

University Website Programme

URL Naming Policy

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Scope

This 'URL Naming Policy' replaces the previous 'URL Policy Proposal' that was accepted by the University's Knowledge Strategy Committee in August 2007. It applies to websites using the centrally managed content management system and published on the www.ed.ac.uk primary domain, for example:

www.ed.ac.uk/events/festivals

It also covers the management and creation of shortened/alias URLs for promotional purposes, for example:

www.ed.ac.uk/festivals

Whilst this policy does not directly apply to the scenarios below, it still represents best practice guidance in these areas:

- Sub-domains of the ed.ac.uk primary domain, such as www.something.ed.ac.uk (see References)
- Websites using non-ed.ac.uk domains, even if they are hosted on an Information Services-supported University web server.

Purpose

A consistent approach to the structuring and wording of URLs brings a number of benefits to the University website:

- Improving website visitor orientation within the site; URL structure and wording helps provide context for the page being viewed
- Supporting website visitor navigation; trimming URLs is a means for website visitors to navigate 'up' through the site
- Enhancing web page performance in search engines; URL paths are a factor in page ranking

The Policy also:

- Ensures a clear process for requesting a shortened alias URL.
- Outlines the responsibilities of the URL alias naming committee.

Definitions

- **URL** (Uniform Resource Locator) – the location of a file on the Web. Otherwise known as the web address.
e.g. www.ed.ac.uk/studying/undergraduate
- **Primary domain** - the domain used as the base/root URL for the centrally managed web publishing framework and content management system within the University.
i.e. www.ed.ac.uk
 - **Structural URL** - the full URL, which gives the location of the content within the context of the whole website.
e.g. www.ed.ac.uk/careers/your-future/options/further-study
 - **Alias URL** – a URL which has been created for the purposes of print publication or email footers and directs visitors automatically to a deeper section of the website.
e.g. www.ed.ac.uk/sport (alias URL) directs to www.ed.ac.uk/sport-exercise (structural URL).
 - **Root alias URL** – an alias that appears after the primary domain.
e.g. www.ed.ac.uk/sport
 - **Sub-alias URL** - an alias that appears below an existing root alias.
e.g. www.ed.ac.uk/sport/firbush
- **URL segment** – the word and/or characters that appear between each forward slash within the URL.
e.g. .../[segment-1/segment-2/](#)...
- **Sub-domain** – a subset of the primary domain, which can be used for websites and applications working independently of the centrally managed web publishing framework and content management system.
e.g. www.something.ed.ac.uk
- **URL trimming** – the act of deleting URL segments from the end of a URL to access higher level content.

Policy statements

All content in the centrally managed content management system is published within a common URL structure.

1. Primary domain

www.ed.ac.uk is the University's primary domain. All URLs, across all websites within the centrally managed content management system are based on this single domain.

2. Format and length of URLs

For each URL segment, single words should be used in preference to multiple words. Where multiple words are required, they must be kept to a minimum and separated by hyphens.

Words such as 'and', 'the' and 'of' should not be included in URL segments as they lengthen the URL without bringing benefit to either the website visitor or search engine performance. Similarly, words relating to organisational structure like 'school' and 'office' should also be avoided in most cases, unless required to distinguish from another URL (see example below). Abbreviations in URLs should only be considered where lengthy phrases would otherwise be required. Any abbreviations and acronyms used must be commonly understood by the target audience.

3. Characters to be used in URLs

URLs must be constructed from the 26 characters of the alphabet (lowercase only), the numbers 1-9 and hyphens. Hyphens must be used to separate multiple words. No other characters or symbols are allowed.

- Any 3rd party/database driven content that is integrated (through web proxy, etc.) into the centrally managed content management system should attempt to produce URLs that conform to the URL naming policy.

4. Naming of URLs relative to navigation and breadcrumb

The words and terms used in URLs must directly correspond to the titles and labels used in the relevant navigation and breadcrumb fields.

Search Engine Optimisation

All major search engines consider the content of the URL when ranking the performance of web pages.

The URL is typically displayed in search engine results pages with search terms highlighted. Along with page title and description, the URL is a factor in website users deciding whether to select a link in the list of search engine results.

Guidance on creating accessible and understandable URLs can be found on the Website support wiki, see References below for details.

URL aliases

For marketing and promotional purposes, it is often necessary to provide units with a shorter version of their structural URL which will redirect users through their website.

All units at and above level 6 in the organisational hierarchy (subject level) will be automatically provided with a primary domain alias URL, such as:

www.ed.ac.uk/biology

Once a root alias URL has been created, further sub-alias URLs can be requested, such as:

www.ed.ac.uk/biology/immunology

Requests for alias URLs should be sent to the University Website Programme.

- [URL alias process](#)

URL Alias Naming Committee

If a unit's requested name for a root alias URL is a particularly generic term or phrase or there is a need to create additional root aliases that are not directly associated to a unit's name (such as for cross-unit projects), the final decision will be deferred to the URL alias naming committee for sign off.

The URL alias naming committee has representation from both Communications and Marketing and Information Services. The decisions that are made by this committee are based on their awareness of University-wide marketing plans.

Requesting additional root URL aliases

For specific marketing of promotions or campaigns, additional primary domain alias URLs can be requested from the URL Alias Naming Committee. Requests will be considered on a case-by-case basis according to the following general criteria:

- Impact on integrity of overall URL scheme
- Size and composition of target audience
- Potential negative impact if structural URL is used
- Media to be used to promote URL

Timescales

Units wishing to use particularly generic terms in their primary domain alias URLs or requesting additional root aliases must submit their requests to the URL Alias Naming Committee with a clear explanation and justification no less than 2 weeks in advance of any scheduled publication date.

Appeals

Any appeals against decisions made by the URL Alias Naming Committee should be addressed to the Director, University Website Programme, who, in turn, will forward the appeal to the Website Governance Group for their consideration.

References

Operational guidance on URLs can be found on the Website support wiki:

- Creating accessible and understandable URLs: www.wiki.ed.ac.uk/x/y6ooAw
- URL aliases and how to get one: www.wiki.ed.ac.uk/x/_QciBg
- URL overview - policy and practice for URLs, aliases and redirects: www.wiki.ed.ac.uk/x/KOfnCQ

Sub-domains of the ed.ac.uk primary domain, such as www.something.ed.ac.uk do not use the central University CMS so are not covered by this guidance. If you would like a sub-domain to be set up, please contact Tony Weir: Tony.Weir@ed.ac.uk