



The Open  
University

Student's guide to studying  
on a programme validated  
by The Open University  
2013/2014

# Student's guide to studying on a programme validated by The Open University 2013/14

## **Welcome to The Open University (OU)**

You have joined a community of around 40,000 students who are currently registered on programmes validated by the OU and delivered in OU approved institutions worldwide.

The aim of this guide is to introduce you to the University and explain what being registered on a programme validated by the OU means to you.

I hope that you will find this guide useful. If you have any questions about its content or any suggestions for improvement, please contact our Communications Officer, whose contact details you will find on page 8.

I wish you every success in your studies.

**Dr Liz Marr**

Director, Centre for Inclusion and Collaborative Partnerships

## About The Open University

- ▶ The OU was established by Royal Charter in 1969 and has since taught more than 1.8 million people.
- ▶ Around 250,000 people currently study with the OU, making it the UK's largest academic institution by student numbers.
- ▶ The OU is the UK's only university dedicated to distance learning, with support coming from a network of 13 national and regional centres, 350 study centres and nearly 6,000 Associate Lecturers.
- ▶ 83 of the FTSE 100 companies have sponsored staff on OU courses; Over 70% of OU students are in part-time or full-time employment; Nearly a third of new OU undergraduates are under 25; 71% of those have no previous HE qualifications on entry.
- ▶ The OU has been one of the top 3 UK universities for student satisfaction in the National Student Survey every year since the survey began in 2005. In 2012 it came top with a 93% satisfaction rating.
- ▶ Over 96,000 'like the OU' on Facebook:  
<http://www.facebook.com/theopenuniversity>
- ▶ The OU's twitter account has over 59,000 followers:  
<http://twitter.com/Openuniversity>
- ▶ The OU's extensive free educational material on iTunes U has had more than 60 million international downloads to date:  
<http://www.open.ac.uk/itunes/>
- ▶ OpenLearn, a free learning resources website which offers 11,000 hours of materials, including interactives, videos, academic blogs and OU podcasts, has had over 26.7 million visits since its launch:  
<http://www.open.edu/openlearn/>
- ▶ The OU has a dedicated channel on YouTube, with bite sized extracts from courses, plus videos of research, experiments and student life: <http://www.youtube.com/ou>
- ▶ Around 23,500 research publications are free to consult via Open Research Online (ORO), which is one of the largest and fastest growing research collections in the UK. Since 2006, ORO has had over 2.4 million visits: <http://oro.open.ac.uk/>

## Open University Validation

Through its Royal Charter, The Open University (OU) is able to validate programmes offered by institutions that wish to offer OU awards. The Centre for Inclusion and Collaborative Partnerships (CICP) is the unit in the University that manages its validation activity. We currently work with almost 30 institutions worldwide, for which we validate a total of more than 250 programmes at undergraduate and postgraduate level. To date over 128,000 students have achieved an OU validated award.

### What is an approved institution?

You are studying at an institution which, following a rigorous process, has been approved by the OU as an appropriate organisation to offer higher education programmes leading to Open University validated awards. Institutions are 're-approved' on a regular basis to ensure that they continue to meet the OU's criteria in terms of procedures and resources for teaching, learning and assessment, staffing and staff development, academic organisation and internal quality assurance systems.

### What is an OU validated programme or award?

You are studying on a programme validated by the OU, which, if you complete it successfully, will lead to an OU validated award. Awards can be undergraduate (e.g. BSc (Hons), BA (Hons), Certificate or Diploma of Higher Education, Foundation Degree), or postgraduate (e.g. MA, MSc, Postgraduate Certificate, Postgraduate Diploma). Your institution has designed your programme, for which it has full responsibility for teaching, assessment and further development, before submitting it to The Open University for validation.

OU validation is a stamp of quality that guarantees the value of your qualification. It responds to stringent quality assurance processes, such as external examiners scrutiny and the systematic application of the Quality Assurance Agency defined standards. This means that OU validated programmes are equivalent in level and standard to similar awards offered throughout UK higher education. They are exactly the same as OU direct awards in terms of employment and application for postgraduate study.

## How does the OU guarantee programme quality and standards?

The University assures itself of the standard and quality of its validated programmes through the following mechanisms:

- ▶ **The validation and revalidation processes**, which involve panels of experts from higher education (and industry where appropriate) both within and outside the relevant subject area. In order to reach a decision about whether or not to (re-)validate a programme, the panel has detailed discussions with the staff team, employers and students, and considers the proposed curriculum and assessment regulations and other programme documentation. Any major changes to a programme are validated and programmes are revalidated regularly. During your time at your institution, you may be asked to speak to a panel as part of a revalidation event.
- ▶ **Scrutiny of the institution's own quality assurance procedures.** As part of the approval process, we check that your institution has appropriate quality assurance procedures in place such as external examiners, student, staff and employer feedback mechanisms, analysis of statistical information and annual monitoring. Your institution is required to produce an annual report to the OU through which the University can monitor the institution's quality assurance procedures and ensure that any concerns are addressed.
- ▶ **The appointment of external examiners to every OU validated programme.** The role of the external examiners is to check and confirm that your assessment has been fair and just and that the academic standard of the award has been achieved. All external examiners produce reports which are considered by both the institution and the OU. The OU monitors these reports and the institution's response to assure itself that the quality and standard of the programme are being maintained. Your programme information must include the details of the relevant external examiners, such as name and position. In addition, your institution should give you access to external examiners' reports.

## What is my relationship with the OU?

Although you are studying for an OU validated award, your primary relationship is with your institution and you must follow its regulations and procedures. Any queries, complaints or requests should be directed towards the relevant person within your institution and information on who to contact should be found in your student handbook.

## What OU services are available to me?

Our approval process requires that institutions have all the necessary services you need to help you with your studies. In addition, we offer a number of great free online resources:

- ▶ **The OU Library** gives you access to non-restricted online resources to support your study and research.  
<http://library.open.ac.uk/libpartnerships/>
- ▶ **The OU on iTunes U** contains a wealth of learning materials, including 79 courses that are free to download.  
<http://www.open.ac.uk/itunes/>
- ▶ **OpenLearn**, a free learning resources website with around 11,000 hours of learning materials, including 8,000 hours taken from OU undergraduate and post-graduate courses.  
<http://www.open.edu/openlearn/>
- ▶ **The OU on YouTube**, has bite sized extracts from courses, plus videos of research, experiments and student life.  
<http://www.youtube.com/ou>
- ▶ **Open Research Online**, hosts over 23,500 free research publications. <http://oro.open.ac.uk/>
- ▶ **OU Alumni Association**: You can register for membership of the OU Alumni Association upon successful completion of a validated award. Membership is free and brings with it networking opportunities, discounts and offers, and much more.  
<http://www.open.ac.uk/alumni>  
For a registration form, visit the student section of our website.  
<http://www.open.ac.uk/validate>
- ▶ **OU Careers Service**  
<http://www.open.ac.uk/careers>

## Frequently asked questions

### Q: Where will I be registered?

**A:** You will be registered as a student at your institution, which will register you through The Open University for an OU validated award. The OU holds summarised information on students, whilst detailed records are held by your institution.

### Q: Who is responsible for induction and any advice I might need?

**A:** Your institution will arrange induction for you and will have appropriate services for advice and guidance on all matters whether academic, financial or personal.

### Q: Where can I find information on my programme, regulations and support services?

**A:** You should find this information in the materials given to you when you start your programme. If you have any further questions, you should contact your programme leader or administrator.

### Q: What should I do if I want to make a complaint?

**A:** Try to deal with any problems or complaints as soon as possible by speaking to your course leader or administrator. If the matter cannot be resolved informally, your institution has complaints procedures which you should follow. These procedures should be available in the documentation provided to you at the beginning of your programme. Your institution will also ask for your feedback at various stages throughout your programme and each programme will have a committee on which there is a student representative. You should raise any concerns through these mechanisms.

### Q: Who is responsible for assessing my performance?

**A:** Your institution is responsible for setting and marking assessments. It is also responsible for ensuring that accurate data on student progress and awards is provided to the OU.

**Q: What should I do if I dispute a decision made about my performance?**

**A:** Your programme handbook should detail your institution's appeals procedures, which will include deadlines for any appeal. You should follow these procedures as soon as possible to ensure that you do not miss the opportunity to appeal.

**Q: Can I appeal or complain to the OU?**

**A:** You have the right to appeal or make a complaint to the OU, but you must first go through the relevant procedures in your institution. Your institution can provide you with the detailed procedures for submitting a formal appeal or complaint to the OU through the Centre for Inclusion and Collaborative Partnerships (CICP), or you can find them in the OU Handbook for Validated Awards, on our website <http://www.open.ac.uk/validate>.

**Q: What will happen if I need to leave my programme early?**

**A:** You may be eligible for an intermediate award or credit for your achievements up to that point. Discuss this possibility with your institution. It may apply to the OU on your behalf for an intermediate award or a certificate of credit. It may be possible to use this credit to get exemption from aspects of another programme within the institution or elsewhere. You will also be entitled to a transcript showing the complete record of your learning and achievement up to the point at which you left the programme.

**Q: What happens when I successfully complete my programme?**

**A:** On successful completion of your programme, your institution will arrange certification from the OU. Your certificate will include your name, the award, the name of the institution you studied at and the date the award was conferred. The OU coat of arms, crest and logo will appear on the certificate, which will be signed by the Vice-Chancellor and the University Secretary. You will also receive a Diploma Supplement, which is a formal and comprehensive record of your learning and achievement. This will come in addition to the transcripts that you will have received as you progress through the programme.

Finally, you may be invited to an awards ceremony organised by your institution and you can choose to attend an OU ceremony (please contact us for details). As for the next steps...

- ▶ You may be able to use the credits or award you have gained to continue your study at the institution, at the OU, or elsewhere. The OU offers progression onto supported distance learning programmes, which you may study whilst in employment.
- ▶ You may join the *OU Alumni Association* (see page 5).
- ▶ You may use the *OU Careers Service* (see page 5).

## Where can I find further information about the OU and OU validation?

Your first point of contact should always be your institution. However, further information is available online or by contacting us:

### Online information available to students

**OU website:** <http://www.open.ac.uk>

**Validation website:** <http://www.open.ac.uk/validate>

The validation website includes the list of all the OU approved institutions, more information about approval and validation, the *OU Handbook for Validated Awards* and our appeals and complaints procedures.

### Contact us

#### Centre for Inclusion and Collaborative Partnerships

The Open University

Walton Hall

Milton Keynes

MK7 6AA

UK

**Phone:** +44 (0) 1908 332 840

**Fax:** +44 (0) 1908 332 841

**email:** [cicp-recep@open.ac.uk](mailto:cicp-recep@open.ac.uk)

**Website:** [www.open.ac.uk/validate](http://www.open.ac.uk/validate)



## Centre For Inclusion and Collaborative Partnerships

The Open University  
Walton Hall  
Milton Keynes  
MK7 6AA  
UK

**Phone:** +44 (0) 1908 332 840  
**Fax:** +44 (0) 1908 332 841  
**email:** [cicp-recep@open.ac.uk](mailto:cicp-recep@open.ac.uk)  
**Website:** [www.open.ac.uk/validate](http://www.open.ac.uk/validate)

Issued August 2013

**SUP 017722**

Designed by LTS Media Corporate team  
Front cover image © Yuri / iStock.com.

The Open University is incorporated by Royal Charter (RC 000391), an exempt charity in England & Wales and a charity registered in Scotland (SC 038302)