

Access and Participation Statement 2021/22

1. A brief description of University of Essex Online

University of Essex Online (UoEO) is a higher education provider offering undergraduate and postgraduate programmes which are delivered entirely online. We offer programmes in a range of subject areas including: Business, Criminology, Law, Health, Psychology, Computing and Education. Our programmes can be studied online from anywhere in the world on a flexible part-time basis.

University of Essex Online programmes are validated by the University of Essex and delivered in partnership with Kaplan Open Learning (KOL). KOL has been in partnership with the University of Essex since 2007 and is part of Kaplan International Pathways, which is part of Kaplan Inc, one of the world's largest and most diverse education providers.

2. Vision and aims

Our strategic focus is on widening participation as the nature of our student demographic is mature, employed and seeking a flexible, vocational course to develop and enhance their careers. We provide the opportunity for students who have not been able to access higher education previously to re-enter education.

Our continuing vision is 'to become a world leader in online learning, making higher education accessible to anyone with the potential and drive to succeed.'

The pursuit of this vision is underpinned by our core values:

- Integrity - we hold ourselves to the highest ethical standards in everything we do.
- Knowledge - we offer expert resources to help you achieve your academic and career best.
- Support - we give you the tools you need to succeed.
- Opportunity - we open doors and broaden access to education.

- Results - we're dedicated to helping you achieve your goals – we succeed when you succeed.

In pursuit of our vision, our aims have always been to provide educational opportunities for those who may not have been able to access higher education (HE) at the traditional time or in a traditional way. We believe that the traditional academic calendar and course start dates act as a barrier to access for our target student group who mainly comprise of mature adults, balancing work and domestic commitments.

We are a reflective and learning organisation which, coupled with our core values, has guided our approach to higher education design, delivery and assessment. This value-led, reflective approach is evident in the innovative, student-centred features of our delivery, which allow us to better recognise and meet the needs of our target student group.

3. Access

The majority of our students are mature adults, balancing work and domestic responsibilities. As a result, we have developed our academic delivery to be flexible and reflect the additional demands of employment, domestic and family commitments. We are committed to fair access and we encourage applications from all those who demonstrate the potential to succeed on our programmes.

We offer an open entry route for those applicants who may be entering HE for the first time or returning to education after a significant break and who may not have traditional entry qualifications. An assessment of work experience is undertaken by our academic team which informs a holistic assessment of each individual application.

All of our applicants are considered on their merits and experience regardless of race, ethnic origin, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, age, socio-economic background, family circumstances, religious or political beliefs, affiliations or other irrelevant distinctions.

We also offer regular start dates, meaning that students have the choice of when to commence their studies and can schedule their start date in line with employment or other commitments and time-frames.

3.1 Tuition Fees

We recognise that the cost of HE is a prohibiting factor for many people. We have maintained a lower tuition fee for undergraduate programmes than many HE providers and we offer multiple payment options to help students spread the cost of their course and manage their finances.

Our Admissions Advisers are trained to assist applicants with their government-backed student loan applications for undergraduate or postgraduate programmes, if applicable.

We also offer a unique 21-day money back guarantee. This allows applicants to experience the first three weeks of the programme and if they decide that they don't wish to continue they can withdraw and receive a full refund.

We also offer a range of financial support including scholarships, bursaries and a hardship fund.

3.2 Ladders of Opportunity

Applicants who are entering/re-entering education are often unsure about making a significant time commitment, we have therefore created 'ladders of opportunity' whereby students can enrol on a shorter target award from which they can progress to higher qualifications if they wish. For example, on undergraduate programmes students can begin with a Certificate of Higher Education, and following successful completion, progress to the Bachelors award. Postgraduate students can begin with a postgraduate certificate and on successful completion progress to the postgraduate diploma or full Masters. Alternatively, they can begin with the postgraduate diploma and progress to the full Masters, thus providing an array of choice and flexibility for students to plan their studies in accordance with their outside responsibilities and commitments.

4. Support and Success

4.1 Student Support

We ensure that all our provision is offered on a part-time modular basis incorporating support arrangements, including a Leave of Absence policy in addition to the traditional Intermission arrangements; this allows our students to take time out of their studies if needed to deal with life events that may affect their ability to engage with their studies.

An intuitive, easy to use Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) provides a user experience which makes it easy for students and academic staff to access course materials anywhere, anytime on a wide range of devices. The platform is tailored to each student profile allowing for the application of adaptive learning strategies and a personalised student experience.

The application of 'learning science' has led us to develop content delivery tools such as integrated lecturecasts which incorporate learning materials, formative assessment activities and link to electronic resources such as eBooks and asynchronous and synchronous communication activities.

This flexibility provides greater accessibility to higher education to those students who are in full time employment, have family or other dependents and therefore cannot take time out to attend a traditional face to face provision on campus.

We are mindful that students experience many challenges when studying online and we have invested heavily in our Student Support team and resources to provide a range of services to help students overcome any difficulties that they may face.

Students enrolling on our programmes are assigned a dedicated Student Support team for their subject area who will, be their first point of contact throughout their studies. The Student Support team are able to get to know the student and become familiar with their situation so that they can offer the most relevant and effective advice and guidance to help them gain the most from their studies.

We believe that building relationships with students in order to gain a good understanding of their individual challenges and study patterns is essential for retention and student success. This enables us to initiate early interventions should grades or attendance decline.

We have also established a Student Experience and Welfare team, who provide advice and guidance in relation to disability support and reasonable adjustment plans, career development and health and wellbeing.

We believe the excellent results that we consistently achieve in the National Student Survey (NSS) are evidence of our commitment to supporting students to successful outcomes. In 2021 we achieved an overall Student Satisfaction of 95%.

Our commitment to world-class online learning has led to University of Essex Online winning the best online classroom experience category at the Global Student Satisfaction Awards 2021. The Global Student Satisfaction Awards celebrate the very best universities across the world and are the only

student-powered global university awards that capture student feedback on their study experience. The Awards are delivered by Studyportals in collaboration with the British Council, IELTS and Unibuddy.

4.2 Learning and Development Support

We offer learning and development support to all students, and in particular, to those who are entering HE for the first time or returning after a significant break, examples include:

- Access to a VLE which is user friendly.
- Access to a Welcome Week and Induction led by the Student Adviser
- Access to study skills resources and materials in the form of the Student and Tutor
- Academic Resources (Study Skills Hub) page of the VLE, supporting the transition to studying higher education.
- Access to a Study Skills Manager/Coordinator to provide formative feedback on study skills.

5. Attainment

All of these measures have resulted in high retention and completion rates for our students compared to other part-time online providers.