ability to achieve your qualification aims.



#### **6.4 Deferral or withdrawal before module start date**

- a) You may defer or withdraw from any module before the start date of that module. This will be treated as a cancellation of the module. Your fee liability will be adjusted to exclude the module you have deferred from and you will need to re-enrol or re-register for the module when you are ready to resume your studies.
- b) If you plan to take a full year out from all your Open University studies please see section 7: Taking a study break.
- c) If you have previously deferred or withdrawn from a module you are permitted to do so again, but any time limits for fee credits and assessment banking will be calculated from the start date of the original module and will not be extended.

#### **6.5 Deferral or withdrawal after module start date**

- a) If you wish to defer or withdraw you must notify us of your intention by following the [Cancellation Procedure](#).
- b) A deferral or withdrawal will be approved subject to the following conditions:
  - i) the University records that it has provided you with advice on
    - the impact your decision to defer or withdraw may have on your academic progress, including any impact on professional recognition; and
    - the impact your decision to defer or withdraw may have on your liability for fees and your eligibility for financial support; and
  - ii) you confirm that you have received that advice and wish to proceed with the deferral or withdrawal.

Please note that if you withdraw from a module you may not be able to use a fee credit for the study of a different module unless the module you have withdrawn from is in the first presentation that you have studied with The Open University.

- c) Please see the current [Fee Rules](#) for full details of the conditions you are required to meet in order to use a fee credit towards the fees for a different module.

#### **6.6 Completing a module after deferral**

- a) You have the following options to complete a module after deferral.
  - i) Provided your module is eligible, you may retain the scores from assessments you have completed, carry these forward to a future presentation of the same module, and complete the assessment requirements during that future presentation. We call this process 'assessment banking'. If you choose this option, you have to bank all

scores before the deferral date including any blank scores for assignments that you did not submit. You may not resubmit any assessments for which a score has been banked. Please refer to the [Assessment Banking Rules from the Academic Year 2016/17 onwards](#) for the full rules which apply if you wish to take this option.

- ii) You may submit a request to cancel the scores from assessments you have completed, and resubmit all assessments (i.e. start again). We call this process deferral without assessment banking.
- b) If you defer a module you must return to study it within 13 months from the start of the presentation of the deferred module. If you do not return to study that module within that period, you will be treated as having withdrawn from that module, even if you intend to study it again at a later date.
- c) If you have deferred a module with assessment banking we recommend that you apply as soon as possible to enrol or register for the next available presentation of that module in order to ensure that a place will be available for you to return to study. You may, subject to time limit in paragraph 6.6(b) and to the availability of places, apply to enrol or register to resume a module deferred with assessment banking at any time up to and including the cut-off date in the new presentation for the last assessment for which you have banked the score. Please note that if you apply to enrol or register to resume the module after the published final enrolment date we do not guarantee that a place will be available for you to return to study.
- d) You may only defer a module with assessment banking on one occasion. When you return to study you may not defer that module again with assessment banking.
- e) If you wish to defer a module that you have returned to studying following a previous deferral you must contact us using the [Cancellation Procedure](#). You will not be eligible for any further fee credit and it may affect your liability for student loans or eligibility for grants.
- f) If you defer a module it will be counted as a module that is not completed. If you do not complete at least one module successfully in three consecutive presentations of study you will not normally be allowed to enrol or register for another module.

## **7 Taking a study break**

### **7.1 Definition**

A study break means an academic year during which you do not commence study on any new module. This means that you will not remain enrolled or registered on any modules starting in that academic year beyond 14 days after the module start date. An academic year is a calendar year starting on 1st August and ending on 31st July.

## **7.2 Approved study breaks**

- a) You may apply for a study break to be approved. An approved study break means that the University will be able to take account of your plans in our communications with you and ensure that you continue to receive appropriate information in relation to your planned study. Approved study breaks will not count towards the period after which the University will withdraw your registration as a student of the University in 8.2 (iii).
- b) A study break will be approved for one academic year at a time (with the possibility of subsequent extensions as per Section 7.4 b (ii) below) subject to the following conditions:
  - i) you have notified the University of your intention to take a study break;
  - ii) the University records that it has provided you with advice on the impact your decision to take a study break may have on your academic progress, including any impact on professional recognition;
  - iii) you confirm that you have received that advice.
- c) An approved study break can be requested during or in advance of the academic year the study break is to commence.
- d) If you are registered on a qualification, during your study break you can access relevant services associated with the qualification as well as services provided to all students of the University.

## **7.3 Unapproved study breaks**

You may take a study break of one academic year only without seeking any approval. An unapproved break means that the University will not be aware that you are not intending to study in that academic year. This means that you may not receive information that is appropriate for or relevant to your situation and plans. You may also not be included in important communications about changes that may affect your future study. An unapproved study break will count towards the period after which the University will withdraw your registration as a student of the University in 8.2 (iii).

## **7.4 Duration of study break**

- a) If you wish to do so, you may return to study earlier than the end of a study break. It will cease automatically as soon as you enrol or register for a module.
- b) If you wish to take a study break of more than one academic year you may either:
  - i) apply before the end of an approved study break for an extension of the current study break
  - ii) apply for an approved study break before the end of an unapproved study break

iii) take an unapproved study break at the end of an approved study break (not recommended)

provided that you may not have more than one unapproved study break within any one continuous period of study breaks.

- c) if you do not enrol or register and remain enrolled or registered beyond 14 days after the final module start date for a module in two successive academic years, unless you have extended this period with approved study breaks, you will cease to be a registered student of the University and you will be unable to continue to access services that are provided to students.
- d) If you cease to be a registered student of the University, we will retain your study record and details of any credit you have been awarded and you may subsequently register with the University to continue your studies under the conditions of registration and regulations which apply to a student commencing their studies at the time of that subsequent registration.

## **7.5 Time Limits**

The time limits for achieving Open University qualifications do not normally require students to study continuously and many students take advantage of this to enable them to fit their study around other events in their lives. A study break does not, however, extend the time limit within which a qualification must be achieved.

There are some qualifications where time limits may be much shorter than normal, for example because of time limits set for professional recognition, or because the qualification is being withdrawn. If you are studying for one of these qualifications the opportunity for a study break may be very limited or not available.

## **8 Withdrawing from your studies**

### **8.1 Definition**

Withdrawing from your studies means that you are ceasing your studies and you do not intend to undertake any further study with The Open University. If you withdraw from study, you will cease to be a student of the University.

### **8.2 Notification of withdrawal**

In order to withdraw from your studies, you must follow the Cancellation Procedure.

- i) If you are not currently studying a module you may withdraw at any time.
- ii) If you wish to withdraw from your studies and you are currently studying a module, you must withdraw before the final deferral date. If you notify us of your withdrawal after the final deferral date it will only take effect after the module presentation has ended.

- iii) If you do not enrol or register for a module within two successive academic years, you will cease to be a student of the University, unless you have had a study break approved.

### **8.3 Withdrawal due to failure of a previous module**

- a) If you have enrolled or registered for further study and receive notification of a failure of a module you should contact us to discuss the options that are available to you.
- b) If you contact us after the module start date to withdraw from your studies following the notification of a fail result in a previous module the withdrawal will take effect from the date of your request unless paragraph (c) applies
- c) A withdrawal from your studies will take effect as at the day before the start date of a current module in the following conditions:
  - i) you have received a fail result for a module studied in your first OU presentation and had not been notified of that result prior to the start of your current module;
  - ii) following receipt of that fail result you wish to withdraw from all OU study and do not intend to return to study within the next 2 academic years;
  - iii) you have requested to withdraw from all OU study within 28 days of the start of the current module;
  - iv) the University records that it has provided you with advice on the impact of your decision to withdraw and the range of options that are available as an alternative.

### **8.4 Effect of withdrawal**

- a) When you withdraw we will retain your record of study and details of any academic credit that you have been awarded.
- b) If you withdraw before you have completed all the modules for which you registered at the time, you may be eligible for a fee credit or a fee refund as set out in the current Fee Rules. Withdrawal does not lead to the cancellation of fee credits towards future study and if you decide to return to study during the period of validity of any fee credit, you may be able to use that credit towards the fees for further study.
- c) You may, if you are otherwise eligible to do so, apply to study with The Open University at a later date. Any subsequent registration will be under the conditions of registration and regulations which apply to a student commencing their studies at that time.

## **Contact details**

### **Student Recruitment**

The Open University  
PO Box 197  
Milton Keynes  
MK7 6BJ

Phone +44 (0)300 303 5303  
or email us from our website [www.open.ac.uk/contact](http://www.open.ac.uk/contact)

### **The Open University in Wales**

18 Custom House Street  
Cardiff  
CF10 1AP

Phone +44 (0)29 2047 1170

### **I siaradwyr Cymraeg**

Os rydych yn siarad Cymraeg a fyddai'n well gennych trafod eich anghenion drwy gyfrwng y Gymraeg, cysylltwch â'r Brifysgol Agored yng Nghymru yng Nghaerdydd os gwelwch yn dda ffôn +44 (0)29 2047 1170

### **The Open University in Scotland**

10 Drumsheugh Gardens  
Edinburgh  
EH3 7QJ

Phone +44 (0)131 226 3851

### **The Open University in Ireland**

110 Victoria Street  
Belfast  
BT1 3GN

Phone +44 (0)28 9032 3718

## **Summary of changes from the 2012/13 version to the current version**

### **September 2016**

1. This 2016/17 version produced for use in conjunction with the 2016/17 Fee Rules and 2016/17 Assessment Banking Rules.
2. Format changes to reduce repetition and the length of the document.
3. 'Deferral' has been redefined to distinguish it from 'withdrawal' [of study of a module].
4. Clarification that study break refers to a standard academic year in which no new study is started. Clarification of study break periods where there is a combination of approved and unapproved study breaks. Consequential amendments to return to study after a deferral.
5. Clarification of requirements for notification of withdrawal from studies.
6. Contact details added.
7. Clarification that this policy does not apply to Apprenticeship students.
8. Redefinition of final deferral date to include single component assessment modules without an end of module assessment.

### **February 2017**

1. Period of validity extended.
2. Clarification that this procedure is not applicable for Apprenticeship students in England.