

RESPONSE TO STUDENT CONSULTATION ON STUDENT TERMS AND CONDITIONS DOCUMENT



SUMMARY

This is a response to the consultation on Student Terms and Conditions which took place between 12 July 2022 and 26 July 2022 on the Student Consultation Forum. The summary of student feedback is at [STUDENT-CONSULTATION: Student Terms and Conditions \(open.ac.uk\)](#).

We wanted students to tell us their views about our Conditions of Registration and Terms and Conditions (the contractual document that students agree to when they apply to study with us). This will help us review them with the aim of making them as clear and easy to understand as possible. Discussion threads included questions around how easy it is to read and interpret the conditions, how students feel about the current content and presentation of the conditions and if there are any barriers to engagement or suggestions for improvement. Students were also asked to comment on several proposed changes to the document to help improve the structure and layout. A total of 57 students registered for the consultation (but it was open to all). We received 51 posts with 26 students posting at least once.

Key headline messages from students related to the length and accessibility of the document. Some students commented that the document was long but well-written with clear language and terminology, well laid out with clear headings, short paragraphs and good spacing. Others said it was complex,

long and legalistic, with too many acronyms. There were comments that some things in the conditions do not become relevant until you start studying. Several students said they don't read the conditions as they assume they will be standard, and they operate on trust alone due to The OU's good reputation, or they contact their 'brilliant one-stop-shop' Student Support Teams (SSTs) or tutors for help and guidance when needed. It was noted that the 'what's changed' section at the beginning of the document is not relevant and can be overwhelming for new students. Several students said a summary of the terms would be helpful. Regarding access to glossary explanations, there was a preference for hyperlinks over footnotes. There was also a comment that the document would be easier to read and navigate if it was in HTML format with expanding sections and links.

All feedback has been shared with the policy working group and several recommendations have been made to help improve the flow of the document, remove repetition, and simplify messages, where possible. This includes combining the short summary and introduction sections, moving the significant changes section to a later point in the document with clear signposting at the beginning, general restructuring of information to combine references to similar themes which should help to reduce word count and remove duplication. We have made a recommendation to make the existing summary of main terms more prominent and accessible for students in a standalone space on our website (final approval pending, and location of summary to be confirmed). It should be noted that the summary would not be intended as a replacement for reading the full terms and conditions. All recommendations received approval at the Student Policy Working Group in

November 2022. Approved changes will start to be rolled out across the suite of terms and conditions documents that apply to different students and learners from academic year 2023/24.

We note that changes to contractual documents require careful planning to ensure we fulfil our legal obligations. We will continue to review our terms and conditions annually to monitor the effectiveness of any changes and to identify further improvements.

FULL RESPONSE

The table below outlines some of the key messages emerging from the forum feedback along with our response, and how the feedback has been/will be taken forward where relevant. The messages have been organised according to the key forum discussion threads. Where the same topic has come up in two places, the response has been included again for completeness.

Reading and using the Conditions of Registration

You said	OU response	Next steps, if appropriate
You have not read the T&Cs as you assume they are sensible and standard and won't hold any surprises. You trust	It was great to hear positive experiences of The OU. We recognise big commitment (both	We hope that these discussions and any changes we make to the document as a result, will help encourage

The OU and its reputation, and you have confidence that The OU will treat you fairly. It states the obvious i.e. we pay fees, you provide education. personally and financially), and we want students to read their conditions and understand the terms and conditions to commitment they make when they register to study with The OU. understand what is expected of them and what they can expect from us.

The contents page is well set out. The document is well written using straightforward clear language. It is well spaced and visually does not look cramped. It is not written in 'legalese' and the sections are short and to the point. What you have works well.

It is great to hear that some students feel the language we use is clear and the information is well presented.

We have reviewed the document to check that acronyms are written in full at first use, and that unfamiliar terms are explained in the glossary. It is noted that some formal or legal-sounding language may be unavoidable at times because it is a contractual document. We will continue to review the document annually to identify where further improvements can be

made. We will use any student/staff feedback received to support with this.

Sections are clearly labelled which allows students to quickly see the sections that are relevant to them and encourages people to be responsible and aware of what they are signing up to.

It is great to hear that some students find our use of section titles and headings in the conditions helpful.

We will continue to review the document on an annual basis to look at how clearly we are presenting information and identify opportunities for improvement, where possible.

Many sections are obvious and trivial.

As we are entering into a legal agreement with you, we are required to provide you with certain information that relates to registration and your study.

We will continue to review the document annually to make sure we are including all necessary information required as part of our legal agreement. Any unnecessary or superfluous information will be removed, where identified.

Not user-friendly or accessible.

We acknowledge the document is lengthy. We do have a team that undertake compliance checks annually to ensure we are meeting accessibility standards for example choice and size of font, spacing, and screen reader compatibility.

We have reviewed the document and made several recommendations to help reduce the word count and overall length of the document, and to improve readability. These include removing repetition and combining references to common themes, simplifying clauses where possible. The document also has a clickable contents list for ease of navigation, a glossary for explanations of any unfamiliar terms, and use of clear headings and subheadings to structure information. Any approved changes to the layout and

structure will start to be rolled out across the suite of terms and conditions documents from academic year 2023/24. We will look for ways to make further improvements with each annual review, using student and staff feedback to help support this work. Our compliance team will also continue to complete annual accessibility checks on all of our documents.

Summary of changes from last version is overwhelming for new students. Don't need to know what amendments have been made.	The summary of changes is there to make students aware of any significant changes that have been made from the previous year's version of the document. We recognise the list of	We have now recommended that this information moves to a later point in the document, with clear signposting at the beginning so students know where to find it. All
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changes from the contractual documents
previous version will not will be reviewed annually
be relevant to everyone. to monitor the
effectiveness of this and
all other changes.

'What this document is Thank you for this We have reviewed this
not about' is confusing feedback. This section is feedback and believe
for a new student. intended to tell you that much of this detail
which students and could be included on the
learners are not covered policy web page so a
by the document so that student knows if the
you don't spend time document applies to
reading through a them before they open
document that does not the pdf. Wording for
apply to you. each policy web page
will be reviewed and
updated.

Lots of acronyms Thank you for this We have reviewed the
feedback. We document to ensure we
understand that use of are spelling things in full
acronyms can be at first use, before using
confusing. an acronym.

To access glossary Thank you for the We have reviewed the
definitions, hyperlinks feedback that hyperlinks document and

work better than
footnotes.

are preferred over
footnotes.

recommended use of
hyperlinks to take
students to an
explanation of any
unfamiliar terms. We
have also
recommended use of
hyperlinks to other
sections in the
document to help with
navigation, and
hyperlinks to any
relevant OU policy
documents or external
web pages. We will
continue to mirror this
approach in all of our
policy documents to
help students access
information and support
understanding.

A quick guide to the
main information would
be helpful.

Thank you for this
feedback. A summary is
sent to students by
email (in their

We have reviewed this
feedback and have
made a
recommendation to

confirmation of registration email) when they register to study. make the summary more prominent and accessible for students in a standalone space on our website (location to be confirmed). We must note that the summary is not intended to serve as a replacement for reading the main terms.

Some things do not become relevant until you study.

We understand that some sections of the document may not be relevant until students start studying. However, as it is a legally binding contract, we are required to include key messages relating to many aspects of the student journey, including the registration process and things that

As part of our annual review process, we will continue to check that all information included in the document is relevant and needs to be included.

may happen during your studies.

Lots of people clearly trust the OU so those who are redrafting the conditions should be mindful of this before making changes.

It is great to hear of such views of The OU.

We have made several positive experiences and recommendations with the intention of building upon the good work that has already been done in helping to present all information as clearly and effectively as possible. We will continue to review the document annually to identify further opportunities for improvement and will consider any feedback we receive from staff and students to support with this.

The document is too lengthy.

Thank you for this feedback. This is something we are looking at. We must also

We have made several recommendations to reduce the word count and overall length by

acknowledge that it is a legal document and we are required to provide students with a certain level of detail. This may limit the scope of the changes we are able to make.

removing repetition, simplifying lengthy clauses, and combining common themes, where possible. Any approved changes will start to be rolled out across the suite of terms and conditions documents from academic year 2023/24. As part of our annual review of these documents, we will continue to look for further streamlining opportunities where possible, without compromising the level of detail we are required to provide in order to fulfil our legal obligations.

**Content and
presentation**

We speak to members of staff, including brilliant SSTs and tutors for one-stop-shop help and guidance when needed. It is great to hear that students feel able to access help and guidance from our student support teams and academic staff when needed.

In all policy documents we encourage students to contact us to discuss anything or ask any questions. We will continue to include clear signposting so students know how to get in touch with us if they need to. We will also continue to review the clarity of the information we include in our documents at each annual review.

The language and terminology are clear but the document is too long and off-putting.

Thank you for this feedback. It is great to hear that some students find the language and terminology clear. We acknowledge that the document is lengthy and it is something we are looking at. However, it is difficult to reduce the length if all of the

We have reviewed the document to see if there is any information that does not need to be included. We have made recommendations to remove repetition, combine common themes wherever possible, which will help to reduce word count

information is deemed worthy to remain. and overall length of the document. Any approved changes will start to be rolled out across the suite of terms and conditions documents from academic year 2023/24. As part of our annual review process, we will continue to look for ways to present the necessary information as clearly and concisely as possible.

It would be easier if the document was in HTML with expanding headings and links.	We recognise the advantages of HTML and this is something we are planning to use for our policies generally. However, legal advice is that our contractual documents need to be in pdf, so this is not	We will continue to monitor this in case legal advice changes and we can review whether HTML is possible.
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something we can
change at the moment.

The structure is fine and the content is fine, but a more concise version would be helpful for students.

It is great to hear that some students feel the language is clear and the information is well presented.

Several students have suggested a summary of the main terms would be helpful. We note that a summary is sent to students by email when they register to study.

We have reviewed this feedback and have made a recommendation to make the summary more prominent and accessible for students in a standalone space on our website (location to be confirmed). We must note that the summary is not intended to serve as a replacement for reading the main terms. We will monitor the effectiveness of this planned change, and all other changes, as part of our annual review process.

My concern is the size of the document. Maybe headers with a short summary and a link at the end of each one would be helpful.

Thank you for this feedback and suggestion.

We have reviewed the document to check that our section headings, subheadings, and section introductions are as clear as possible. We have also made recommendations to remove repetition, simplify clauses and combine common themes to help reduce the word count and overall length of the document. We will continue to review annually to make sure our messages are as clear as possible for students. We will use student and staff feedback received throughout the year to support with this.

It is heavy on technical and legal language (a lot of references to clauses and sub-clauses).

Thank you for this feedback. We want the document to be as clear and easy to read as possible.

We have reviewed the document and made recommendations to simplify complex clauses and include glossary definitions to explain technical jargon, where possible. As it is a contract, formal or legal-sounding language is unavoidable at times. We will continue to review the document on an annual basis to look for ways to make the language as clear and easy to understand as possible. Where we cannot avoid technical language, we will endeavour to provide a glossary definition or an external link to more information.

You could maybe
condense some sections
for example A2/A3 and
A11/12.

Thank you for this
feedback and
suggestion. Looking for
ways to simplify or
condense sections more
effectively is a focus of
this review.

We have reviewed the
document and have
made several
recommendations to
condense, combine, or
simplify sections, where
possible, to make the
information easier to
read and understand for
students. Any approved
changes will start to be
rolled out across the
suite of terms and
conditions documents
from academic year
2023/24. We will
continue to look for ways
to make improvements
at each annual review
point.

**Proposed changes –
part one**

Support for combining the short summary (different to the longer 17-point summary) and introduction sections to remove duplication and reduce any delay in students reaching key messages.

Thank you for this feedback.

We have recommended that these two sections be combined. The change will be rolled out across the suite of terms and conditions documents.

Support for including the scope information (stating who the document is aimed at) more clearly on the main policy webpage so students can see if a document applies to them before opening it.

Thank you for this feedback.

We have recommended that the wording on the main policy web page be reviewed so that students understand if a document applies to them before they open the pdf. Once the wording is agreed, the relevant web pages will be updated.

Support to move the 'summary of significant changes' section to a later point in the

Thank you for this feedback.

We have recommended moving the summary of significant changes to a later point in the

document as it is not relevant to new students, can be overwhelming and causes a delay in reaching the main messages of the document.

document, with clear signposting at an earlier point, so students know where to find it.

**Proposed changes –
part two**

There was limited feedback but general support to move the summary of main terms into a more prominent place e.g. as a standalone document where students will notice it and read it.

Thank you for this feedback.

We have made a recommendation to make the existing summary more prominent and accessible for students in a standalone space on our website (location to be confirmed). We must note that the summary is not intended to serve as a replacement for reading

the main terms. We will monitor the effectiveness of this planned change, and all other changes, as part of our annual review process.

There was limited feedback regarding the possibility of moving the 'related documentation' section (list of relevant policy documents that students should refer to) to a later point in the document.

Thank you for this feedback.

As feedback was limited, discussions are ongoing regarding the best place for this section to sit in the document. We will continue to monitor any staff or student feedback to inform any recommendations we make.

There was limited feedback but general support for collating cancellation information into one section, rather

Thank you for this feedback.

We have reviewed the document and recommended removal of the earliest reference to the cancellation section to avoid

than being repeated in multiple places.

repetition, so there is now one section containing all cancellation information. If approved, the change will take effect in the published version of the conditions in academic year 2023/24. We will continue to use our annual review process to identify further ways to identify and remove any unnecessary duplication.

Date: 28 March 2023