

SKILLS+ SCOTLAND

Galvanising higher education to
support an inclusive recovery

The Open University in Scotland's vision
for the 2021-26 Scottish Parliament



SCOTLAND





Our cover features Carla Belkevitz, one of our 2020 graduates, who in her own words was 'kicked out at 14 and went off the rails'. A single mum who left school at 16, made redundant several times, she juggled studying with raising a family.

Now having gained her OU Bachelor of Arts (Honours) Open Degree at age 41, she is studying an OU Postgraduate Diploma in Global Development to support her ambition to teach refugees. Her story is one example of the difference The Open University can make.



Along came The Open University and they opened their doors and gave me the chance.

I cannot explain the sense of achievement I feel and the value of proving to my kids that you can achieve anything.



Carla Belkevitz
BA (Hons) Open Degree



Delivering life-changing learning to people across Scotland

For over 50 years, The Open University has helped people across Scotland to develop their knowledge, acquire new skills and achieve life-changing qualifications wherever they live.

We currently have over 20,000 students based in every Scottish parliamentary constituency from the Shetland Isles to Dumfries and Galloway. Over three quarters combine work and study which makes us the country's largest provider of part-time higher and flexible education.

Our supported distance learning model is a proven way of delivering at a national level yet sustaining local needs; 85% of our graduates remain in the location where their study was undertaken, retaining their talent and skills in those, often rural and remote, communities.

Many of our students overcome adversity and are empowered through studying with us, regardless of their age, background or geography. And one quarter of all our students are disabled.

The Covid-19 pandemic has disrupted our society, our economy and our workplaces and we are all adapting to an uncertain and changing world. A new focus on learning, reskilling and upskilling from the Parliament is vital as the nation recovers. With its inherently sustainable delivery model, The Open University can help support Scotland's green recovery.

More agile higher education provision, open to people at all stages of life, delivered flexibly and with shorter courses and modules focused on the skills we need are central to this.

We need to recognise that people enter higher education at different stages of their lives and that they balance work with study, caring responsibilities, or other commitments. A flexible higher education system supporting skills development will ensure that all of Scotland's citizens play a valued and valuable part in Scotland's growth.

That spirit is central to the mission of The Open University: to open up education and lifelong learning to all our citizens, and to be a movement for change. As Scotland recovers, we have a vital role to play.

Susan Stewart
Director of The Open University in Scotland

ECONOMIC RECOVERY

Supporting businesses, individuals and communities with reskilling and upskilling opportunities

Workers without formal qualifications or digital skills are more likely to work in the hardest hit sectors such as retail and hospitality than those with a degree. A fairer Scotland will not be achieved if those groups with the greatest job-market challenges as a result of COVID such as young workers, disabled people, minority ethnic people, women and those with caring responsibilities are left behind.

A traditional approach to education and skills will not therefore meet the challenges that lie ahead for a post-pandemic economy. The ability to upskill and reskill for a changing economy through part-time and modular learning will be key to an inclusive economic recovery.

With Scottish Government funding we have been able to rapidly respond in supporting businesses, workers, families and communities during the pandemic through our online platforms and flexible learning opportunities. To help support

employees who were furloughed and facing redundancy as a result of COVID-19, we offered free places through the Scottish Funding Council Upskilling Fund on a new Coding Skills course to upskill and reskill people for digital roles and careers.

The Open University in Scotland has a track record of working in partnership to support workers, their families and the local community to upskill when major employers have announced redundancies. We have rolled out a pilot project with Michelin in Dundee to work with Rolls Royce, Debenhams and Top Shop and are able to offer support across Scotland for an inclusive economic recovery.

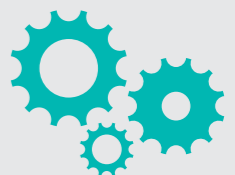
We are keen to extend our work as a partner with the Scottish Government, employers and task forces so that we can deliver targeted skills support at scale on a national basis; applying our fifty years' experience of high-quality distance learning with personalised learner support.



85%
of alumni say OU
studies improved their
job skills



260
employers across
Scotland sponsor OU
students



£1M
in OU training to SMEs to
respond to the impacts of
Covid-19

Business spotlight



I would encourage other employers to give their workforce access to The Open University – both during difficult times and as routine. The offering and approach that they have is comprehensive, engaging and relevant for today's workforce.



Donald Mackenzie
Former Head of Personnel, Michelin Tyres, Dundee

The Open University can support the next Scottish Government to deliver **TARGETED SKILLS SUPPORT** at scale, rolled out nationally.



FIND OUT MORE

Visit www.open.ac.uk

SUPPORTING PART-TIME STUDENTS

We are the largest provider of part-time undergraduate higher education in Scotland. A fair deal for part-time students is key to our mission

We believe that financial barriers should not prevent people from studying part-time. Indeed, if the Fair Work agenda is to be successful then we should be encouraging people to undertake part-time study to upskill and/or reskill while in work. There are however a range of anomalies in the support offered to part-time learners.

Part-time students are often lower paid and juggling work, caring and other commitments and we see evidence that these pressures have been even greater during the Covid pandemic yet they do not receive maintenance support. The OU in Scotland has recently received enquiries from part-time students looking for greater support after changes in their circumstances due to the pandemic.

There also needs to be greater flexibility concerning the income and credit threshold for the Part-time Fee Grant – currently set at annual income of £25,000 or below and 30 credits – to support shorter, more skills-focused courses to be studied, to allow people to reskill, upskill and return to the workplace. The threshold

has not changed since 2015. An inflationary increase to the Part-time Fee Grant income threshold should be introduced.

Our open access policy enables care-experienced learners with low previous education qualifications to study with us. Data on our care-experienced students suggests that they may begin their learning journey later, with a higher average age than our non-care-experienced students. Yet the system is predicated upon supporting those who go directly to university from care, are under twenty-five years of age and studying full time.

Another anomaly is that full-time students can apply for council tax reduction whilst it is much harder to do so as a part-time student; despite their commitment to education, often while having family and/or caring commitments and working part-time.

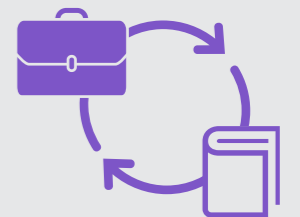
An inclusive economic recovery which leaves no one behind cannot be built on inequities between support for part-time and full-time students.



72%
of new undergraduates
earn less than £25,000



68%
of our students receive
a Part-time Fee Grant



76%
of our students are in
full or part-time work

Student spotlight



The Part-time Fee Grant is just tremendous. I wouldn't have been able to study without it.



Tracey Wilson
BSC (Hons) Combined STEM

A FAIR DEAL

for part-time students removing financial barriers to accessing learning and achieving their potential.



FIND OUT MORE

Visit www.open.ac.uk

WIDENING ACCESS

Making higher education accessible to everyone across Scotland

A key focus of our work is ensuring that people from Scotland's most disadvantaged groups and communities can all access higher education at any stage of their lives to help improve their work and life opportunities. We work in partnership with many third sector organisations to reach people from the most deprived areas, people with disabilities and chronic health conditions, carers, ethnic minority groups, and people with care experience. We embed support into our curriculum design and delivery at every stage of the student's learning journey, including mental health support.

We work in partnership with TogetherAll, an online mental health and well-being resource available free to students, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Using additional funding from Scottish Funding Council, we have extended this partnership to be able to offer a virtual therapy service to our students in Scotland. Students are referred by our Educational Advisors for an initial clinical assessment followed by access to up to six counselling sessions.

Our Young Applicants in Schools Scheme (YASS) allows students in the final year of secondary school to experience higher education level study in school alongside their other subjects.

There is already growing evidence that the pandemic is having a disproportionate impact on the most disadvantaged people in Scotland. It is vital that there remains a strong commitment to widening access to higher education in ensuring inequalities in society are not worsened.

The OU in Scotland continues to play a crucial role in helping support some of those most disadvantaged during the pandemic through widening access. We believe that our open entry policy approach to potential students demonstrates that we can do much more in the future to strengthen the gains made in widening access if we are resourced adequately to achieve this.

A challenge for the next Scottish Government is to ensure accessibility to suitable devices and effective and reliable broadband in every part of Scotland given the importance of digital access in terms of jobs, services and learning. We know how important digital connectivity is to our students being able to successfully achieve their ambitions.



39%
of new undergraduates live in Scotland's 40% most disadvantaged areas



24%
of our students declare a disability



23%
of our students live in remote or rural areas

Student spotlight



I was told that I would never achieve much academically – but I'm now an award-winning student and mum of three who's fighting to ensure all care experienced learners are fully supported.



Carol Hunter
BA (Hons) Social Sciences

DIGITAL ACCESS

and connectivity is vital to open up higher education to the most disadvantaged across Scotland.



FIND OUT MORE

Visit www.open.ac.uk

LIFELONG SKILLS

Delivering flexible, personalised higher education for our students

Everyone's learner journey should be flexible to allow them to personalise their higher education experience, recognising the diversity of learners and their needs in Scotland. The Open University's mission is to support students, whatever their age and regardless of prior qualifications, who do not follow a single linear learner journey from leaving school and moving straight away into full-time university.

Many learners instead choose to go to college first or pursue higher education at a later stage, perhaps due to work or family commitments, or financial reasons. This will be even more applicable in the post-pandemic environment as people return to study in order to gain new skills and improve eligibility for new employment opportunities, and in supporting the future economy.

Our routes for college students transfer are available nationwide, unrestricted by the geographical location of the student or their college. The Open University's unique Open Degree is available to all HN students, regardless of the subject they studied at college. This allows the student to gain credit for previous study, whilst building a degree programme tailored to their own development needs or to the needs of their employer.

Accessible, clear and simple pathways for learners are becoming increasingly even more important as demand for different opportunities gets stronger. The Open University has ensured that students are not constrained by traditional 'offers' by responding to this demand with innovative developments of new modules and microcredentials. We have also developed Graduate Apprenticeships.

Our strategic partnerships, for example, with the Department for Work & Pensions and the Partnership for Continuing Employment (PACE) have led to work with retail workers facing redundancy from Debenhams, the Arcadia Group and House of Fraser in Scotland, providing direct access to the OUs skills based provision, helping them to reskill for post COVID careers.

Opportunities and support should be available to everyone when needed. It needs to be flexible and agile so that all students can participate with confidence when looking to gain new skills. It should also be free from as many barriers as possible, giving learners the opportunity to achieve their ambitions.



900

students have transferred credit from their HNC or HND to OU studies



Our students range from school age to 90 years old



85%

of OU graduates remain in their local communities; retaining talent & skills

Student spotlight



My MBA provided me with a 'career parachute' when my role in my chosen career disappeared overnight.



Alan S Morrison
MBA Graduate

A LIFELONG SKILLS

commitment would ensure higher education is open to everyone, at any stage of their life.



FIND OUT MORE

Visit www.open.ac.uk



With over 170,000 students across the world, our size and scale means we can offer a broad curriculum and innovative public engagement including our long-standing, strategic partnership with the BBC



By its very nature, our model of delivery is inherently environmentally sustainable. All our electricity already comes from renewable sources. The University is committed to working towards carbon neutrality



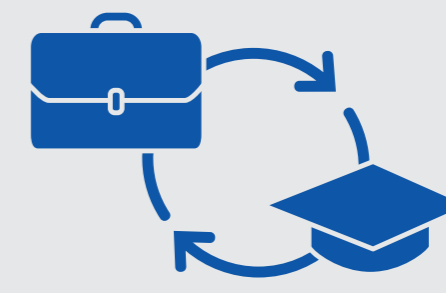
Our fully supported distance learning model means our students score us highly for the experience we provide to them, 91.5% student satisfaction rating (10-year average)



Our vast OpenLearn platform offers free, informal learning resources to a global audience. It was established to address the key barriers to starting education – access, lack of confidence and cost



OpenLearn Create is our innovative open educational platform which supports the OU in Scotland to co-create training resources with partners such as the Carers Trust Scotland and Who Cares? Scotland



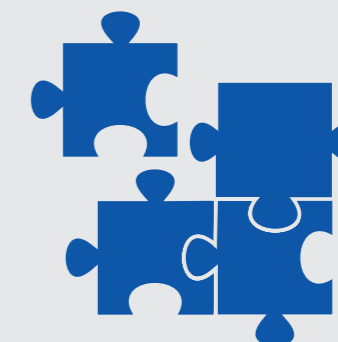
We are the world's largest MBA provider with The OU Business School leading flexible, high quality management and professional development across the globe through distance learning



Our world-leading innovative research and development ranks in the top third of UK universities. Our research underpins our teaching as well as influencing policy and practices from local to global levels



Graduates with National 5s or below as their highest prior attainment completing an OU part-time degree in Scotland are estimated to earn an average of £200,000 more over the rest of their career



Our innovative national programme, Young Applicants in Schools Scheme, helps S6 pupils bridge school to university level study. In 2019/20 we had over 1,200 YASS students across all 32 local authority areas



FIND OUT MORE

Visit www.open.ac.uk/Scotland
Email Scotland@open.ac.uk
Twitter [@OUScotland](https://twitter.com/OUScotland)
Facebook [OpenUniversityinScotland](https://www.facebook.com/OpenUniversityinScotland)

March 2021

Image credits: Michael McGurk, Leila Angus, Unsplash [heylagostechie, brooke-cagle, alexander-dummer, josh-appel, jud-mackrill].

Data: Figures throughout relating to OU in Scotland students are based on Full-Time Equivalent statistics for academic year 2019-20. Impact data is from the Economic and Social Impact of The Open University in 2018-19, London Economics, November 2020.

The Open University is incorporated by Royal Charter (RC 000391), an exempt charity in England and Wales and a registered charity in Scotland (SC 038302). The Open University is authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority.



The Open
University

SCOTLAND