URL Standards for intranets

This standard governs the allocation and appropriate usage of Intranet URLs

Nicky Waters /Caroline Jeffreys
# URL Standard – Published content and services

1. Overview ................................................................................................................................... 2
2. Formats ..................................................................................................................................... 2
3. Using abbreviations or acronyms ............................................................................................. 3
4. Internal audiences .................................................................................................................... 3
5. Intranet URL structures ............................................................................................................ 3
6. Publicity URLs .......................................................................................................................... 3
7. Redirects .................................................................................................................................. 4
8. URL management ..................................................................................................................... 4
9. URL requests ............................................................................................................................ 4
10. Withdrawing a URL ................................................................................................................... 4
11. Document History .................................................................................................................. 5
URL standards for Open University Intranets

1. Overview
This document provides information on URL standards within the University’s Intranet environment.

The format and structure of the URLs used are important for our website users and search engines, therefore Open University URLs should follow a consistent, predictable, format (as far as possible).

1.1 The standard applies to sites hosted on our intranet*.open.ac.uk and openuniv.sharepoint.com/sites environments.

1.2 A consistent approach to the structuring and wording of URLs brings a number of benefits to the University website:

- Improving staff orientation within the site; URL structure and wording helps provide context for the page being viewed
- Uses the URL to rank page results in the University’s search engine, Exalead.

1.3 Any URLs generated by our URL shortening service are also expected to conform to this standard. To be confirmed, contact Digital Services for more information.

2. Formats

2.1 URLs must be clear, unambiguous, easy to read, easy to type and easy to share.

2.2 URLs must clearly indicate where a page sits within the overall site architecture.

2.3 URLs should indicate the subject of the page as accurately and succinctly as possible.

2.4 URLs are lower case by default. If there is strong evidence of a need for an upper-case short URL (for example, it will be read aloud and refers to a commonly-capitalised phrase) this will be considered.

2.5 URLs should contain only standard ASCII alphanumeric characters A to Z; numerals 0 to 9 and/or hyphens (not underscores)

2.6 Hyphens should be used to separate words within URLs where a logical space occurs so they are easy to read. For example http://intranet6.open.ac.uk/human-resources

2.7 Articles (a, an, the) and other superfluous words should not be used. For example use /contact rather than /how-to-contact-us.

2.8 URLs should use the verb infinitive, where possible. For example use /apply instead of /applying.
3. Using abbreviations or acronyms

3.1 To the broad majority of users acronyms are meaningless. A user-centred approach should be taken and acronyms expanded where possible.

3.2 Abbreviations or acronyms should only be used if:
   - The acronym is well known and understood by the internal audience (e.g. STEM, FASS).
   - There is no reasonable and meaningful alternative.
   - Using the full title would make the URL too long and complex or exceed character lengths (e.g. Windows/SharePoint has a 256 character limit).

4. Internal audiences

Content that is intended for an internal audience should not be hosted on an external URL (e.g. www.open.ac.uk), the reasons being is that this can cause confusion (especially if staff have to log in) and mislead staff into thinking the site is an external resource which is open to all. Additionally, content hosted on external URLs will not be indexed in Intranet search, so staff may have difficulty locating the site.

5. Intranet URL structures

Currently (and this is likely to change in the future) there are different URL stems for the different hosting platforms within our intranet environment, these are:

- Intranet.open.ac.uk (our original intranet environment hosting OU Life and historic APS sites)
- Intranet4.open.ac.uk (for our internal blogs and Wiki’s hosted on WordPress and MediaWiki)
- Intranet6.open.ac.uk (for Intranet sites hosted on our Drupal environment)
- Intranet7.open.ac.uk (for collaborative team sites hosted on SharePoint 2010)
- Intranet8.open.ac.uk (for collaborative team sites hosted on SharePoint 2010 providing and additional security layer for content classified as highly confidential)
- openuniv.sharepoint.com/sites (for collaborative SharePoint Online team sites)

The second part of the URL is generally where the site is located within our information architecture (IA) which allows us to organise and manage our sites and information efficiently.

When an Intranet site is requested via the web site creation process, its URL will be determined by its hosting platform and information architecture.

To discuss any non-standard Intranet URL requirements contact Digital Services.

6. Publicity URLs

For a publicity URL, where a more friendly or shorter URL is required (e.g. for posters or printed materials), contact Digital Services about the URL shortening service (still to be determined).
7. Redirects
Redirects are not normally provided for Intranet sites as these can generally be accessed via the main OU Life A to Z or search, exceptions can be made, contact Digital Services for further advice.

8. URL management
8.1 The Intranet Manager is responsible for managing the allocation of URLs on a business as usual basis.
8.2 The Domain Working Group are responsible for managing the allocation of URL stems on open.ac.uk, openuniv.sharepoint.com (and others). The Domain Working Group has representation from Digital Services, LTI and Information Technology. The decisions that are made by this working group are based on their awareness of University-wide plans.
8.3 Digital Services maintain a list of all current Intranet URLs in support of the Working Group and auditing requirements.

9. URL requests
9.1 Any department, faculty, unit, institute or other grouping within the University that wishes to request a new URL stem for website content, should do so through the website request process, or via contacting Digital Services if there are any queries.
9.2 Requests will be considered on a case-by-case basis according to the following general criteria:
   - Impact on integrity of overall University information architecture and technical infrastructure.
   - Size and composition of target audience
   - Media to be used to promote URL
   - Timescales
9.3 Units wishing to use particularly generic terms in their URL must submit their requests with a clear explanation and justification no less than 2 weeks in advance of any scheduled publication date.

10. Withdrawing a URL
The following summarises conditions that may result in withdrawal of an .open.ac.uk URL stem:
10.1 Not following the above rules and conditions.
10.2 Failure to maintain an accessible and functional website (e.g. obsolete and de-commissioned URLs where a code 404 page is consistently appearing).
10.3 Failing to comply with University Digital Standards, including accessibility.
10.4 Changing the status of the organisation or project that the URL stem represents.
## 11. Document History

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Version</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>01 Dec 2016</td>
<td>Nicky Waters</td>
<td>Initial draft</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>