

Inclusion and Equal Opportunities Policy

1. Introduction

The University of Essex Online recognises the value of diversity. We are committed to inclusion and equal opportunity for our students. We expect students to be treated with dignity and respect solely on the basis of their merits, abilities and potential, regardless of age, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, socio-economic background, political beliefs and affiliations, family circumstances or other irrelevant distinction.

The Management Board is responsible for ensuring that the company complies with the requirements of the Equality Act 2010.

Each member of staff is responsible for implementing this policy.

2. Overarching Principles and Legislative Obligations

Under the general equality duty set out in the Equality Act 2010 we have an obligation as an education provider to have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic* and those who do not.
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

*Appendix A defines 'protected characteristics',

Non-discriminatory language must be used in all internal and external documents, official correspondence, publications and other communications, including verbal communication.

We will ensure that the principles of equality and diversity are taken into account in policies and procedures and that, when new policies are developed, or existing ones revised, consideration is given to the needs of particular groups of people e.g. disabled people.

3. Supportive Community

All staff and students are expected not to knowingly use language which may be deemed to be discriminatory or offensive to other members of staff or students. All staff and students are expected to be tolerant of the beliefs of others and be sensitive to the influence of ethnic and cultural background, the needs of those with disabilities and issues related to gender, marital status, sexuality, socio-economic background and age.

Although students and staff at the University of Essex Online interact virtually, real world standards of behaviour still apply, and all members of our community are expected to adhere to the guidance outlined in our **Use of the Virtual Learning Environment and Social Media Policy**.

4. Harassment and Bullying

The University of Essex Online is an international community that is both multicultural and diverse. All members of the community and visitors are to be treated with dignity and respect. We are committed to establishing an environment that is free from any form of harassment and bullying. Harassment and bullying adversely affects working, learning and social conditions for students, staff and visitors and are unacceptable. The University of Essex Online has a zero-tolerance approach to instances of bullying or harassment. Zero tolerance means that (i) we will take action and (ii) the action will be proportionate to the circumstance of the case. Any incident of harassment, bullying or victimisation will be regarded seriously and will be treated as grounds for disciplinary action up to and including dismissal with or without notice or expulsion from the company\withdrawal from a programme of study.

We will make every effort to make visitors aware of the behaviour it expects from all members of its community and will take steps to deal with any allegations of harassment or bullying by a visitor or of a visitor.

5. The Student Experience

For the purposes of this policy the term 'student' refers to current students, prospective students and former students with whom the University of Essex Online has a continuing relationship.

Admission of Students

We are committed to fair access and encourages applications for all students who are able to demonstrate the potential to meet the entry criteria for the relevant course. Our **Admissions Policy** is designed to ensure that all applications are considered fairly and consistently and in accordance with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education. Against this background our admissions policy is intended to provide a policy and procedural framework within which admissions decision-making is characterised by transparency, fairness and consistency.

Learning, Teaching and Assessment

We will ensure that wherever it is reasonably possible, no individual student or group of students is discriminated against on the grounds of the protected characteristics, by the content of curriculum or the way in which it is delivered e.g. during lecturecasts, discussion forums, or by assessment methods.

External Examiners

On appointment, we will draw this policy to the attention of each External Examiner, along with the expectation that they will act in accordance with it.

Academic Freedom, Freedom of Speech and Inclusion

The University of Essex Online values academic freedom, freedom of expression and inclusion. Academic freedom is an essential part of UK higher education and flourishes where that is tolerance of, and respect for, a wide range of views and beliefs. In addition, everyone has the right

to freedom of expression within the law. Our legal obligations and our commitment to inclusion demand that we exercise our freedoms responsibly, respectfully and with due regard to the values we share as an online learning community. This means that neither academic freedom nor freedom of expression can be used as an excuse for subjecting an individual or group to bullying or harassment or for committing a hate incident.

Our **Policy on Academic Freedom and Freedom of Speech** affirms our commitment to promoting academic freedom, freedom of speech and inclusion with the law.

We will seek to ensure that freedom of speech, debate and expressions within the law is secured for students. All students are expected to comply with the requirements of the Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006 which gives people the protection from harm because of their religious beliefs or lack of religious beliefs.

The right to freedom of speech will also be upheld as part of our responsibility to pay due regard to the government's Prevent Duty. However, where the beliefs or views that are expressed are unlawful we reserve the right to prevent those views or beliefs from being expressed. Further information on the Prevent Duty can be found in the **Prevent Policy**.

The law focuses on those who stir up violence and hatred on religious grounds and the main offences cover:

- The use of words or behaviour or display of written material
- Publishing or distributing written material
- Distributing, showing or playing a recording
- Producing threatening material with a view to using it in a way that is intended to stir up religious hatred.

In the event of a student having any matter arising from the application of this policy it should in the first instance be taken up with the Student Adviser.

6. Complaints of discrimination

The University of Essex Online is a large online community. From time to time a member of the community may feel dissatisfied with some aspect of their dealings with the us and when that happens it is important that the issue is dealt with as quickly as possible.

Students can seek advice from their dedicated Student Support Team, Module tutor or Head of Department.

Staff can seek advice from Heads of Department, Senior Managers or Human Resources.

We have procedures in place for students to follow if they believe they have not been treated in accordance with this policy.

Students should make a formal complaint of harassment or discrimination by following the procedures in the **Student Complaint Policy**. Staff should make a formal complaint of harassment or discrimination using the Kaplan **Harassment, Bullying and Sexual Misconduct Policy**.

Under the Equality Act students can complain of behaviour they find offensive even if the behaviour is not directed at them.

Responsible Manager	Name	Date Approved	Related Policies
Managing Director	Nicola Pittman	March 2026	<p><u>Student Complaint Policy</u></p> <p><u>Student Code of Conduct Policy</u></p> <p><u>Use of the Virtual Learning Environment and Social Media Policy</u></p> <p><u>Harassment, Bullying and Sexual Misconduct Policy</u></p>