



The Open  
University

Student's guide to studying  
on a programme validated  
by The Open University

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## **Welcome from the Director of Open University Validation Services**

Welcome to The Open University (OU). You have joined a community of around 40,000 students who are currently registered on programmes validated by the OU and delivered in OU approved institutions worldwide.

The aim of this guide is to introduce you to the University and explain what being registered on a programme validated by the OU means to you.

I hope that you will find this guide useful. If you have any questions about its content or any suggestions for improvement, please contact our Communications Officer, whose contact details you will find on page 8.

I wish you every success in your studies.

**Dr Kate Clarke**

Director, Open University Validation Services

## About The Open University

- ▶ The OU was established by Royal Charter in 1969 and has since taught more than 1.7 million people.
- ▶ Over 260,000 people currently study with the OU, making it the UK's largest academic institution by student numbers.
- ▶ The OU is the UK's only university dedicated to distance learning, with support coming from a network of 13 national and regional centres, 350 study centres and nearly 7,000 Associate Lecturers.
- ▶ 89% of part-time students study to further their career aims; 64% study vocational or professional courses; 3 out of 4 FTSE 100 companies have sponsored staff on OU courses; 61% of OU undergraduates have no previous Higher Education qualifications.
- ▶ The OU has been one of the top 3 UK universities for student satisfaction in the National Student Survey every year since the survey began in 2005. In 2009/10 it had a 93% satisfaction rating.
- ▶ The OU has its own Facebook page, with over 47,000 'liking the OU': <http://www.facebook.com/theopenuniversity>
- ▶ The OU's twitter account has over 13,000 followers: <http://twitter.com/Openuniversity>
- ▶ The OU's iTunes U presence is huge with over 34.6 million downloads to date – the most of any university globally: <http://www.open.ac.uk/itunes/>
- ▶ OpenLearn, a free learning resources website from the OU has had over 16.7 million visits since its launch: <http://www.open.ac.uk/openlearn/home.php>
- ▶ The OU has a dedicated channel on YouTube, with bite sized extracts from courses, plus videos of research, experiments and student life: <http://www.youtube.com/ou>
- ▶ Over 18,000 research publications are free to consult via Open Research Online (ORO), which is one of the largest and fastest growing research collections in the UK. Since 2006, ORO has had over 1.5 million visits: <http://oro.open.ac.uk/>

## Open University Validation Services (OUVS)

Through its Royal Charter, The Open University (OU) is able to validate programmes offered by institutions that do not have their own degree awarding powers. Open University Validation Services (OUVS) is a unit within the University, which is responsible for managing its approval, review and validation activity. We currently work with over 30 institutions worldwide, for which we validate a total of almost 300 programmes at undergraduate and postgraduate level. To date over 107,000 students have achieved an OU validated award.

### What is an approved institution?

You are studying at an institution which, following a rigorous process, has been approved by the OU as an appropriate organisation to offer higher education programmes leading to Open University validated awards. Institutions are 're-approved' on a regular basis to ensure that they continue to meet the OU's criteria in terms of procedures and resources for teaching, learning and assessment, staffing and staff development, academic organisation and internal quality assurance systems.

### What is an OU validated programme or award?

You are studying on a programme validated by the OU, which, if you complete it successfully, will lead to an OU validated award. Awards may be undergraduate (e.g. BSc (Hons), BA (Hons), Certificate or Diploma of Higher Education, Foundation Degree), or postgraduate (e.g. MA, MSc, Postgraduate Certificate, Postgraduate Diploma). Your institution has designed your programme, for which it has full responsibility for teaching, assessment and further development, before submitting it to The Open University for validation.

Our own supported distance learning programmes may be very different in nature to the programme that you are studying. However, OU validation means that your programme is equivalent in level and standard to similar awards offered throughout UK higher education. A validated award is exactly the same as an OU direct award in terms of employment and application for postgraduate study.

## How does the OU guarantee programme quality and standards?

The University assures itself of the standard and quality of its validated programmes through the following mechanisms:

- ▶ **The validation and revalidation processes**, involving a panel of experts from higher education (and industry where appropriate) both within and outside the relevant subject area. In order to reach a decision about whether or not to validate a programme, the panel has detailed discussions with the staff team, employers and students, and considers the proposed curriculum and assessment regulations and other programme documentation. Any subsequent major changes are validated and programmes are revalidated regularly. You may find that during your time at your institution, you may be asked to speak to a panel as part of a revalidation event.
- ▶ **Institution's own quality assurance procedures**. The OU approval process checks that your institution has appropriate quality assurance procedures in place such as external examiners, student, staff and employer feedback mechanisms, analysis of statistical information and annual monitoring. Your institution is required to produce an annual report to the OU through which the University can monitor the institution's quality assurance procedures and ensure that any concerns are addressed.
- ▶ **External examiners appointed to every validated programme** ensure that the standard of the OU's validated awards is maintained and that your assessment has been fair and just. All external examiners produce reports which are considered by both the institution and the OU. The OU monitors these reports and the institution's response to assure itself that the quality and standard of the programme is being maintained.

## What is my relationship with the OU?

Although you are studying for an OU validated award, your primary relationship is with your institution and you must follow its regulations and procedures. Any queries, complaints or requests should be directed towards the relevant person within your institution and information on who to contact should be found in your student handbook.

## What OU services are available to me?

Our approval process requires that institutions have all the necessary services you need to help you with your studies. In addition, we have a number of free resources available online, which you may find useful:

- ▶ **The OU Library** has created a gateway to non-restricted online resources, so that you can easily locate useful links and resources to support your study and research.  
<http://library.open.ac.uk/libpartnerships/>
- ▶ **The OU on iTunes U** contains a wealth of learning materials.  
<http://www.open.ac.uk/itunes/>
- ▶ **OpenLearn**, free learning resources website.  
<http://www.open.ac.uk/openlearn/home.php>
- ▶ **The OU on YouTube**, for bite sized extracts from courses, plus videos of research, experiments and student life.  
<http://www.youtube.com/ou>
- ▶ **Open Research Online**, freely available research publications.  
<http://oro.open.ac.uk/>
- ▶ **OU Alumni Association**: You can register for membership of the OU Alumni Association upon successful completion of a validated award. Membership is free and brings with it a range of benefits, including networking opportunities, discounts and offers.  
<http://www.open.ac.uk/alumni>  
For a registration form, visit the student section of the OUVS website.  
<http://www.open.ac.uk/validate>
- ▶ **OU Careers Service**  
<http://www.open.ac.uk/careers>

## Frequently asked questions

### **Q: Where will I be registered?**

**A:** You will be registered as a student at your institution, which will register you through OUVS for an OU validated award. The OU holds summarised information on students, whilst detailed records are held by your institution.

### **Q: Who is responsible for induction and any advice I might need?**

**A:** Your institution will arrange induction for you and will have appropriate services for advice and guidance on all matters whether academic, financial or personal.

### **Q: Where can I find information on my programme, regulations and support services?**

**A:** You should find this information in the material given to you when you start your programme. If you have any further questions, you should contact your programme leader or administrator.

### **Q: What should I do if I want to make a complaint?**

**A:** Try to deal with any problems or complaints as soon as possible by speaking to your course leader or administrator. If the matter cannot be resolved informally, your institution has complaints procedures which you should follow. These procedures should be available in the documentation provided to you at the beginning of your programme. Your institution will also ask for your feedback at various stages throughout your programme and each programme will have a committee on which there is a student representative. You should raise any concerns through these mechanisms.

### **Q: Who is responsible for assessing my performance?**

**A:** Your institution is responsible for setting and marking assessments. It is also responsible for ensuring that accurate data on student progress and awards is provided to the OU.

**Q: What should I do if I dispute a decision made about my performance?**

**A:** Your programme handbook should detail your institution's appeals procedures, which will include deadlines for any appeal. You should follow these procedures as soon as possible to ensure that you do not miss the opportunity to appeal.

**Q: Can I appeal or complain to the OU?**

**A:** You have the right to appeal or make a complaint to the OU, but you must first go through the relevant procedures in your institution. Your institution can provide you with the detailed procedures for submitting a formal appeal or complaint to the OU through OUVS, or you can find them in the OU Handbook for Validated Awards, on the OUVS website <http://www.open.ac.uk/validate>.

**Q: What will happen if I need to leave my programme early?**

**A:** You may be eligible for an intermediate award or credit for your achievements up to that point. Discuss this possibility with your institution. It may apply to the OU on your behalf for an intermediate award or a certificate of credit. It may be possible to use this credit to get exemption from aspects of another programme within the institution or elsewhere. You will also be entitled to a transcript showing the complete record of your learning and achievement up to the point at which you left the programme.

**Q: What happens when I successfully complete my programme?**

**A:** On successful completion of your programme, your institution will arrange certification. The certificate will include your name, the award, the name of the institution you studied at and the date the award was conferred. The OU coat of arms, crest and logo will appear on the certificate, which will be signed by the Vice-Chancellor and the University Secretary. You will also receive a full transcript of your study showing the record of your learning and achievement. In addition, you may be invited to an awards ceremony organised by your institution. As for the next steps...

- ▶ You may be able to use the credits or award you have gained to continue your study at the institution, at the OU, or elsewhere. The OU offers progression onto supported distance learning programmes, which you may study whilst in employment.
- ▶ You may join the *OU Alumni Association* (see page 5).
- ▶ You may use the *OU Careers Service* (see page 5).

## Where can I find further information about the OU and OUVS?

Your first point of contact should always be your institution. However, further information is available online or by contacting OUVS:

### Online information available to students

**OU website:** <http://www.open.ac.uk>

**OUVS website:** <http://www.open.ac.uk/validate>

The OUVS website includes the list of all the OU approved institutions, more information about approval and validation, the *OU Handbook for Validated Awards* and our appeals and complaints procedures.

### Contact OUVS

#### Open University Validation Services

The Open University

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**Phone:** +44 (0) 1908 332 840

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**email:** [ouvs-recep@open.ac.uk](mailto:ouvs-recep@open.ac.uk)

**Website:** [www.open.ac.uk/validate](http://www.open.ac.uk/validate)

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