

Response to student consultation on the Student Accessibility Policy

Summary

This is a response to the consultation on the development of the Student Accessibility Policy which took place between November 2016 and January 2017 on the Students Consultative Forum. The summary of student feedback is at <https://learn1.open.ac.uk/mod/forumng/discuss.php?d=81177>.

For the development of the Student Accessibility Policy, we asked for your input in relation to your top-three areas that we need to get right in order to support you in relation to your accessibility needs, as well as to provide us with an example of an experience where you felt well supported in relation to your accessibility needs and an example of where you were poorly supported. We used all the views you provided us with in relation to these prompts to inform the development of the draft version of the Student Accessibility Policy.

Once we had formulated the draft policy, we asked you again for input on the draft policy and gave you an opportunity to feed back on its suitability and appropriateness for meeting your needs. Based on this second round of feedback we formulated a final draft of the policy.

We are now in the process of using the overarching policy to work with different parts of the University to articulate a set of implementation guidelines which will describe specific actions we will take in order to effectively implement the student accessibility policy. We are also in the process of taking the policy through the OU governance processes to seek approval for it to be incorporated.

Key areas which the policy aims to address are:

1. Improving our communication with students with accessibility needs
2. Improving the responsiveness of our processes for putting in place proactive as well as reactive accessibility-related adjustments
3. Ensuring that we promote an inclusive environment within which students with accessibility needs feel valued as part of our academic community and feel confident in being able to disclose any accessibility requirements to us.

Full response

You said	OU response	Next steps, if appropriate
Many students commented on the importance of clear and timely communication by the OU in relation to support for accessibility requirements and for us to ensure that we respond effectively without students having to repeat themselves.	Four of the 17 principles of the accessibility policy we have developed focus on ensuring that we communicate effectively and in a timely manner with students with accessibility needs and make sure that we listen at every opportunity.	We will be working closely with OU staff in different areas to develop a set of actions which enhance the effectiveness and timeliness of our communication efforts with students with accessibility needs.
There were a lot of comments around the importance of timely provision of accessibility related support such as alternative formats.	The policy we have articulated includes a number of principles which focus on the provision of timely accessibility related support and ensuring that these are in place before they are encountered in the student journey.	We will be working with relevant areas of the University including the alternative formats team to review and streamline our processes for delivering accessibility related support
Many of you commented on the additional hurdles that need to be navigated by students with accessibility needs.	We are committed to minimising the overhead on students with accessibility needs and have developed a set of principles which focus on simplifying the processes involved in declaring a disability and seeking support including reasonable adjustments.	We will be working with relevant areas of the OU involved in managing student contact and requests for reasonable adjustments and where possible we will be identifying and removing unnecessary hurdles.
There were many comments around the Disabled Students Allowance (D S A) process and the importance of ensuring that this process operates in a smooth and effective way.	Although D S A is provided through funding bodies over which the OU has no direct control, we will make sure that we continue to enhance our communication with D S A funding bodies and provide effective guidance and support for students navigating the D S A process.	We will be identifying steps we can take to improve the effectiveness of our communication with the D S A bodies and reviewing our guidance and support for students going through this process.

The principles which we have articulated for the policy will drive the specific actions we will take to further improve our support for students with accessibility needs. These principles are:

Promote an inclusive environment

1. Be receptive to our students with accessibility needs and work with them in partnership in the design, development and evaluation of accessible resources and services
2. Maintain an inclusive, supportive, positive and proactive culture in which each student is treated as an individual with a unique combination of needs

3. Ensure that we do not discriminate against or treat unfairly any students based on their accessibility needs
4. Effectively support all our students according to need without placing undue emphasis on the conditions from which these needs arise
5. Provide appropriate, effective and accessible training, guidance and support for all staff. Ensure staff engage with training through processes including induction and CDSA (Career Development and Staff Appraisal).
6. Adopt the Social Model of Disability in proactively identifying and removing or minimising barriers to effective study over which we have a degree of control
7. Provide a confidential, supporting and positive environment in which students and enquirers feel secure to disclose their accessibility requirements without fear of being adversely affected

Ensure responsive processes and procedures

8. Minimise and where possible remove administrative burdens and delays for students in obtaining support with accessibility needs
9. Offer accessible, effective, fair and clearly communicated procedures to:
 - Address complaints associated with student accessibility-related needs
 - Provide effective support throughout the process to reduce any negative impact on the student while the complaint is being addressed
10. Adopt a proactive as well as responsive approach to putting in place adjustments to support students with accessibility needs
11. Make accessibility a key consideration in decision making and innovation from early conception and design of our curriculum all the way through to presentation, drawing on Universal Design for Learning principles and practices
12. Make every effort to ensure that all accessibility provisions for students requiring them are put in place in a timely and appropriate manner, where possible before these are encountered
13. Ensure wherever possible that all physical and digital spaces with which students can reasonably be expected to engage, including those from third-party providers, are accessible for students

Engage in effective communication

14. Provide effective, proactive and timely communication with students with accessibility needs from initial enquiry all the way to the completion of their studies
15. Engage with students directly and through the provision of timely and relevant information about accessibility-related provisions and ensure these forms of engagement are consistent and suitable for students' needs
16. Ensure that all students with accessibility needs are informed of the provisions that they can expect from us in supporting them in their studies
17. Offer support in how to make effective use of accessibility-related provisions and engage relevant students in further developing such provisions where appropriate

Date: April 2017