QUALITY AND STANDARDS IN THE OPEN UNIVERSITY

FACT SHEET SERIES: INTRODUCTION

About the Fact Sheets

Quality and Standards in the Open University comprises a series of fact sheets that provide a guide to the structural and procedural arrangements which support academic standards and the quality of the student learning experience in the Open University. The fact sheets aim to act as a reference for staff, and to provide an insight for students and anyone else who wish to understand the University through its quality assurance arrangements.

Quality assurance is embedded into organisational structures, staff roles and process design, but there is scope for variation in practice between different units, and continual change and development. For that reason these fact sheets serve only as a starting point but further reading links are provided for those who would like to explore more.

The fact sheets have been prepared by the University’s Quality Assurance and Curriculum Policy team, in co-operation with relevant staff or departments to ensure accuracy and currency of information. They are reviewed periodically and amended where appropriate to reflect major changes. The latest date of publication appears on each fact sheet.

About The Open University

The Open University (OU) is distinctive among UK universities in that it teaches entirely at a distance through its method of Supported Open Learning. It has no academic prerequisites for admission to its undergraduate provision (with the exception of a small number of modules in professional programmes such as Nursing and Social Work), and its students enter the University with a wide range of study goals and previous educational and general experience. There are entry requirements for study at taught postgraduate level and research degrees.

The Open University is a very large institution with 38% of all part-time undergraduate higher education students in the UK. Data about the OU is contained in Facts and Figures. Most modules and qualifications are available throughout Europe and some worldwide, and many more are available through our partnerships and accredited institutions. There is no typical OU student. People of all ages and backgrounds undertake study for all sorts of reasons including to update their skills, get a qualification, to boost their career or change career direction. Students mainly study part-time in their own homes or other similar location with many students working full or part-time during their studies, and apply their learning in the workplace on a daily basis throughout their studies.

The University’s headquarters are located at Walton Hall in Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire, where most of its full-time academic, administrative and clerical staff are based. Each of the University’s two regional centres in England and 3 national centres in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland has a

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1 Some web links referred to in the fact sheets may be intranet based and so restricted to Open University staff
complement of academic, administrative, advisory and support staff. The University also employs several thousand Associate Lecturers.\(^2\)

In Milton Keynes qualifications and modules are planned, and module materials are created, produced and distributed using mass production and delivery systems. Administrative activities which do not need to be local to the student, including planning and policy development and the coordination of large operations e.g. examinations and fee collection, are also based at Walton Hall.

The University has four faculties, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASS); Faculty of Wellbeing, Education and Language Studies (WELS); Faculty of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM); Faculty of Business and Law (FBL). Each Faculty has an Executive Dean as senior officer. Most Faculty members are based at Walton Hall, but each academic unit has a cadre of Regional Managers or Staff Tutors based at regional and national centres that provide an important link between module design, development and delivery.

Individual interactions and relationships with students are managed through the central, regional and Academic Services. The first point of contact for students is usually their Associate Lecturer, who are appointed, developed and supported by academic unit and Academic Services staff.

The University offers:

- Foundation degrees;
- a general BA or BSc degree (with or without Honours) and a range of Honours degrees in named subjects;
- a range of undergraduate certificates;
- postgraduate certificates, diplomas and taught degrees;
- an Access programme of preparatory/return-to-study modules;
- single modules (i.e. up to 60 credit points);
- research degrees;
- validated qualifications at approved institutions (through OU Validation Partnerships).

The Quality Assurance and Curriculum Policy Team

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\(^2\) tutors who have part-time module-related contracts and are often employed in other educational institutions