

## Alternative format

If you require the Student Computing Policy in an alternative format, contact your [Student Support Team](#) or Apprenticeship Enrolment and Support Team. Research degree students should contact the Research Degrees Office at [research-degrees-office@open.ac.uk](mailto:research-degrees-office@open.ac.uk). See also section '[Contacting us](#)' below.

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## Summary of policy

The Open University Student Computing Policy sets out the ways you are expected to use Open University computing services. 'Computing services' means all computer systems provided by The Open University, including software, hosted computing services and the associated IT and telecommunication hardware covering the transmission, storage, organisation, presentation, generation, processing or analysis of data and information in electronic format over our network.

This policy will help you to understand your responsibilities when using a computer to support your studies, including:

- participation in online activities
- publication of materials using Open University supplied services
- communicating electronically
- the protection of Open University computer systems, services, and networks
- expected standards of behaviour
- the consequences of breaching this policy.

The use of social media is covered by our [Social Media Policy](#)

If you do not comply with the Open University Student Computing Policy we may bring disciplinary action against you under the [Code of Practice for Student Discipline](#).

If you have any queries about this policy, please see '[Contacting us](#)' below.

For questions about social media use at The Open University, contact the Social Media Engagement Team at [social-media@open.ac.uk](mailto:social-media@open.ac.uk).

## Scope

### Who this policy covers

This policy applies to you if you have permission to sign into Open University websites and systems and are not a member of staff. If you are both a member of staff and a student or learner, this policy only applies to you when you are signed in as a student or learner.

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Throughout this policy, when we refer to 'study' or 'study materials' we include modules as well as other forms of University study (e.g., short courses and vocational qualifications).

Vocational Qualification (VQ) learners have access to student policy information and the Computing Helpdesk. They can study from outside the UK and can obtain materials in alternative formats but may not have access to some of the other facilities mentioned in this policy, including access to StudentHome and an Open University email address.

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## Who this policy does not cover

This policy does not apply to you if:

- you do not have Open University sign-in credentials, including VQ students and some students in secure institutions (SiSE).
- you are a member of Open University staff, except if you are signed in as a student or learner,
- you are a learner studying a Professional Development (PD) Course who should refer to [Computing Guidance: for Professional Development \(PD\) learners \(2023/24\)](#).
- You are studying a microcredential. Please refer to [Terms and Conditions: Microcredentials](#).

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## The Open University Student Charter Values

The [Student Charter](#) was developed in partnership by The Open University and the OU Students Association. It sets out our shared values and the commitments we make to each other as a community of staff and students. This document has been developed with the Student Charter values as its foundation.

## Introduction

To study with The Open University, you will need and be able to use a computer and have internet access. This policy explains what you need to know about using a computer with an internet connection to study and communicate, where you can get help and what your responsibilities are when online.

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# Policy

## 1. Using a computer for your studies

### 1.1 What you will need a computer for

Your study will require the use of a computer and an internet connection for several reasons; for example, so that you can access online module materials, participate in forums, publish information (for example via blogs and ePortfolio), find student support information, view your personal record, undertake and submit assessments, book and attend tutorials and to contact us.

### 1.2 Computing requirements for study

1.2.1 There are minimum requirements for the specification of computers and internet connections that apply to all modules, for more help see [Computing equipment](#) in the Computing Guide. In addition, you should check the 'Computing Requirements' section of the description on the online prospectus (if applicable) for any requirements specific to the module that you wish to study. Since technology is developing rapidly, the general specifications may change over the time that you study with us, so you should check these each time you consider studying a new module.

### 1.3 Study outside the UK

The following clauses only apply to individuals planning to study with The Open University when resident (temporarily or permanently) outside of the UK and Ireland.

1.3.1 To be able to access study materials and learning events via the digital services provided by The Open University, you will need to sign into your student account: this will enable you to engage with your studies. In most cases, the ability to sign into your student account and use all digital services will be fully accessible. However, in a small number of geographical locations (please see The Open University guidance "[Help with signing in to OU systems](#)"), access may be restricted or not be permissible without use of a VPN (Virtual Private Network).

1.3.2 If you are planning to study with us from outside the UK and Ireland, please see "[Help with signing into OU systems](#)" for information about current restrictions. These restrictions may impact upon your continued registration with The Open University,

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in line with our [Conditions of Registration](#), [Conditions of Registration \(Short Courses\)](#), [Conditions of Registration for Apprentices](#)). You should contact us with any concerns (see [Contacting us](#)' below)

- 1.3.3 If you are studying in a country that currently has restrictions on access and requires a VPN, The Open University is not responsible for which VPN provider you opt to use to sign into your student account. It is your responsibility to ensure the VPN provider you use is compatible with the location you are in or intend to travel to. It is also your responsibility to ensure you are aware of any legal requirements or restrictions in the location you choose to study in when using a VPN to access your studies.
- 1.3.4 If you are unable to access these digital services via a VPN because of restrictions in your place of residency, then you will be offered a full or partial refund of your module or course fees. This is limited to locations where VPN access is either prohibited or restricted by law. If you are unsure how this will affect your studies, please contact us (see [Contacting us](#)' below)
- 1.3.5 If there are VPN providers available in your place of residency (albeit with a limited service), it is your responsibility to ensure that you make use of these VPN providers when studying. If you are unsure how this will affect your studies, please contact us with any concerns (see section, [Contacting us](#)' below)
- 1.3.6 A refund will not be provided in the event of any technical issues that may arise with your VPN.
- 1.3.7 If you are travelling and choose to study in another location, it is your responsibility to ensure you can access your study materials online by arranging to have access via a suitable VPN provider, or by downloading materials prior to travelling. If you are unsure how this will affect your studies, please contact us (see [Contacting us](#)' below).

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## 2. Computing support

- 2.1 Once you have registered with us, you will have access to help and advice from a dedicated [computing helpdesk](#), the [Help Centre](#) and the Library.

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- 2.2 If you require additional support to use IT equipment because of a disability or additional need and want help or information about using a computer, go to the [Help Centre accessibility pages](#). There is also an [accessibility guide](#) to using a computer for study in the [Open University Computing Guide](#).
- 2.3 You should be aware of how to take care of your health and safety when you are working on a computer. Further information can be found in the ['Using a computer and your wellbeing'](#) section in the Help Centre.
- 2.4 If you see any content on a website or online service provided by us that you feel is counter to this Policy, then please report this (see ['Contacting us'](#) below). If you see anything on social media that is managed by us that is counter to this policy, please see section 7.5 and 7.6 of the [Social Media policy](#).
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### **3. Your Open University computing account**

#### **3.1 Your Open University Computer Username (OUCU) and password**

- 3.1.1 You will be provided with a secure Open University computing account when you register. This account is accessed using an Open University Computer Username (OUCU) and password that will be issued to you. This will give you access to the Open University computing services you need for your studies. You should not use your account for any business or personal purposes.
- 3.1.2 You can set a different username, but it should remain a true representation of your real name so that your tutor can identify you.
- 3.1.3 You will be in breach of this policy if your selected username may be considered offensive.
- 3.1.4 Your password must be in line with accepted good practice. The Help Centre has [advice on choosing suitable passwords](#).
- 3.1.5 You must not share the contact details of any member of the University, student or staff, including computer username and email address, without their express permission.

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## 3.2 Keeping your account secure

- 3.2.1 You should always keep your account secure and confidential; your account details should not be accessible to anyone else. Please visit the Help Centre's ['Safe and secure computing' pages](#) for up-to-date information about keeping your account secure. If you have an advocate who acts on your behalf, you should not disclose your account details; see section 1.9 in our [Advocacy Policy](#).
- 3.2.2 If you think the security of your Open University computing account has been compromised, for example if somebody else knows your password, you must notify the University Computing Helpdesk by [completing this form](#) or calling +44 (0)1908 653972 as soon as possible. You may be held responsible for fraudulent activity if someone else accesses your account because they have been given your sign on credentials and you haven't informed us.
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## 4. Sharing information in online activities

### 4.1 Display of personal information

Your Open University computing account enables you to participate in online activities, which may include compulsory activities as part of your studies. In most cases, when you participate in these activities, your name, preferred email address, your Open University Computer Username (OUCU) and the content you contribute, will be displayed online to Students and Open University staff who have a need to see the information concerned.

If you want others to know a bit about you when you contribute to forums, you will be able to update your 'online appearance profile', for example so that it shows your social media ID and interests. Your online appearance profile can be accessed from various locations. Full details are provided in the [Profile section](#) of the [Open University Computing Guide](#).

### 4.2 Retention of messages

Messages sent or received through University systems form part of the administrative records of the Open University and will be held on our Customer Relationship Management system to help us support you. The [Student Privacy Notice](#) sets out how we use your personal data.

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### 4.3. Sharing personal information

When working online, you should carefully consider the information that you are sharing with others. For example, do not share personal information such as your home address or bank details. More information is available in the '[Conduct when communicating online](#)' section of the [Open University Computing Guide](#).

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## 5. Online communication

### 5.1 Contacting you by email

You must provide us with a valid email address, which we will use to correspond with you. You must inform the Open University of any changes to your preferred email address by updating your personal profile on [StudentHome](#). Students studying modules or working towards a qualification will be provided with an Open University email address before their module starts, but you are not obliged to use this as your contact address. For more information see the [Your OU email address](#) section in the Help Centre.

We will use your preferred email address to communicate with you, and so you need to read and respond to these messages by any deadline given. We do not accept liability for messages that were not received, for example because your email was not working, you changed your email address without informing us or because a junk or clutter filter meant it was not directly in your inbox.

If you are receiving marketing messages, you can opt-out or update your preferences in your [StudentHome profile](#). The [Student Privacy notice](#) sets out how we use your personal data.

### 5.2 Communicating with you by the Bulletin Board

We primarily use email for messages relating to your studies where you need to take personal action, for example, to meet a deadline. In addition, you will also find more general 'bulletin board' messages on StudentHome and on your module website. It is your responsibility to regularly check these. Note that you can opt out of some messages, for example, those that are marketing related.

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### 5.3 Communicating with you through your study websites

We will communicate with you through your study website, forums, and news feeds and so you should check your study website regularly. If you would like to receive forum posts by email, please subscribe to the forum using the 'subscribe' button.

### 5.4 Conduct when communicating online

The [Student Charter](#) sets out the responsibilities we have to each other as members of the Open University community. In addition, the principles of communicating with other students in Open University collaborative spaces are outlined in the '[Conduct when communicating online](#)' section of the [Open University Computing Guide](#). When using social media as a student, you must adhere to the [Social Media Policy](#)

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## 6. Protection of Open University computer systems

### 6.1 Keeping your computer and our systems safe

Working online may expose both you and our computer systems to external threats, unless you take suitable precautions against malicious software (for example, computer viruses) that may jeopardise the integrity, performance or reliability of our computing services.

To reduce the risks of such threats, you should ensure that you:

- a) Have up to date virus protection software and do not forward junk mail to others or encourage others to do so, since malicious software is often spread this way.
- b) Treat email attachments with caution, as they may carry viruses. If in doubt, do not open suspicious emails. For further information please see our guide to [Safe and Secure Computing](#).
- c) Avoid hacking sites or downloading hacking or evidence eliminating software. Do not attempt to hack into Open University computer users' accounts or Open University systems.
- d) Do not intentionally visit internet sites that are likely to contain obscene, racist, hateful or material likely to be seen as offensive, nor download or share such material via Open University systems.

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- e) Do not publish any content, for example, via blogs, forum contributions, ePortfolios and so on, that might contain material that is defamatory, obscene, discriminatory, illegal, incites hatred or could damage the reputation of the Open University or breach copyright of The Open University or any other person or organisation.
- f) Do not do anything that might result in sustained high-volume network traffic to our network, for example by sending emails to large numbers of addresses, as this might prevent others from accessing the network. We may block or quarantine any email or online posts if we identify it as a potential threat to our network.
- g) Your OU email address is intended to support your study. Incidental and occasional personal use is permitted, but shouldn't be used for regular personal activities, such as online shopping.
- h) If you think you may have compromised our network, you must contact the Computing Helpdesk immediately. We may investigate any breach or potential breach by accessing all relevant records and other evidence.

Further information on safe computing can be found in the [‘Safe Computing’](#) section of the [Open University Computing Guide](#) and the [‘Safe and secure computing’](#) section of the [Help Centre](#).

## 6.2 Blocking content

We may delete or hide any item that you publish via our network and systems, such as forum posts, blogs or ePortfolios, where we believe they do not meet this policy. Further information can be found in the [‘Conduct when communicating online’](#) section of the Open University Computing Guide.

## 7. Standards of behaviour

### 7.1 Acceptable standards

When using our computer services, you should observe the standards of behaviour as outlined below:

- a) That you should only use our computing services for the purpose of your study with us unless we have agreed otherwise. This includes any online storage space provided as part of your studies, such as the ePortfolio system, which should only be used for storing items related to your studies.

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- b) When you study with us, you agree to follow any licensing agreements for software provided.
- c) You should not send or publish offensive, obscene, abusive, libellous, defamatory or harassing material or anything via our computing services that might damage The Open University's reputation.
- d) You should not present your own opinions or any facts or other information from your own sources as if they are those of The Open University or made on its behalf.
- e) Any software, website content, study materials or other information provided by us must not be copied for non-study use without prior permission from us or any relevant third-party supplier. You should not share online any questions relating to assessment nor any completed assessments. For further details, please see section 3.3, Enabling Plagiarism, in our [Academic Conduct Policy](#).

If you realise you have unintentionally enacted any of (a) to (e) above, you should determine if you can undo what you have done, for example, delete a forum or message post. Otherwise, you should contact us and explain the situation immediately (see section 10, ['Contacting us'](#) below).

- f) You should comply with [The Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1998](#). This means that you should not infringe copyright relating to materials and software provided by us. This includes storing copies of copyright material on any online space provided as part of your studies (for example the ePortfolio system).
- g) You agree to follow the requirements of the [Computer Misuse Act \(1990\)](#), the [Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994](#), data protection legislation and other relevant Acts.
- h) You agree to abide by the policies of our partners where you are using their services or facilities through us. In these cases, you will be subject to the regulations of the institution you are accessing the services from. In addition, cloud services may also have policies for users of their services.
- i) Users accessing our computing services from outside the UK must ensure that they abide by all local laws. You should ensure that you have the consent of the owner of the computer/network owner, for example if you are accessing our services from work.

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- j) You should not promote any product or service via our computing services for which you are paid either financially or in kind. See also section 2.1 of the [Social Media Policy](#)
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## 8. Monitoring

- 8.1 In exceptional circumstances, we may use records of your study activity and your contact with us to carry out our work or meet our legal obligations. The [Student Privacy Notice](#) describes how we will manage these records.
- 8.2 For security and maintenance purposes, authorised individuals within The Open University's central IT teams may monitor online services, systems and network traffic at any time to ensure compliance with this policy, other security policies, and the effective operation of The Open University's systems.
- 8.3 As an institution of higher education, we have a statutory duty to prevent people being drawn into terrorism. If the use of Open University computer equipment, network, or online services and systems gives rise to a concern that a person may be at risk, this may result in action being taken in accordance with the [Open University Prevent Principles](#).
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## 9. Non-Compliance

- 9.1 Any breach of this policy may undermine the effective running of The Open University and its ability to meet its duties and legal obligations.
- 9.2 If you do not manage your Open University computing account as stated in Section 3.1 above, it may adversely affect your learning experience. For more serious breaches of the policy, such as those related to security (section 3.2) or standards of behaviour (section 7), action may be taken under the [Code of Practice for Student Discipline](#). It may also be the case that your conduct and/or action(s) may be unlawful, in which case, we may inform the appropriate authorities.
- 9.3 Always ensure that you keep copies of any work you submit to us online in case there are technical problems, and you need to resubmit the work.

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## Contacting us

Please use the [contacts page](#) to contact your Student Support Team or Apprenticeship Enrolment and Support Team.

Research degree students should contact the Research Degrees Office at [research-degrees-office@open.ac.uk](mailto:research-degrees-office@open.ac.uk).

## Feedback

Comments and feedback about this policy and how it might be improved are welcomed.

Please submit these to [SPR-Policy-Team@open.ac.uk](mailto:SPR-Policy-Team@open.ac.uk)

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## 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 Open 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.

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## Glossary

### **Antivirus protection software**

Antivirus protection software is designed to detect and remove viruses and other kinds of malicious software from your computer or laptop. Malicious software - known as malware - is code that can harm your computers and laptops, and the data on them.

### **Blog**

A blog, short for weblog, is a website or web page, typically one run by an individual or small group, which is written in an informal or conversational style.

### **Bulletin Board**

An electronic notice board, accessed via StudentHome or module website, where the University will post study-related topics that might interest you.

### **Customer Relationship Management system**

The administrative student record system that we use when you contact us. This allows us to keep a record of email and telephone conversation with you along with a note of any action we have taken in response.

### **ePortfolio**

An electronic, curated collection of material designed to provide evidence of your developing professional competence.

### **Hacking**

The gaining of unauthorised access to data in a system or individual computer.

### **Objectional material**

Text, illustrations, audio or video material that promotes racist, sexist, homophobic, violent or other unacceptable opinions or is pornographic, horrific, cruel or dehumanising or that is otherwise contrary to the student charter.

### **Open University computing services**

All computer systems provided by The Open University, including software, hosted computing services and the associated IT and telecommunication hardware covering the transmission, storage, organisation, presentation, generation, processing or analysis of data and information in electronic format over our network.

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## **Open University Computer Username (OUCU)**

In most cases, when you register to study with us you will be issued with an Open University Computer Username (OUCU) that, along with your password, will allow you to sign on to our computing services.

## **Preferred email address**

This is the email address provided by you that we will use to communicate with out about your studies.

## **Social media**

For the purposes of this policy, 'social media' is defined as websites and online applications that enable users to create and share content, and/or participate in social networking. These social media tools enable users to share ideas, opinions, knowledge and interests and use of them includes posting, commenting, instant messaging and sharing links, images and files.

## **Study websites**

These are module- or qualification-related websites that are provided to support you with your studies and include teaching material, study timetable and so on. You will only have access to these websites while you are an active student on that qualification or module.

## **Virtual Private Network (VPN)**

A Virtual Private Network (VPN) is an encrypted network connection that allows remote users to securely access an organisation's services. This means that the security of the data is ensured even though the network itself may not be trusted.

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## Related Documentation

Refer to the following documentation in conjunction with this document:

- [Advocacy Policy](#)
- [Code of Practice for Student Discipline](#)
- [Code of Practice for Student Assessment](#)
- [Academic Conduct Policy](#)
- [Student Privacy Notice](#)
- [Safeguarding - Ensuring the Safety of Children and Vulnerable/Protected Adults](#)
- [Dignity and Respect Policy](#)
- [Prevent Principles](#)
- [Social Media Policy](#)
- [Computing help \(Help Centre\)](#)
- [Open University Computing Guide](#)

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### Additional support

- [Being digital: skills for life online](#) (Open University Library)
- [Digital skills: succeeding in a digital world](#) (OpenLearn free course)
- [Social Media Toolkit](#)
- [How to report bullying and harassment on social media](#)  
(via [Dignity and Respect Policy](#))
- [A template for community guidelines](#) (for student group administrators)

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## Summary of significant changes since last version

The student computing policy has been significantly rewritten to ensure that the policy reflects current practices, is more comprehensive and easier to understand. The main changes are:

- a) The 'Summary of policy' section has been rewritten to be clearer about what is covered in the policy, what students' responsibilities are and has been updated to reflect the changes made in the policy (see below).
- b) In the 'Feedback' section, information has been added about how readers can provide feedback on the policy.
- c) The 'Scope' section has been rewritten for clarity.
- d) The 'Related Documentation' section has updated and additional links.
- e) The 'Open University Student Charter Values' section has been replaced with new wording that will be used on all policies.
- f) The Introduction has been rewritten to improve clarity and reflect current practice.
- g) Section 1.1, 'What you need a computer for' has been simplified to reflect computer use as a core study tool.
- h) Section 1.2, 'Computing requirements for study' has been simplified and advisory information replaced with a reference to the computing guide and module specific requirements to avoid duplication. The information relating to study outside the UK has been rewritten and moved to a new section 1.3.
- i) Section 2.2 has had the disability information made clearer and extra support links added.
- j) Section 2.3 is now incorporated into section 2.2.
- k) New sections have been added; 2.3 has new text and links related to health and safety advice, while 2.4 is about how to report material counter to the policy.
- l) Section 3.1.1 and 3.1.2 have combined and made clearer.
- m) In Section 3.1.3, the good practice section is replaced by 3.1.4 and the advocacy information has been rewritten for clarity and moved to section 3.2.1.

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Two sections have been added; 3.1.3 now relates to the use of offensive usernames and 3.1.5 is about the need to not share contact details of other staff and students.

- n) In section 3.2.1, the advice on security has been replaced by an appropriate link to the Help Centre to avoid duplication. The information for advocates from section 3.1.3 has been moved here.
- o) Section 3.2.2 has been rewritten to improve clarity.
- p) Section 4.1, 'What is displayed' has been retitled 'Display of personal information' and has been rewritten to improve clarity.
- q) Section 4.2, 'Sharing personal information' has been simplified and moved to section 4.3. A new section 4.2, 'Retention of messages' relating to privacy contains the link to the student privacy notice formerly contained in 4.1.
- r) Section 5.1, 'Your email address' and 5.2, 'Communicating with you by email' have been merged, clarity improved and retitled 'Contacting you by email'.
- s) Section 5.3, 'Communicating with you through StudentHome' is now section 5.2 and retitled 'Communicating with you by the Bulletin Board'.
- t) Section 5.4, 'Communicating with you through Open University websites' has been simplified and renumbered 5.3. A new section 5.4, 'Conduct when communicating online' has been added.
- u) Section 6.1, 'Precautions you must take' and 6.2, 'What you are expected to do' have been merged and completely rewritten and expanded to be clearer and more up to date as section 6.1, 'Keeping your computer and our systems safe'. There is a new section 6.2, 'Blocking content' relating to items published that contravene the policy, this covers similar ground to the old section 7.2.
- v) Section 7.1, 'Acceptable standards. This has been rewritten and updated to improve clarity. Paid promotion online is now covered for the first time. Information has been added about what to do when breaches are made unintentionally.
- w) Sections 8, 'The principles of online communication', 9, 'Social networking guidance' and 10, 'Using your computer safely' have been removed to avoid duplication.

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- x) Section 11, 'Monitoring' is renumbered to section 8 and has been rewritten for clarity.
- y) Section 12, 'Failure to comply' is now section 9 and has been rewritten to improve clarity. An extra section, 9.3 has been added to ensure students keep copies of any work they submit online.
- z) A new section, 'Contacting us', has been added to avoid repetition throughout the policy and includes contact details for microcredential learners and apprentices. This also replaces the 'Further information' section.
- aa) A glossary, has also been added.
- ab) The 'Alternative format' details are now at the top of the document to make it easier for those who require alternative formats.
- ac) Appendices 1 to 3 have been removed as these contained largely advisory information that can be found elsewhere.

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### **Policies superseded by this document**

This document replaces the previous version of the Student Computing Policy dated March 2022.

Version number: 2.0	Approved by: Delegate of Director, Academic Services
Effective from: March 2023	Date for review: March 2024