Subdomain Policy

Externally published content and services

Version 1
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This policy governs the allocation and appropriate usage of subdomains on the open.ac.uk domain for externally published content and services

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Subdomain Policy – Externally published content and services

1. Overview

The Open University (OU) domain and its subdomains are ways to communicate the University’s corporate identity and reputation through its digital content and services. To protect the integrity of the OU and to limit the proliferation of unnecessary, redundant, or ambiguous subdomains, Digital Engagement (DE) and Information Technology (IT) have created this policy around the appropriate usage of subdomains e.g. [subdomain].open.ac.uk.

1.1. This policy applies to all web sites and services relating to the normal business of the University produced and owned by staff or units within The Open University.

1.2. A consistent approach to the allocation, structuring and wording of subdomains brings a number of benefits to the University website:

- It creates cohesion among OU websites, and supports corporate identity
- It mitigates against poor search engine optimisation (SEO) as a result of subdomain conflict and cannibalisation where multiple subdomains are focussed on the same content or search terms
- It forms the foundations of a clear technical strategy in preparation for cloud hosting.

1.3. The Policy also:

- Outlines the governance of subdomains for the University and the responsibilities of the Domain Working Group in managing the allocation of subdomains
- Ensures a clear process for requesting a subdomain.

2. Policy

2.1. The university’s policy is that all University activities should be presented within the open.ac.uk domain. The following are current exceptions:

- International course marketing which is presented within the openuniversity.edu domain
- Open media activity which is presented within the open.edu domain.

2.2. Subdomains will be limited to one level. For example, [subdomain].open.ac.uk (the only exception is when the “www” prefix is requested).

2.3. To use a subdomain your unit must be one of the following:

- A faculty or other organisational unit that does not belong within an existing OU subdomain
- A university level research entity
• University wide initiative or service that does not belong within an existing OU subdomain, or is most appropriately represented as university wide initiative or service
• A unit may be granted more than one subdomain if the website is representative or serves the interests of the entire university.

2.4. Subdomains must have a clear and meaningful connection to the business purpose of the site.

2.5. Subdomains must avoid use of acronyms or ambiguous sets of characters, unless it's an already recognisable part of your identity. For example blockchain.open.ac.uk or creet.open.ac.uk

2.6. Subdomains must be unique enough to prevent confusion with other subdomains.

2.7. Subdomains may not be used as a vanity URL or redirect to subpages within other sites. Instead consider using the University’s URL shortener.

2.8. All details of subdomains must be registered with DE to ensure audit commitments are met

3. Formats

3.1. The table below contains agreed naming formats for key areas of the university’s digital content.

3.2. The table also contains subdomains relating to specific content areas that are reserved and therefore will not be approved for use in relation to other content areas.

3.3. Where a subdomain deviates from the agreed naming formats the final decision will be deferred to the Digital Governance and Performance Sign-off Group for sign off.

3.4. A list of existing live subdomains can be found at…. (we will need a list to link to)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Agreed Format</th>
<th>Content criteria</th>
<th>Reserved</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UK Prospectus</td>
<td>courses.open.ac.uk/&lt;product&gt;</td>
<td>Currently UK focused content related to the recruitment of new students (both B2C and B2B). The main online prospectus for undergraduate, postgraduate and research degree courses, marketing and campaign landing pages. (B2C) OR Content relating directly to our learning and development service for business. (B2B)</td>
<td>courses study postgraduate research-degrees prospectus enquire learners business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Prospectus</td>
<td>openuniversity.edu</td>
<td>Internationally focused content related to the recruitment of new students. The International online prospectus for undergraduate, postgraduate and research degree courses, marketing and campaign landing pages.</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Units</td>
<td><a href="http://www.open.ac.uk/">www.open.ac.uk/</a>&lt;site/unit&gt;</td>
<td>Main corporate information regarding the University’s mission, strategy, management and governance including content published by Administrative units as listed on <a href="http://intranet6.open.ac.uk/human-resources/university-organisational-charts/administrative-and-other-units">http://intranet6.open.ac.uk/human-resources/university-organisational-charts/administrative-and-other-units</a></td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
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<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research</td>
<td>research.open.ac.uk/</td>
<td>Content composing our Institutional research presence including institutional centres, projects, the Virtual Research Environment OR a research centre as defined by Research, Scholarship and Quality Unit.</td>
<td>research oro vre gsn graduate-school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>oro.open.ac.uk/</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>research.open.ac.uk/project/&lt;name&gt;</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>research.open.ac.uk/creet</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>research.open.ac.uk/project/enduring-love</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&lt;centre&gt;.open.ac.uk</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>cepsar.open.ac.uk</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nations</td>
<td>&lt;nation&gt;.open.ac.uk</td>
<td>Content relating to stakeholder</td>
<td>wales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty</td>
<td>Faculty present: &lt;faculty&gt;.open.ac.uk</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- stem.open.ac.uk</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- wels.open.ac.uk/health-wellbeing-and-social-care</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- stem.open.ac.uk/research/astrochemistry</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- fass.open.ac.uk/research/asianbritain</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic initiatives or services</td>
<td>Strategic initiatives present: &lt;initiative&gt;.open.ac.uk</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- kmi.open.ac.uk</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- blockchain.open.ac.uk</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- news.open.ac.uk</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- relationships, public engagement and outreach specific to named countries.  
- scotland  
- republic-of-ireland  
- northern-ireland  
- england  

- Content composing of individual Faculty presences including schools, departments, faculty based research and curriculum  
  BUT  
  specifically excluding content relating to the recruitment of students.  
- stem  
- fass  
- wels  
- fbl  

- Content relating to strategic initiatives and services that support the university as a whole  
  BUT  
  specifically excluding content relating to the recruitment of  
- news  
- search  
- people  
- events  
- contact
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Services to students</th>
<th>learn*.open.ac.uk</th>
<th>Content specifically related to the delivery of the online learning experience. Including StudentHome and the virtual learning environment AND directly related support services such as library and careers service.</th>
<th>learn* students library vle careers help-centre</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OR</td>
<td>Students.open.ac.uk</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>library.open.ac.uk</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OMU</td>
<td>open.edu/openlearn</td>
<td>Free educational resources and sample courses.</td>
<td>free-learning openlearn mooc</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. Naming conventions

4.1. Names must be clear, unambiguous, easy to read, easy to type and easy to share.

4.2. Names must not imply university-wide activity when in reality it is focused on or limited to
a unit/project responsibility or activity.

4.3. Names must:
- contain only standard ASCII alphanumeric characters A to Z; numerals 0 to 9 and/or
  hyphens (not underscore)
- not begin or end with a hyphen (-)
- not coincide with internet protocols, such as www, ftp, dns, whois
- not contain more than 64 characters
- not contain “ou” or “open”

4.4. 1 and 2-letter subdomain names will not normally be used. Exceptionally they may be
permitted for generic online services which are intended to apply to all of the university
community and for which a very short domain name is essential for end-user
convenience.

4.5. Internationalised subdomain names are currently not supported. Where names contain
letters that cannot be reproduced in standard ASCII, the conventionally accepted
spelling should be used.

4.6. When selecting any name you should be aware of the need to avoid infringing existing
trademarks, trade names and third party business names. These can sometimes
mistakenly be used as generic terms e.g. Apple. Apart from giving unnecessary
publicity, there is a risk of it being illegal. Where a trade name, trademark or business
name is to be used then written proof of your authority to use the name or mark must be
submitted.

5. Using abbreviations or acronyms

5.1. To the broad majority of users acronyms are meaningless. Web managers should favour
a user-centred approach and name accordingly.

5.2. 3 and 4-letter abbreviations or acronyms should only be used if:
- this abbreviation is understood within the HE sector and by the wider public (eg
  STEM)
- There is no reasonable and meaningful alternative.

6. Subdomain management

6.1. The Domain Working Group are responsible for managing the allocation of subdomains
on open.ac.uk.
6.2. The Domain Working Group has representation from Digital Engagement, LTS and Information Technology. The decisions that are made by this working group are based on their awareness of University-wide plans.

6.3. DE maintain a list of all current subdomains in use across the University website in support of the Working Group and audit commitments.

7. Requesting a subdomain

7.1. Any department, faculty, unit institute or other grouping within the University which wishes to request a subdomain, please use the form subdomain request form.

7.2. You will hear from a Digital Engagement representative within 5 business days of your request as to the approval and status of your request.

7.3. When making the request, be sure to indicate the business case for the subdomain and where the subdomain should resolve (usually a domain or ip address).

7.4. The request must be submitted by a member of Open University staff.

7.5. If the requested name is a particularly generic term or phrase or not directly associated to a unit’s name (such as for cross-unit projects), the final decision will be deferred to the Network and Server Governance Group for sign off.

7.6. 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
- Potential negative impact if subdomain is used
- Media to be used to promote URL
- Timescales
- 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.

7.7. The Senior Responsible Officer at the University for the allocation of subdomains is Director External Engagement, Vice-Chancellor's Office the authority for decision making is delegated to the Chief Architect, IT and Head of Digital Engagement, Communications.

7.8. Any appeals against decisions made by the Domain Working Group should be addressed to the Digital Engagement mailbox, who, in turn, will forward the appeal to the Chief Architect, IT and Head of Digital Engagement, Communications for their consideration.
8. Withdrawing a subdomain

The following summarises conditions that may result in withdrawal of an .open.ac.uk subdomain name.

8.1. Not following the above rules and conditions.
8.2. A persistent failure to maintain an accessible and functional website (e.g. obsolete and de-commissioned domains where a code 404 page is consistently appearing).
8.3. Failing to ensure the website remains resistant to existing and emerging security compromises: if an .open.ac.uk website is found to be compromised by third parties, the relevant DNS administrator will be instructed to point the subdomain in question to a safe landing page while the security issues are addressed.
8.4. Persistently failing to comply with University Digital Standards, including accessibility and coding standards.
8.5. Changing the status of the organisation or project that the subdomain name represents.
# 9. Document History

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Version</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>29 Apr 2016</td>
<td>Viki Keogh</td>
<td>Initial draft</td>
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<tr>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>4 May 2016</td>
<td>Viki Keogh/Adrian Wells</td>
<td>Revised following discussion with Adrian Wells/Chris Wigglesworth</td>
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<tr>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>26 May 2016</td>
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