



**UWE  
Bristol**

University  
of the  
West of  
England

*This policy helps all members of UWE  
Bristol to select, store and use  
appropriate methods of authentication.*

# Password Policy

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## Document Control

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## 1. Purpose

Passwords are an important aspect of computer security. Effective password management will minimise the likelihood of user accounts being easily compromised and mitigate risks to University information and IT systems. Use of long, complex passwords help to mitigate attacks that attempt to guess them; regular password changes help to mitigate the long-term exploitation of any disclosed or discovered passwords.

The purpose of this policy is to establish the standard for the creation of strong passwords, the protection of those passwords and their ongoing management.

## 2. Scope

This policy applies to all individuals and groups with user accounts, with which to access the University's IT and network facilities. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Staff (full-time, part-time, and temporary)
- Registered students
- Consultants and contractors working for, or on behalf of the University
- Associates, visitors, and conference delegates
- External services used for University purposes, e.g. social media
- Privileged accounts (used for managing IT systems and services)

## 3. Responsibility and Consequences of Policy Violation

The University has an obligation to comply with statutory, legal and contractual requirements. It is the responsibility of every individual with a UWE user account to protect it in accordance with the standards set out in this policy.

- Relevant disciplinary procedures will be used in cases where a student or staff member fails to adhere to this policy
- Commercial contracts for third parties and contractors must contain clauses referring to this policy and the consequences of non-compliance
- Any exception to this policy must be approved in advance, by the University's Head of Information Security, or nominated deputy

## 4. Principles and Requirements

- All passwords must be treated as confidential University information and must not be shared with anyone or made public in any form – either written or verbally
- The same passwords must not be used for multiple University IT systems, where Single Sign On (SSO) is not available and users have the option to set their own passwords
- University IT account details must not be used for non-University systems or applications, e.g. social media sites, retail websites, personal email and other services
- Any individual that suspects their password may have been compromised must change it and inform the IT Service Desk immediately
- Passwords must never be disclosed e.g. written on a note or stored digitally in clear text
- Consequently, passwords must not be recorded (e.g. paper, software file or hand-held device) unless this can be stored securely

- The use of password managers (also known as a password vault) are permitted. For further information please contact the IT Service Desk. However, their use would be subject to strong encryption to protect the stored passwords in addition to a strong master password
- The IT Service Desk and IT Services will never ask for full details of your password or other security credentials (unless you have self-initiated a password reset with the Service Desk), and therefore you should never provide these, either over the phone or in an email

## 5. Multi-Factor Authentication (MFA)

Passwords are a single factor of authentication, something you *know*, but they can be guessed, or otherwise known by a third party. Where systems hold important information, we now require an additional factor of authentication. This typically utilises a mobile phone app, but could include a phone call, SMS or biometric identification, such as a fingerprint.

## 6. Changing your Password

All user-level and system-level passwords must conform to current University best practice guidelines. These are detailed as follows:

- Newly issued passwords must be changed on first use
- All University passwords must be at least 12 characters long
- Your ten previously used University passwords cannot be reused
- After ten unsuccessful attempts within a ten-minute period, you will be locked out of your account for a period of 30 minutes
- Passwords must not be easily guessed (avoid using your name, children or a pet's name, car registration number, football team etc.)
- Be creative and use words memorable to you, so that people can't guess your password.
- Avoid the use of 'remember password' features in applications such as web browsers for more sensitive University systems and services.
- Passwords should not be shared with colleagues, for instance when on annual leave - use functionality such as delegated access with email instead
- In line with Government guidance, UWE Bristol does not typically enforce the regular changing of passwords, as this can lead to poor password management
- UWE Bristol actively encourages the technique of using three random words. Numbers and symbols can still be used if needed, for example '3red!houseBananas'

## 7. Privileged Access

Where an individual requires more access privileges than a standard account, such as a system administrator, these accounts should be handled with extra care due to the increased potential for harmful use. As such, 'admin' accounts should be separate from the standard user account and follow these principles:

- Passwords should be unique from all others, especially the individuals standard account
- MFA must be enabled wherever it is available
- Passwords must be stored securely and used to elevate privilege only when required

## 8. Staff Handling Card Payments

To comply with the Payment Card Industry (PCI) Data Security Standard, members of staff who handle payments via debit, credit, and pre-paid cards (e.g. Mastercard & Visa) must additionally:

- Passwords must be changed at least once every 90 days
- Changed passwords must not be different to any of the previous four used by that individual
- Must contain both numeric and alphabetic characters