



Open SU Travel & Subsistence Policy

1. Principles of the policy

- 1.1. This policy set outs the basis on which Student volunteers and Staff may claim reimbursement for travel and subsistence incurred whilst on Open SU business. This means attendance at Open SU committees and other approved meetings, courses or conferences¹.
- 1.2. Open SU recognises that travel may be required for Student Volunteers and Staff to carry out their roles effectively. We also acknowledge that emissions from travel are likely to be one of our largest contributors to our organisation's carbon emissions, therefore it is important that we all consider how we might reduce the emissions generated through travel related to Open SU activities.
- 1.3. We will aim, wherever possible, to have a hybrid or online alternative for meetings or events for both accessibility and environmental reasons. We recognise however that the benefits of face-to-face activities will sometimes outweigh the negative environmental impact of travel-related emissions.
- 1.4. We ask that when considering options for travel, you consider environmental impact alongside cost and time. We recognise that public transport may not always be a practical solution, especially given the location of the University campus in Milton Keynes. However, we ask that where possible, public transport is given precedence, and that domestic flights are avoided. If use of personal vehicle is the best option, we would ask you to consider car sharing where reasonable and practical.
- 1.5. Claims are accepted for the actual cost of expenses incurred wholly, exclusively and necessarily in the performance of duties for and on behalf of Open SU, (see 4.4 for subsistence limits).

¹ *For reimbursement of expenses for attendance at University-arranged meetings or events, please refer to the organiser for advice on expenses reimbursement arrangements.*

- 1.6. A visa may be required for non-UK citizens. Any costs associated with visas are not reimbursable by Open SU. Information on visa requirements is available [here](#).
- 1.7. Careful consideration should be given to booking travel and/or accommodation in advance. Savings available for advance bookings may only represent value for money in circumstances where there is a high degree of certainty that the event will go ahead, and therefore should be weighed up against losses that may be incurred should it be necessary to cancel or make changes to a booking.
- 1.8. If an event is cancelled or attendance is prevented due to illness or other unforeseen circumstances, every effort should be made to cancel bookings made and obtain refunds. If this is not possible, expenses incurred will be reimbursed on submission of an expenses claim, supported by receipts. Please use the “explanation” section of the form to explain the reason for non-attendance and efforts made to cancel bookings.
- 1.9. It should be clear to the claimant, before they incur any expenditure, what will be reimbursed and how it will be funded. If there is any doubt, the claimant must seek clarification in advance from the relevant Open SU budget holder(s). A list of budget holders is provided in Appendix 1 but contact oustudents-resources@open.ac.uk for guidance if you are in any doubt about the eligibility for reimbursement or the budget holder.
- 1.10. Expenses are funded from a variety of budgets and budget holders are accountable for the spending of their budgets. Budget holders will therefore need to assess requests for funding, balancing the cost against the benefits to student members as a whole.
- 1.11. Open SU provides separate budgets to provide extra funding where it has been agreed that a volunteer requires additional support to facilitate the fulfilment of their remits. In deciding to what extent funding can be provided to meet an individual’s specific needs, Open SU will need to consider the added costs incurred to make any reasonable adjustments to the current arrangements, as well as other potential calls on the funding. Further information is available from the [Associate Director – Services and Projects](#).

2. Policy Administration

- 2.1. Open SU's Business Services Team have the responsibility for the day-to-day administration of expenses.
- 2.2. Depending on their role, the claimant will either submit their expenses claims and receipts electronically via our accounting system, for which an app is available; or by completing an electronic form which must be emailed with supporting receipts and documentation to the Business Services Team (email: oustudents-resources@open.ac.uk).
- 2.3. All receipts of expenditure should accompany the expense claim, or in the case of missing or non-receipt items, a note to this effect should be provided with the claim, otherwise processing of the claim may be delayed.
- 2.4. **VAT receipts** should be obtained where possible to enable Open SU to minimise its costs by recovering VAT where permissible in accordance with HMRC rules.
- 2.5. The original receipt(s) should be retained until reimbursement has been received.
- 2.6. All Open SU expenses must be **authorised** by the relevant Budget Holder in accordance with the list at Appendix 1. Approval in advance of incurring expenditure should therefore be sought from the relevant Budget Holder.
- 2.7. Expenses and receipts must be submitted **within four weeks** of the event. Any claim submitted after this date must include a written explanation for the delay, which will then be passed to VP Administration for consideration.
- 2.8. We aim to settle claims within two weeks of receipt. If the authorising manager has a query which is likely to delay processing, the claimant will be notified by that authorising manager.
- 2.9. Open SU reserves the right to withhold payment of any expense claims which are not properly authorised or are outside the terms of the policy. Processing of incomplete or incorrectly completed claims may be delayed as these may need to be returned to claimants/queried with claimants and/or Budget Holders.
- 2.10. It is the responsibility of the person claiming to ensure that the personal details provided for the purposes of administering the claim are correct and up to date (including their name, address and email address) to

enable the Business Services team to make contact and bank details for reimbursement.

3. Travel Expenses

- 3.1. Notwithstanding clauses 1.3 and 1.4, the health, safety and welfare of our employees and volunteers is paramount, and so modes of transport should be selected accordingly.
- 3.2. **Public Transport** – this is Open SU's preferred mode of transport in consideration of minimising our environmental impact. the most competitive prices are usually obtained online, and this also facilitates price comparisons. Where first class travel and/or overnight sleeper modes of transport provide better value for money, or these options are considered the most practicable/reasonable in the circumstances, the claimant must seek written approval in advance from the [Head of Business Services](#).
- 3.3. **Railcards** – the use of railcards and discounts is encouraged and Open SU will assist in the purchase of a railcard where this brings financial advantage to Open SU. Agreement should be sought in advance from the [Head of Business Services](#) on the proportion of the cost that can be met by Open SU.
- 3.4. **Taxis** – travel by taxi should generally be avoided, but Open SU recognises that public transport is not always a practical solution, particularly in an unfamiliar place, at certain times, or where there are medical or safety concerns. We simply ask that the use of taxis against other options is considered wisely.
- 3.5. **Car hire** – prior permission from the [Head of Business Services](#) must be sought in writing by providing an explanation of reason(s) and/or price comparisons with other methods of transport.
- 3.6. **Personal Vehicle** – this may be the preferred option if public transport is not practicable in the circumstances, for example due to safety concerns, journey time, material cost difference. Open SU will reimburse based on the number of miles travelled at the [Open University published rates](#).
- 3.7. For all mileage claims, the start and end addresses (including postcodes) of each journey must be provided.
- 3.8. For staff, whose contracted permanent place of work is the campus, no reimbursement will be made for travel between home and the office. For travel to another location for training or other work-related purpose,

where the journey starts and ends at home, reimbursement will only be made for mileage in excess of usual home to office mileage.

- 3.9. The Passenger Rates apply to passengers travelling to carry out Open SU business. The name of the passenger(s) and purpose of their journey must be provided in the “Explanation” section of the form.
- 3.10. Open SU does not insure an individual’s own privately-owned car for business use. It is a personal responsibility to ensure adequate insurance cover is provided through the vehicle owner’s own motor insurance policy.

4. Subsistence

- 4.1. Reimbursement of subsistence is to cover reasonable out of pocket expenses for food and drink whilst travelling or away from home (students and volunteers on Open SU business; or away from their normal place of employment (staff).
- 4.2. VAT receipts (not credit card receipts) are required for all amounts claimed.
- 4.3. Where meals and drinks are provided as part of a hotel booking, or by the venue/event attended, additional expenditure incurred will only be reimbursed in exceptional circumstances.
- 4.4. For costs incurred not provided as part of a hotel booking/event, actual expenditure incurred will be reimbursed up to the following limits (inclusive of non-alcoholic drinks), where travel time or time away from home/normal place of work, **exceeds 5 hours**:

Breakfast	£10*	Where the claimant leaves home before 07.00am or an overnight stay has been necessary and breakfast is not included in the bed and breakfast rate.
Lunch	£10	
Dinner	£25	Where an overnight stay has been necessary or return to home/work is after 20.00pm

** in the case of an overnight stay, the hotel's standard breakfast rate will be reimbursed.*

- 4.5. Service charges will generally not be reimbursed but may be considered if the charge incurred was unavoidable, for example due to there being no other option of venue for obtaining suitable subsistence.

- 4.6. In exceptional circumstances it may be possible to grant additional funds i.e. if there are medical or special dietary needs. Support and advice are available from the Business Services Team at oustudents-resources@open.ac.uk.
- 4.7 Under no circumstances will expenditure on alcohol or tobacco be reimbursed.

5. Accommodation

- 5.1. Accommodation for attendance at in-person Open SU events or meetings to be attended by a group of volunteers and/or staff, will usually be arranged by office staff, unless advised otherwise. Related charges will then be settled directly with providers by Open SU.
- 5.2. For specific, individual or one-off accommodation needs, individuals are responsible for booking their own accommodation, but the need for accommodation should be agreed in advance with the relevant Budget Holder. Requests will generally only be approved where an overnight stay is necessary due to the timing of the event(s) and/or travel distance; or where an overnight stay makes sense from a cost and/or an environmental sustainability point of view. For example, this may apply where attendance at 2 or more events is required on consecutive days.

6. Advances

- 6.1. Advances can be provided for those having difficulty funding their travel to attend an Open SU meeting/event normally up to a limit of £300 per event. The Head of Business Services will however consider costs in excess of this limit in extenuating circumstances, subject to 1.10 and 1.11 above.
- 6.2. Open SU advances must be submitted to the Business Services team at least **ten working days** prior to the event to ensure payment is timely. For non-UK citizens, evidence of possession of a valid visa must be provided with any application for an advance.
- 6.3. An advance must always be followed by an expense claim form giving a detailed account for the advance, including receipts for all items of expenditure. The claim form must be submitted within **four weeks** of the meeting/event. An advance unsupported by receipts may be regarded as a benefit in kind, leading to a tax and national insurance liability for the

individual. Open SU would also incur a national insurance liability in these circumstances.

- 6.4. If an expense claim to support an advance is not submitted within four weeks of the meeting/event, the claimant will be required to repay the full amount advanced to Open SU within 14 days of this being requested by the [Head of Business Services](#).
- 6.5. If the advance is more than the cost of your travel or you are unable to attend the meeting/event, the amount owing must be repaid to the Open SU. You will be sent details of how to repay the amount on receipt of the claim. Any amount owing cannot be held over to the next meeting/event you attend.
- 6.6. If costs have been incurred in relation to an unattended event, an expenses claim must be submitted to support the expenditure incurred in accordance with 6.2, otherwise repayment will be required in accordance with 6.4. For further information on cancellation, please refer to 1.7 and 1.8.
- 6.7. Further advances will not be approved, nor will expense claims for any subsequent events be processed whilst there is still a claim outstanding, due to the risks to the individual and Open SU highlighted in 6.3.
- 6.8. Open SU may decline future requests for advances where the deadlines in this policy have not been met.

Appendix 1

Budget Groups	Contact	Email
Administration and Management	Head of Business Services	oustudents-resources@open.ac.uk
Governance	Head of Executive Support & Staff Welfare	oustudents-exec-support-staff@open.ac.uk
Communications	Head of Digital Communications	Oustudents-media@open.ac.uk
Community	Head of Student Community	OUstudents-community@open.ac.uk
Representation	Head of Volunteering and Representation	OUstudents-volunteer@open.ac.uk
Research	Head of Strategy and Insight	OUstudents-insights@open.ac.uk
Student Support	Head of EDI and Student Welfare	OUstudents-support@open.ac.uk
OU Students Shop/Trading	Head of Business Services	OUSA-Services@open.ac.uk
Volunteering	Head of Volunteering and Representation	OUstudents-volunteer@open.ac.uk
Projects	Chief Executive/Senior Management	OUSA@open.ac.uk