

Best Practice in Curriculum Withdrawals

Student Leadership Team 2024–2026

Protecting the Curriculum Priority Project

Introduction

Open SU strongly opposes the reduction of the Open University's curriculum and calls instead for its preservation and long-term expansion. The curriculum is central to the OU's mission of widening participation, supporting lifelong learning, and providing flexible, high-quality education to diverse student communities. A clear democratic mandate backs this position: at the 2024 Conference, 93.40% of the 1,828 voting students supported this motion, giving Open SU a strong instruction to campaign on this issue. While we recognise the serious financial challenges facing the University and acknowledge that some cost-saving measures may be unavoidable, curriculum cuts should be a last resort. Reducing academic provision risks long-term harm to students' opportunities, institutional reputation, and future sustainability. Open SU therefore urges the University to work collaboratively with students and staff to explore alternative approaches that protect academic breadth while addressing financial pressures. Where curriculum reductions or withdrawals become unavoidable, student representatives must be consulted and meaningfully involved throughout the decision-making process.

This document sets out Open SU's expectations for how the University should manage such situations, ensuring students are supported and continue to receive a high-quality academic experience. It also outlines the governance processes that we believe must be followed before any decisions are made, including appropriate consideration through Boards of Study, Academic Committees for Learning, Teaching and Assessment, and ultimately the Qualifications and Assessment Committee, which holds delegated authority for approving the introduction or removal of curriculum.

By clarifying these expectations, we aim to promote transparency, uphold due process, and safeguard the interests of current and future students.

To uphold best practice in curriculum withdrawals, we expect the Open University to act in the following areas, outlined below:

1. Student Consultation
2. Governance
3. Teach-out Periods
4. Communication and Student Support
5. Rights to Refunds, Compensation, and Appeals
6. Inclusion

1. Student Consultation

Students should be consulted at the earliest opportunity to ensure that the student voice remains central to decision-making.

In the [Student Protection Plan](#), Section 3.d, the University commits to:

"Taking into consideration your needs and the impact that any proposed changes and protective measures may have on you."

This means students must be involved early in discussions about curriculum withdrawal, not merely informed once a decision has been made.

2. Governance

Student Representatives are expected to be consulted at:

- Board of Study level
- Faculty Committees for Learning, Teaching and Assessment
- Qualifications and Assessment Committee

Their names should be recorded on the Qualification Withdrawal Form, as minutes are often delayed and do not provide timely confirmation.

The elected representative responsible for student voice at Open SU must always receive the completed Qualification Withdrawal Form, identifying which Student Representatives were consulted.

This allows Open SU to follow up and ensure the Student Representatives' views were heard and addressed.

3. Teach-Out Periods

Minimum teach-out periods must be guaranteed, for example, 5 years (+1 year for resits) for undergraduate degrees, 2 (+1) years for master's degrees.

Teach-out plans must be approved by the Qualifications and Assessment Committee, who ensure students have sufficient time to complete.

Alternative options must be provided when direct completion isn't possible, such as transferring to:

- A related qualification
- The Open Programme
- Another provider

Refunds and compensation must be applied in line with the [Refund and Compensation Policy](#).

4. Communication and Student Support

A Communication Plan must identify affected students and outline how they will be contacted.

- Students should receive an initial email followed by a telephone call to discuss their individual options.

The module or qualification should be removed from the website as soon as the withdrawal decision has been confirmed.

Communications must clearly outline:

- Students' rights and responsibilities
- The nature of the changes, timelines, and notice periods
- How to access advice and guidance

A dedicated advisory team must offer consistent, personalised support.

Open SU (via the VP Student Voice or a nominated contact) must be consulted on all withdrawal communications.

5. Rights to Refunds, Compensation and Appeals

Students must be signposted to the OU's [Refund and Compensation Policy](#) if they cannot complete due to the University's actions.

Students should be reminded that they may use the [Complaints and Appeals Procedure](#) and /or the [Individual Representation Service](#) if the plan is not implemented fairly or transparently.

6. Inclusion

Student Representatives will emphasise the need for specific consideration of students with:

- Disabilities
- Caring responsibilities
- Other protected characteristics

There must be accessibility and fairness in alternative arrangements and equitable support throughout the teach-out process.

In Summary...

Open SU expect that, either through the University's direct correspondence, or through our appointed Student Representatives:

- We are provided with the formal teach-out plan to ensure it aligns with the timelines set out in the Student Protection Plan (SPP).
- Students receive early and transparent communication about proposed changes, as required under Section 6 of the SPP.
- Student Representatives are meaningfully involved in consultation and decision-making, in line with the SPP's commitments to incorporating student feedback.
- Equality Impact Assessments are completed, reviewed and considered before any changes are approved or implemented.
- Students are fully supported in accessing advice, refunds, or transfer options where these apply.