STUDENTS FIRST: STRATEGY FOR GROWTH
THE OPEN UNIVERSITY’S MISSION

Open to people, places, methods and ideas

The Open University has been the driving force for opening up higher education to people across all the nations of the UK since it was founded in 1969 and our influence spreads across the world.

Our purpose is to widen and deepen human knowledge and understanding. In being “open to people, places, methods and ideas” we are committed to sharing and building that knowledge and understanding with learners and citizens across the globe through our strong tradition of excellent research and our expertise in supported distance learning.

We play a unique role in promoting educational opportunity and social justice by providing high-quality education to all who wish to realise their ambitions and fulfil their potential.

We have led the learning revolution and pioneered innovative teaching methods that enable us to reach people and communities that other universities are not able to reach.

We help many thousands of people each year make a change in their lives for the better by providing the opportunity to combine study with employment and other important life commitments. For some students, success is about broad personal and intellectual development; for many others, it is about helping them build the specific skills, experience and knowledge to progress in their career.

We are proud to be the only University that operates across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Our four-nation perspective is a distinctive source of strength and value. We are able to bring the benefits of scale but flex to meet the specific social, economic and cultural needs in each nation.

Our impact in widening access to high-quality university education also extends across the globe. We currently work with education institutions in 25 countries to help build capacity and capability. The OU’s international development work includes projects in Africa and Asia to deliver large-scale impact in areas such as frontline health, teacher education and English language teaching.

The Open University makes a wider contribution to society that goes beyond our directly registered students. Millions of people engage with our free online learning materials on OpenLearn, FutureLearn and other platforms, and we reach millions more through our educational programmes in unique partnership with the BBC.

The way in which the University has delivered its mission has evolved over time. In this dynamic and competitive world, we will continue to innovate and evolve our approach to continue to meet the changing needs of students, employers and wider society for the future.

---

2 This Mission was first coined in 1969 when The Open University was founded. It has served the test of time and we do not propose to alter it. Our job is to interpret the Mission for the current period.
OUR VISION

To reach more students with life-changing learning that meets their needs and enriches society

We aim to increase the positive impact that The Open University has on the world through our teaching, research and engagement.

We will achieve this vision by putting our students first and by focusing on:

1. Enabling more students to achieve a qualification.
2. Providing enhanced employability and career progression outcomes for students.
3. Enhancing our academic excellence.
4. Leading in digital innovation.
5. Developing a more adaptive organisation and culture.
6. Diversifying our income and reducing our costs.

In a world which is fast-moving, complex and uncertain, delivering this strategy implies considerable change for the organisation – in the services we provide, how we organise ourselves and how we work.

Our people are critical to our future. We aim to create an environment where:

- staff are motivated and empowered.
- staff are enabled to succeed, for our students to succeed.
- we invest in our people’s success.
- we work effectively across the organisation as one University.

“The OU has fundamentally changed my life. I now have a successful career. I couldn’t have done that without studying with The Open University.”

Neil McIvor, BSc (Hons) Mathematics & MSc Mathematics
OUR VALUES

In achieving our vision, we remain committed to, and are guided by, the enduring Open University values of inclusivity, innovation and responsiveness.¹

Inclusive

- We play a unique role in society, making higher education open to all.
- We promote social justice through the development of knowledge and skills.

Innovative

- We lead the learning revolution, placing innovation at the heart of our teaching and research.
- We continuously seek new and better ways to inspire and enable learning.
- We create world-class research and teaching.

Responsive

- We respond to the needs of individuals and employers and the communities in which they live and work.
- We are dedicated to supporting our students’ learning success.

³ The OU’s values were developed some time ago and have endured over a period of years. Whilst values are not immutable, we do not see a need to change values which capture well the spirit of The Open University and which command widespread support in The Open University community.

---

I missed the opportunity to study in my younger days. It was incredibly difficult, but I felt I just had to stick with it. This was my chance to right a terrible wrong.

Priscilla Hogan, BSc (Hons) Health and care
STUDENTS FIRST: STRATEGY FOR GROWTH

THE OPEN UNIVERSITY MISSION
Open to people, places, methods and ideas

OUR VISION
To reach more students with life-changing learning that meets their needs and enriches society

OBJECTIVES

PEOPLE AND VALUES
Inclusive • Innovative • Responsive

MORE STUDENTS QUALIFYING
LEADERSHIP IN DIGITAL INNOVATION
ENHANCED EMPLOYABILITY AND CAREER PROGRESSION
ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE
ADAPTIVE ORGANISATION AND CULTURE
INCOME DIVERSIFICATION AND COST REDUCTION
OUR STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

We have established clear aims for each of our strategic objectives. The details of the approach represent our current view of the priority activities, which will evolve over the lifetime of the strategy.

More students qualifying

Our aim:
Reach even more students by offering a wider range of study options and qualifications across the UK and globally. Support students more effectively so that more people achieve a qualification, with a continued commitment to widen access and success.

Our approach:

- Attract an increasing number of students to study with the University, both across the UK and around the world.
- Give faculties clear responsibility for the student experience and student success, with the levers to make changes.
- Increase the focus on student retention and progression and invest in further improving the quality of student support.
- Improve real-time reporting and analysis of student engagement and retention in order to better support students.
- Deliver truly student-focused systems and processes.
- Undertake a fundamental market needs analysis.
- Refresh the brand.
- Review our offer, explore the opportunities to extend our range of formal qualifications and move into new markets where we can compete effectively.
- Improve marketing effectiveness.
- Involve our student and alumni community in recruiting and supporting students.

Enhanced employability and career progression

Our aim:
Increase the number of students achieving positive personal and career development outcomes.

Our approach:

- Systematically track what each student is seeking to achieve through study and how well we are helping achieve that throughout their journey with us.
- Embed employability skills more explicitly in the curriculum.
- Maximise the distinctive benefits that derive from students combining OU study with their own world of work.
- Invest in and expand the careers service to enable more personalised support according to the career goals of the student (to start develop, or change their career).
- Bring the employer perspective more directly into the University.
Academic excellence

Our aim:
Academic excellence based on the integrated value of teaching, research and engagement around developing a sustainable academic community, which directly contributes to student success through high quality teaching and is recognised through external rankings, positions and progress against sector performance indicators.

Our approach:
- Develop an academic strategy that focuses our resources more clearly on the teaching, research and external engagement activities that best support our mission.
- Further integrate the Associate Lecturer community with the academic staff base, to provide opportunities to reprioritise/focus the activities of all academics and enable differential workload distributions to meet the demands of excellence measures.
- Focus on research which is world-leading and internationally excellent, and on scholarship which informs the development of cutting-edge teaching materials and enhances the student experience leading to greater student success.
- Increase our focus on academic professional development to improve academic capability, leadership and opportunities around teaching and learning, research and external engagement.
- Increase the emphasis on the relationship between identified areas of excellence, career development and promotion for academic staff.
- Enhance outward-facing activity to increase external visibility and impact of our academic excellence.
- Build student-facing academic communities/engagement, providing a holistic approach to student engagement across the spectrum of enquirer-learner-student-alumni.

Leadership in digital innovation

Our aim:
The Open University leads in the development and use of digital technologies in a) teaching and learning; b) research and c) how we go about our work.

Our approach:
- Further develop our research capability to support digital innovation.
- Ensure that our digital platforms for students are leading-edge through continuous innovation and improvement.
- Develop programmes focusing on supporting widening participation in digital technologies.
- Identify and promote our current excellence in digital innovation by developing a comprehensive engagement and communications campaign.
- Use FutureLearn, OpenLearn and other digital platforms to develop new models of learner engagement with exciting and relevant curriculum.
- Develop a set of minimum competencies for digital literacy and provide programmes for development and support for all staff and students.
- Enhance work practices suitable for working in a digital world.
Adaptive organisation and culture

Our aim:
Our people are focused on delivering the best for and with our students. We will work with our staff to put in place all that is needed to support a high performance culture; supporting them to develop the skills they need and investing in processes and systems which enable us to deliver flexibly and meet the needs of our students.

Our approach:
- Work with our staff to identify together how the OU as an organisation can support them to be proactive, engaged and focused on supporting our students to meet their goals.
- Invest in our staff, with an expectation that they will proactively seek to develop themselves, including a leadership development programme to build leadership, performance management and change capability.
- Foster a culture in which staff are engaged with, and responsive to, the external environment, including the role of the University across the nations of the UK, with the agility to move quickly and flexibly to pursue new opportunities.
- Prioritise and conduct fundamental reviews of key University business processes.
- Develop a business architecture capability to deliver the expertise to match business needs with sustainable and flexible business processes and operations.
- Do more to underpin our understanding of performance with access to data, information, analysis and insight, including developing transparent performance indicators for all areas of the University.
- Consider upgrades to core IT systems to enable more effective use of our finite resources.

Income diversification and cost reduction

Our aim:
A substantial increase in income from alternative sources, a focus on value to students and a sustainable financial position.

Our approach:

Income diversification
- Continue to grow existing commercial activity across the UK and globally.
- Establish the University as a major player in new markets, including apprenticeships.
- Grow philanthropic income, particularly through the 50th anniversary campaign.
- Move FutureLearn to profitability.

Cost reduction
- Deliver strategic cost reductions.
- Greater transparency of how we use our resources and the value we deliver for students.
- Continue close annual scrutiny of cost, value and priorities through annual planning and budgeting process.
HOW WE WILL JUDGE SUCCESS IN ACHIEVING OUR VISION FOR GROWTH

We will track our progress in achieving our vision for growth through a number of high-level strategic measures of success. This will be supplemented by the close monitoring of additional leading indicators of performance.

We have identified a wide range of measures to track our progress in achieving the strategy, but it is helpful to specifically highlight the five measures that are most critical to the achievement of our strategy vision. The strategy is one of sustainable growth, focused on putting students first. Therefore, the key measures are:

Increase the numbers of students achieving or on track to achieve an OU qualification
Increase the numbers of students achieving positive career outcomes
Increase student satisfaction (NSS, PTES and PRES)
Increase the staff survey score for the question “I feel motivated at work”
Significantly increase our income from non-core sources

Other success measures include:
- Increase the numbers of new students directly registered on OU modules and qualifications
- Maintain or increase widening participation proportions within the new undergraduate intake
- Close the black/white and non/disabled attainment gap
- Perform strongly in the proposed Teaching Excellence Framework
- Increase our research and enterprise income
- Optimise our ranking in the Research Excellence Framework
- Maintain high performance in future Quality Reviews
- Increase the sustainability of academic communities (TBD)
- Increase the number of learners though partnerships and informal learning
- Achieve a more adaptive organisation and culture (basket of HR, systems and process measures)
- Generate a financial surplus in line with the University’s financial strategy