Students Studying in Secure Environments

Contents

Version number: 1.0	Approved by: Director, Academic Services
Effective from: 1 February 2024	Date for review: August 2025

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Alternative format for this policy

An alternative format of this policy can be requested from the appropriate specialist team listed in [Further Clarification](#) or by phone at +44 (0)300 303 5303.

Students living in Wales can speak with a student support adviser in Welsh on 029 2047 1170, should you wish to do so.

Summary of policy

The Open University vision is to reach more students with life-changing learning that meets their needs and enriches society. As part of this vision, the University partners with justice and health organisations to provide higher education opportunities for students in prison or secure hospitals convicted of an offence ([secure environments](#)) in the UK and the Republic of Ireland. Students in secure environments have access to an approved curriculum adapted for study in environments with no or limited access to digital resources and equipment.

This policy sets out how The Open University supports learning for students in secure environments, how partnerships with justice and health organisations are managed and the implications for study when a student transitions to a prison or secure hospital.

There is a separate policy for [students with unspent criminal convictions](#) studying in the wider community to address their distinctive needs and circumstances.

Scope

What this policy covers

The policy applies to all students studying undergraduate or postgraduate modules and qualifications and postgraduate research students within a secure environment registered on qualifications and modules from 1 August 2024 onwards.

Specifically, the policy applies to students in prison, students granted a temporary license or release into the community, and students in secure hospital units convicted of an offence.

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What this policy does not cover

This policy only applies to students at The Open University who have been convicted of an offence.

This policy does not apply to students who are staying in secure hospital environments but have not committed a criminal offence. It does not cover learners studying a Vocational Qualification through our informal study routes (e.g., Open Learn) or paid for Short Courses and Micro-credentials.

Students studying with a collaborative partner, wholly owned subsidiary, or validated institutions should refer to the policies related to criminal convictions for the institution with which they are studying.

This policy does not cover additional entry requirements for programmes governed by professional, statutory and regulatory bodies. Further information about these programmes' entry requirements are covered in our Conditions Of Registration for taught courses, including the relevant Supplementary Agreements.

The Open University Student Charter

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.

Introduction

This policy explains how The Open University works with justice and health organisations to support students in secure environments to achieve their study goals.

The Open University's curriculum for students in secure environments respects the rules and regulations of the justice agencies the university partners with. Additionally, the study options available to those in secure environments have been adapted and can be studied successfully without access to the internet or our digital teaching tools and services.

Students in secure environments agree to the same Conditions of Registration, Academic Regulations, Fee Rules and policies as all other undergraduate and postgraduate students.

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[Conditions of Registration for Postgraduate Research Students](#) applies to Postgraduate Research (PGR) students. A student's location and domicile nation will determine the funding and payment options available, as explained in our [Guide for Learners in Secure Environments](#).

Policy

1.   Purpose

1.1 The policy's purpose is to clarify for enquirers, students, justice and health sector organisations, and OU staff our approach to supporting students in secure environments. This includes:

- Registering for study

- How the curriculum is selected and adapted (e.g. tutor support and assessment)

- The Open University's approach to working with justice organisations

- Access and adaptations to support services.

1.2 This policy informs our curriculum, service and information provision.

2.   Policy principles

2.1 The Open University works in partnership with justice agencies in the UK and the Republic of Ireland to provide students with access to higher education qualifications and modules in secure environments. Registrations, therefore, from students in secure environments outside of the UK and the Republic of Ireland are not accepted.

2.2 Each justice agency has eligibility criteria for higher education study applications, which the Open University must comply with. Each UK Nation and the Republic of Ireland have different eligibility criteria and processes for approving study and funding depending on the legislative context of that nation. Therefore, The Open University agrees on a process with each agency to enable registration, which always follows from approval by the relevant secure environment. An overview of these arrangements across the Nations is detailed in [Appendix 1](#). Additional conditions for students in a secure environment are detailed in the appropriate Conditions of Registration (see [Related Documentation](#)).

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2.3 The University can only communicate about a student's registration, academic progress and study with Nominated Contacts in each secure environment. This measure ensures that advice is readily accessible to students throughout their course of study while being delivered securely. This also applies to students on temporary licence or released from a secure environment.

3. Choosing the Open University and registering for study

3.1 The Open University published a guide for students in secure environments that details the undergraduate courses available. This is supported with more detailed module information sheets that the justice organisations may need when considering an application to study with us. Interest in Postgraduate Taught Courses or Research is assessed on an individual basis.

3.2 Nominated contacts in the secure environments can advise on the justice organisation's eligibility criteria and the application process. The Open University can only accept registrations which are approved by the secure environment and sent to us via the Nominated Contacts. Additionally, students can receive study choice advice and guidance from us exclusively through these Nominated Contacts.

4. How the Open University determines suitable curriculum and study adaptations

4.1 The Open University, with the justice organisations, assess courses that will be made available to students in secure environments against a list of criteria. The modules available will depend on whether the student is studying at undergraduate, postgraduate or research level.

4.2 Undergraduate study:
A subset of undergraduate qualifications and modules have been assessed as appropriate for study by students convicted of an offence. The available modules and qualifications are listed in the current academic year and is published in a Guide for learners in Secure Environments. The assessment includes consideration of:

4.2.1 Module content: Inappropriate module content may contain a reference to or materials about, for example:

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- Sex offences

- Violence

- Children

- Chemicals

- Smuggling/Trafficking

- Terrorism

- Fraud (financial/legal/international)

- Computing/cybersecurity/internet related

- Drug or alcohol misuse

- Counterfeit/forgery

- Religion/Racial discrimination

- Psychological offences

4.2.2 Courses (qualifications and modules) will not be available in secure environments if it is not possible to adapt the study materials and assessment to achieve the learning outcomes because, for example, they involve research, collaborative activities, or extensive use of digital technologies.

4.3 In line with our Conditions of Registration, the curriculum is reviewed yearly to ensure it includes new modules and qualifications and remove any modules or qualifications which have been withdrawn or can no longer be delivered in a secure environment.

4.4 Postgraduate study:

The suitability of postgraduate qualifications and modules is assessed on a request basis in partnership with the Faculty, the Student in Secure Environment Team and the secure environment. The assessment is based on the same criteria as undergraduate study. The Nominated Contact will contact the university to make the assessment to confirm if the application can proceed. This assessment can take over 12 weeks to complete. Students need to register their interest in a master's programme with the Nominated Contacts in time to enable the assessment to take place before the Final Enrolment Date.

4.5 Postgraduate Research Study:

The justice organisation must approve applications for postgraduate research. The Graduate School Director, via the appropriate faculty, will then consider applications on an individual basis by taking into account the proposed methodology and other factors, such as access to funding,

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in addition to the standard application criteria, which can be found in the [Conditions of Registration for Post Graduate Research Students.](#) The Nominated Contact must contact the appropriate team listed in [Further Clarification](#) ahead of any application to request an initial feasibility check. Postgraduate research students who enter a secure environment can get advice about their options via the Nominated Contact. Direct contact between the student or advocate and their supervisor is not possible.

4.6 There are no approved curriculum offerings within a secure environment for short non-credit bearing courses, Microcredentials, NVQs or Apprenticeship programmes.

5.   How teaching and learning is adapted for module study

5.1 [Nominated contacts](#) within the secure environment act as the conduit for the student requiring any study advice or guidance from the University.

5.2 The Nominated contact is responsible for ensuring the secure environment requirements are met and managing the relay of study materials, queries, assessments or administration between the student and The Open University. The University contact information for each Nation is detailed in [Further Clarification](#).

5.3 Students will receive a printed study pack. The pack includes all the resources required to successfully study a module, including text transcripts of the audio-visual materials. If a student has a disability requiring a reasonable adjustment of the print packs or assessments, including exams, this can be discussed with the relevant team listed in [Further Clarification](#). Where assessment requires the completion of an online or a collaborative activity which cannot be completed in a secure environment, students will be provided with an alternative in the print pack. Access to online versions of course materials is only available if it can be facilitated by the secure environments and digital infrastructure and is agreed upon by both the Open University and the relevant justice agency in each Nation.

5.4 The University's [Assessment Policies](#) apply, including provision for [special circumstances](#), [deferrals](#) and [postponement](#) of the end of module assessment. All assessments, examinations, resits, resubmissions, special circumstances and deferral applications have deadlines that must be met. Nominated Contacts in secure environments are responsible for submitting assessments and applications on the student's behalf and for communicating assessment results and outcomes of any applications. Assessment and related applications can only be accepted through these

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contacts. Where deadlines are missed due to delays in returning information outside the student's control, an assessment or application may be accepted late at the discretion of The Open University.

5.5 Students are allocated a tutor who will provide Correspondence Tuition and can respond to queries about the academic content of the module. Nominated Contacts are responsible for facilitating information to and from the tutor and agree tutorial arrangements. Tutorial arrangements are explained in Appendix 1 and will be provided by telephone when possible. Exceptionally, an in-person tutorial may be considered if:

5.5.1 There is evidence that a reasonable adjustment due to a disability that necessitates an in-person tutorial.

5.5.2 The institution cannot facilitate a telephone tutorial because of security or health and safety constraints.

5.6 Communications about our services, including changes to our policies or curriculum, will be emailed to the Nominated Contacts in each secure environment. The exception is module results, which are sent as paper letters via the nominated contact. Students will not receive marketing communications or be invited to contribute to general research and student feedback.

6. How Support Services are adapted for module study

6.1 The Open University recognises that the students' location inhibits access to our standard educational support. The university will, therefore, endeavour to provide the level of support that does not disadvantage students in secure environments or create additional barriers while recognising that there are issues out of the University's control in relation to the policies and procedures of the respective justice organisations and specific secure environment:

6.1.1 Access to information, advice and guidance is facilitated by the Nominated Contacts and can be provided by email and occasionally by telephone. This support includes:

- assistance with study choices,

- accreditation for prior learning and credit transfer towards a qualification,

- addressing any issues with missing printed study materials,

- guidance concerning study skills, preparing for and completing assessments, changing study plans or taking a break, and understanding our policies and administration processes.

- making a complaint or appealing against a decision,

- request support from specialist teams, for example, to arrange any additional support required for any declared disability or requesting career guidance from the University's Careers and Employability Service

6.1.2 As printed module packs contain all the study materials required, it is unlikely that a student would require library access. However, the OU Students Association offers a Library Study Partner Scheme if research is required on a course.

6.1.3 Conferring of a qualification requires the Nominated Contact to take action. For some qualifications, such as most undergraduate honours degrees and qualifications, which have optional routes, the qualification will be offered to the student, and the Nominated Contact must accept the offer on the student's behalf by sending confirmation via email or post to the Qualifications Centre at the University. The Nominated Contact will also need to confirm the Open University has the correct name to ensure the award certificate is correct. Other qualifications are awarded automatically on completion of the required study, provided the modules are linked to the qualification and do not need to be accepted. However, the Nominated Contact still needs to contact the University if the student wishes to request a name change. Any name change must be accompanied with documentary evidence, and no changes can be made after the qualification is conferred.

Students will receive a standard Open University certificate, which the University produces on watermarked stationery, including the University crest and hologram, amongst other security features. The certificate omits any information regarding the specific location where the student pursued their studies, or the funding arrangements associated with their course of study.

6.1.4 Degree ceremonies can be arranged in secure environments at the request of the nominated contact. Arrangements are at the discretion of the specific institution, not the Open University. Ceremonies will always involve OU staff and, depending on the secure environment, may include guests. It may be possible to attend a degree ceremony once a student is released into the community, depending on the outcome of a risk assessment by the University. The risk assessment process is explained in the policy for students studying

in the community with a licenced condition. Students in secure hospitals can contact the University on discharge to find out about degree ceremony options.

6.2 Students who become a prisoner while registered for a qualification or enrolled on a module will become immediately subject to the eligibility criteria for the relevant justice agency, as explained in the Conditions of Registration. Although each case is unique, it may not be possible to continue with study immediately and only study from the approved curriculum is permitted. The University can provide advice through the Nominated Contact on the implications for study.

6.3 The University will provide advice when a student is transferred to a new, secure environment to support successful study. The University recognises that this may be disruptive to study and relies on being notified of the transfer by the Nominated Contact. Support includes providing advice on the options for study to the new Nominated Contact, if needed, sending a new printed pack, providing catch-up advice or arranging changes to study in line with other University policies and procedures.

6.4 The Open University provides additional information and support when students are formally released from a secure environment. The students continue to be supported by the specialist Students in Secure Environments team to ensure consistency. Students should contact the team as soon as possible once released for advice on the next steps for their study. The contact details are listed below under Further Clarification. The University recognises that this can be a challenging time, and the specialist team can advise on study options, including how to take a break in study if needed. Students will be subject to a post-release risk assessment, explained in the policy 'Students Studying in the Community with a License Condition'. This risk assessment aims to determine which facilities students can access and avoid a student inadvertently breaching a licenced condition. Until those checks are completed, the study arrangements described in this policy still apply; for example, the student cannot participate in any community or collaborative activity, including all tutorials. The Careers and Employability Service can also provide careers advice to students leaving secure environments up to three years after finishing study.

7. Providing data to justice organisations

Details of the information collected about students, how it is used and who it is shared with are provided in the Student Privacy Notice.

8. Prevent statutory duty

The Open University has a statutory duty regarding the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism. If there is reason to believe that a member of staff or student may be at risk of being drawn into terrorism, any action taken under this policy will be taken in consultation with The Open University Prevent Co-ordinator.

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.

Safe Space Reporting

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. Safe Space Reporting is available through an online tool 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 individuals can do if these incidents happen and where to find support.

Glossary

Assessment

This includes all assessments detailed in the assessment guide for each module and can include tutor-marked assignments, examinations, multiple-choice questions, reports and projects.

Correspondence Tuition

This is the personal learning support (or feedback) given in writing by OU tutors concerning their students' work on tutor-marked assignments.

Final Enrolment Date

The last date that a reservation can be made for a module in a specific presentation period. It is published in the online prospectus.

Module

A self-contained unit of teaching, learning and assessment that 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.

Nominated Contact/s

These are the named individuals in each secure environment that The Open University communicates with regarding registration, on-study support, and arrangements for exams and tutorials. Typically, they are staff who work in the Education unit/team/centre on behalf of the secure environment.

Postgraduate Student

A Student who is registered for a module that is designated as a postgraduate module.

Prison

In this document, prison refers to students who are in Prisons, Young Offender Institutions, Youth Custody, or secure units and hospitals and who have been convicted of an offence.

Prison Services Instructions/Rules (PSI)

The set of rules, regulations, and guidelines by which prisons operate.

Registered Qualification

A qualification that a student has formally registered to study and has enrolled on modules for and are counting credit towards.

Registration / Registration Agreement

The process by which students become a Student of the University. Subject to these conditions, students can register for a module or a qualification.

Secure Environment/s

Correctional facilities or detention centres that are specifically designed and equipped to safely and securely house individuals. This includes youth offender institutions, prisons and secure hospitals.

Special Circumstances

The Special Circumstances Policy is aimed at students who want to make The Open University aware of any matters that may have affected their ability to study, take an exam or submit other forms of assessment.

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Related Documentation

Refer to the following documentation in conjunction with this document:

[Academic Regulations](#)

[Assessment policies](#)

[Changing Your Study Plans](#)

[Conditions of Registration](#) for taught modules

[Conditions of Registration for Post-Graduate Research Students](#)

[Fee Rules (UG)](#)

[Fee Rules (PG)](#)

Information and Guidance

[Advocacy: guidelines and procedure](#)

[Careers and Employability Services](#)

[Student Privacy Notice](#)

Other organisation documentation

Students in Secure Environments are subject to the relevant prison service instructions or schedules for their UK Nation or the Republic of Ireland, as detailed in [Appendix 1.](#)

Further clarification

If you have questions about this document's content and how to interpret it, please contact the appropriate Students in Secure Environments Team below by email, telephone or post. To check the latest postal address and other contact details or if you would like to find out more about our most up-to-date response times for receiving and sending postal correspondence to the Open University, please see [OU Offices](#). The dedicated [Students in Secure Environments](#) website may also be helpful.

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Students in Secure Environments (SiSE) Team for the location of the prison or secure hospital

England

The Open University,
PO box 197,
Milton Keynes,
MK7 6BJ

Email: SISE-General@open.ac.uk
Phone: +44 (0)300 303 5303
Website: https://www.open.ac.uk/secure-environments/

Wales

If you are a resident in Wales, you can speak to a student support advisor in Welsh or English

The Open University
18 Custom House Street,
Cardiff,
CF10 1AP

Email : Wales-SiSE@open.ac.uk
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 neu ebost Wales-SiSE@open.ac.uk.

Scotland

The Open University
10 Drumsheugh Gardens,
Edinburgh
EH3 7QJ

Email: Scotland-SiSE@open.ac.uk

Phone: +44 (0)131 226 3851

The Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland

The Open University

110 Victoria Street,

Belfast Northern,

Ireland BT1 3GN

Email : Northern-Ireland@open.ac.uk

Phone : +44 (0)28 9032 3718

Qualification Centre

Can be contacted for questions about accepting a qualification and receiving a certificate using email: cqc.verifications@open.ac.uk or by post using the appropriate addresses provided above.

Feedback

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.

Summary of significant changes since the last version

This is a new policy.

Policies superseded by this document

This document does not replace any previous policies.

Appendix

Appendix 1: Additional national considerations for students who are in secure environments.

This appendix provides an overview of how the University partners with justice agencies in the UK and the Republic of Ireland. It also applies to people convicted of an offence who are in a secure hospital.

England and Wales

The Open University works with the Ministry of Justice to provide Higher Education learning in insecure environments. Policy and guidance for prisons in England and Wales cover this provision in the Prison Services Instruction PSI 32/2012. The Nominated Contacts in each secure environment will ensure the eligibility criteria required by the Ministry of Justice are met before contacting the University to register students. Methods of funding and the registration process are detailed in the prospectus. The Nominated Contact is usually in the Education Centre or an Occupational therapist.

The Ministry of Justice funding in England and Wales provides telephone tutorials based on the level and credit value of the module. As a guide, across a module, this can be up to:

Module	Credit Value	Tuition hours
OU Level 1	30 credit modules	7 hours
OU Level 1	60 credit modules	10 hours
OU Level 2 & 3	60 credit modules	6 hours
OU Level 2 & 3	30 credit modules	4 hours

In addition to printed packs, students may have access to the virtual campus, which houses Open University study materials and provides a method for sending and receiving questions from Tutors. This is dependent on the arrangements within each institution.

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In line with the [Welsh Language standards](), students in Wales have a right to submit written assignments in Welsh.

Scotland

The Higher Education Access Scheme governs study with the Open University. This partnership is with the Open University in Scotland, Fife College, representatives from private prisons with OU applicants and students, and the Scottish Prison Service. All institutions, including the Open University in Scotland, have staff representatives on the Higher Education Access Board, which reviews and approves all applications to study. The Open University in Scotland staff representative role is to provide study-related information, advice and guidance and confirm that students are applying for modules appropriate to the qualification.

There is no digital access to study materials in secure environments; printed packs are provided. Additionally, endeavours are made to arrange tutorials if needed, and this can be discussed through the Nominated Contacts in the prison Learning Centres.

Northern Ireland

Studying with the Open University is governed by the Northern Ireland Prison Service Distance Learning Policy. Support for the study is also governed by those policies and procedures, which must be satisfied before a student can register with the Open University.

There is no digital access to study materials in the secure environments; printed packs are provided. However, endeavours are made to arrange telephone tutorials on a needs basis, which is requested and approved through the Northern Ireland Prison Service Distance Learning Coordinator.

Republic of Ireland

Studying with the Open University is governed by the Irish Prison Service Application Policy. Within this policy, there are eligibility criteria which must be met before a student can be registered with the Open University. This is managed by the appropriate Education Training Board (ETB), providing education services for each secure environment. The Open University provides advice on the suitability of qualification and module choice during this phase.

Students in the Republic of Ireland have access to online study materials directly from the Open University in addition to the printed packs. Endeavours are made to arrange telephone tutorials on a need basis.

Note: For all nations, postgraduate research arrangements will be agreed to on an individual basis.