



Wales Cymru

# OU Futures Wales 2011/12 – 2012/13

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# Mission

The Open University is open to people, places, methods and ideas.

# Foreword

The Open University is unique. We are world leaders in using technological innovation to create high quality flexible higher learning provision across the United Kingdom and on a wider, global stage, and pride ourselves on being 'open to people, places, methods and ideas'.

*OU Futures Wales* sets out our key priorities for the forthcoming period and is set within the University's overall strategy, *OU Futures 2010-13*. Current changes in both internal and external environments merit a reassertion of what we need to do in order to progressively achieve the mission, vision and values of The Open University.

The external environments in which the University operates are changing rapidly, not least in the context of the devolution of higher education policy-making and funding within the UK. The University has adopted a Four Nations Strategy to enable it to respond effectively and imaginatively to the opportunities and challenges that flow from this. *OU Futures Wales* may require further expansion in 2012 and beyond as the context in which we function becomes clearer.

*OU Futures Wales* renews and strengthens our commitment to Wales and sets out how the University will meet the needs of, and maximise the return on public investment in, Wales by developing Wales-specific approaches and, where appropriate, curricula. It also establishes how the benefits, efficiencies and capacities of an institution of global reach and scale can be brought to bear upon the needs of individual learners, employers and communities across Wales. This is one of many unique contributions that we are able to make to the higher education sector and to the nation. We are proud to be both a Welsh university, and a global university.

The Open University in Wales has set itself ambitious, challenging yet achievable objectives which not only serve to sustain our mission but to contribute to the nation's economic, social and cultural development. *OU Futures Wales* demonstrates how the University will respond to the priorities and objectives for higher education set out in the Welsh Government's strategy and plan for higher education, *For Our Future*. The OU can play a lead role in making higher education in Wales 'more open, accessible and responsive to regional and national need'<sup>1</sup>. *OU Futures Wales* addresses and responds positively to the five strategic themes for higher education set out in the Corporate Strategy of the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales. In particular, the OU's quality, breadth and flexibility of provision, and consistent high-quality student experience, underpinned and informed by excellence in research, enable it to widen access and meet higher level skills needs.

We believe that The Open University in Wales has a key national role in enabling more culturally, socially and economically diverse student groups to learn, achieve and prosper. Flexible learning opportunities which put the student in control of how, where and when they study is an

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<sup>1</sup> (*For Our Future*, paragraph 39)

attractive and necessary means of meeting the skills needs of learners and employers. The Open University's style of supported open distance learning provides exceptional value for money.

The OU in Wales is committed to working with other providers in implementing the regional strategies for higher education across Wales, and has a distinct and non-replicable role at a national level in the emerging higher education system in Wales. Our commitment to achieving a mode-blind approach to funding higher education and student support remains undiminished. We will work with Government, the Funding Council and all relevant stakeholders and partners in seeking to achieve this outcome.

The University is a unique and vital part of the ecology of higher education in Wales; this plan reaffirms our commitment to maintaining and enhancing our role within, and contribution to, the nation.

Martin Bean  
Vice Chancellor

Rob Humphreys  
Director, Open University in Wales

# Facts and figures

- The Open University operates in the four UK nations making it the largest academic institution with around 260,000 students enrolled. With a further 18,000 students studying overseas, The Open University is one of the world's largest universities.
- The Open University in Wales promotes educational opportunity and social justice by providing high quality university education to all who wish to realise their ambitions and fulfil their potential. The Open University has an open admissions policy: no qualifications are required to study at degree level. Around a quarter of students join us without standard university entrance level qualifications.
- The Open University continues to be a world leader and innovator in the use of new technologies for educational delivery. The OU presence on iTunesU is one of the biggest in the world, with over 18.4m downloads in 2009/10. The first UK University to join iTunes U, over 250,000 free OU tracks are downloaded every week.
- OpenLearn, the OU's free learning resources website, has had over 14.4 million visits since its launch, 11 million of which were unique visitors.
- The Open University climbed 23 places to 43<sup>rd</sup> in the UK's latest Research Assessment Exercise (RAE 2008), securing a place in the UK's top 50 higher education institutions, making The Open University one of the UK's fastest rising research universities.
- With an 'all Wales' reach The Open University in Wales has provided part-time university study across the nation for over 40 years. With students from almost every community across the nation, The Open University is the leading provider of part-time undergraduate study in Wales.
- The Open University works actively with other providers in Wales through its membership of the three regional higher education partnerships and the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol.
- The Open University is a partner of choice for employers, with over 300 companies sponsoring more than 1,000 students in Wales.
- The Open University's innovative partnership approach with trades unions to widening access in the workplace was recognised at a UK level by the Times Higher Award for Widening Participation Initiative of the Year, and by the award in 2010 of the Wales TUC Quality Award for its Openings provision (the first university to receive such recognition).
- The Open University in Wales directly contributes to economic, skills and workforce development in Wales. Almost four in ten of all Open University in Wales students are enrolled on either a Science, Maths, Computing, or Technology course.
- More than a third of our students are on low income or unemployed. They are able to study because they receive a fee waiver to cover their course fees. A quarter of Open University students are from "low affluence" areas as defined by HEFCW.
- For the sixth year running, students at The Open University were more satisfied with the quality of their higher education than those at any other university in Wales, according to the 2010 National Student Survey.

# Core Values

The OU has developed and embodied a set of core values that make it the most distinctive institution in higher education.

## **The Open University is:**

### **Inclusive**

We play a unique role in society making lifelong learning open to all, inspiring and enabling people to develop wherever, whenever and however they need.

We achieve social justice by inspiring learning throughout the world.

### **Innovative**

We lead the learning revolution taking innovation to the heart of learning and research.

We continuously seek new and better ways to inspire and enable learning.

We develop world class research and teaching.

### **Responsive**

We respond to the needs of individuals and employers and of the societies in which they live and work.

We are dedicated to supporting our students' learning success.

These values provide a moral and intellectual compass for the University in a changing world.

# Focus Areas

The following ten Focus Areas are the vehicles that are used to deliver the University's strategic ambitions and priorities, as defined in the UK-wide corporate strategy, *OU Futures* ([www.open.ac.uk/ou-futures](http://www.open.ac.uk/ou-futures)). They are institutional level programmes, each addressing an area of University business, with the intent to adapt and strengthen the University in order to sustain the OU mission.

Underlying these focus areas, framed and informed by the University's Four Nations strategy, is the priority to shape and support the strategies of the Welsh Government and Higher Education Funding Council for Wales by:

- Securing recognition of and promoting flexible, part-time higher education as a vital component of Wales's learning, skills and economic strategies.
- Working with the Welsh Government and the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales to secure an equitable and enabling funding settlement for part-time higher education students and providers
- Exploiting and promoting the potential for new technology to revolutionise access to higher level learning right across the nation.
- Utilising to best effect in Wales the strengths, scale and capacities of The Open University as a UK wide institution with global reach, including its contribution to the three regional higher education partnerships and the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol
- Promoting The Open University's academic, economic, social and cultural contribution and offer to all citizens of Wales
- Sharing its extensive curriculum and expertise in the area of Foundation Degrees and work based HE
- Continuing to develop Wales specific curricula and ensuring non-Wales specific curricula fully reflects the needs of Wales
- Supporting Welsh research excellence in areas of particular OU strength and supporting Welsh business through knowledge exchange in areas of strength
- Promoting the study of the languages, history and contemporary society of Wales to citizens here, across the UK and the globe, underpinning the status of Wales as a 'world nation'.
- Sustaining and enhancing a high quality student experience.

The Open University evaluates its progress by using key performance indicators which feed into an institutional dashboard, regularly monitored by the Vice Chancellor's Executive.

## Focus Area: Curriculum coherence

<b>What</b>	Increase the academic coherence, reduce the complexity of modules and qualifications and develop processes, systems, mechanisms and guidance for the on-going management of the curriculum to meet the challenges of the changing HE context.
<b>Why</b>	To increase the attractiveness and financial sustainability of the curriculum and contribute to the improvement of student progression.
<p>The Open University in Wales will be actively involved in supporting the OU's institutional programme aimed at delivering the above objectives. This includes strengthening the overall communication of the curriculum offer to students, particularly pathways to qualifications, and designing a refreshed stage-gate process to ensure support for the development of a market enabled curriculum. We will be focused on the following priorities in this area for Wales:</p>	
<b>Key priorities for The OU in Wales</b>	1. Make effective use of the national scale and reach of The Open University in Wales to contribute to meeting higher education sector-wide needs, including through the three regional higher education strategies.
	2. Develop curriculum partnerships with other institutions throughout Wales, building on existing models.
	3. Inform the development of the University's overall curriculum to ensure its relevance to Welsh requirements, in particular the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW) and professional regulatory frameworks in Wales.
	4. Extend our provision to reflect the needs of Wales with investment from diverse sources, particularly where Welsh policy developments, economic priorities or funding opportunities open up possibilities of innovative models of curriculum development to the benefit of the University UK-wide.
	5. Enhance the efficiency of our information, advice and guidance by using clearly structured curriculum pathways to support student decisions and progression.
	6. Contribute to best effect as a member of the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol, drawing on the University's expertise in flexible distance learning and its open access platforms.

## Focus Area: Learning and teaching efficiency

<b>What</b>	Improve the efficiency of course production, presentation and assessment.
<b>Why</b>	To reduce the cost and improve the effectiveness of the core business.
<p>The Open University in Wales will be actively involved in supporting the OU's institutional programme aimed at delivering the above objectives. This includes developing proposals for new models of assessment and tuition. In addition to this, we will be focused on the following priorities in this area for Wales:</p>	
<b>Key priorities for The OU in Wales</b>	1. Leverage advantages and efficiencies of working at scale and being able to operate across Wales.
	2. Tailor our information, advice and guidance, and learning support to meet the needs of students throughout their learning journey.
	3. Support the implementation of a single integrated management structure for Associate Lecturer Services, with streamlined processes to improve cost efficiency and effectiveness.
	4. Improve the efficiency and effectiveness of provision to disadvantaged, remote and rural communities by use of new technology wherever possible.

## Focus Area: Developing pedagogy

<b>What</b>	Continue to innovate and develop pedagogy.
<b>Why</b>	To maintain the University's reputation for quality and innovative teaching and learning.
<p>The Open University in Wales will be actively involved in supporting the OU's institutional programme aimed at delivering the above objectives. This includes development work for the new VLE platform in Moodle 2.0 release and initiating the start-up phase for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Project. In addition to this, we will be focused on the following priorities in this area for Wales:</p>	
<b>Key priorities for The OU in Wales</b>	1. Conduct research, in collaboration with strategic community partners, to understand student needs, aspirations and environments, focusing on individual learning journeys particularly those coming from non-traditional backgrounds and areas.
	2. Work with the wider Welsh higher education community to support the current QAA Enhancement theme on Graduates for the 21st Century.
	3. Embed skills development, entrepreneurship and student employability in The OU in Wales' teaching, learning and student support provision.
	4. Develop innovative models for the delivery of learning and teaching opportunities, particularly in the areas of work-based and work-related learning, college-based delivery and community partnerships.
	5. Develop innovative approaches to enhancing teaching methods through action research, and in partnership where appropriate.
	6. Support teaching staff to develop and disseminate their capacities in the scholarship of teaching and learning.
	7. Continue to develop high quality, free online bi-lingual learning resources of relevance to Wales through the OpenLearn website.
	8. Continue to develop 'shared curriculum' models (through the use of OU modules) with Welsh institutional partners particularly in the area of Foundation Degrees, and through the three regional higher education strategies.

## Focus Area: Student progression

<b>What</b>	Increase the proportion of students who progress to the achievement of long-term study goals.
<b>Why</b>	To reduce acquisition and support costs and increase student achievement.
<p>The Open University in Wales will be actively involved in supporting the OU's institutional programme aimed at delivering the above objectives. This includes enhancing the current system of end of course contact and support on target OU Level 1 and 2 courses, and strengthening student progress management information. In addition to this, we will be focused on the following priorities in this area for Wales:</p>	
<b>Key priorities for The OU in Wales</b>	1. Develop the existing strengths of OU staff to provide focused student-centred information, advice and guidance to improve student progression and retention rates.
	2. Increase the recruitment, retention and progression of students from all backgrounds to The Open University in Wales, through projects, programmes and partnerships, including targeted approaches in Communities First areas.
	3. Actively support students in the development of achievements, understanding and personal attributes that will assist them in developing their careers and making further contributions to society.
	4. Continue to build on existing partnerships with employers, trade unions and third sector organisations to support students in work to achieve their study goals.
	5. Continue to work within the Reaching Wider partnerships, with the common goal of widening access to further and higher education and developing flexible routes to degree study to meet the personal development and vocational needs of learners and remove barriers to progression.
	6. Remain a leading provider of higher education for students with disabilities in Wales.
	7. Continue to develop innovative approaches to help individuals gain credit for their prior informal learning and contribute to public policy, underpinning exploration of how the sector could be further supported in this area.
	8. Make the most effective use of the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW) to facilitate access to credit transfer opportunities and provide flexible routes into and through OU study.

## Focus Area: Developing research

<b>What</b>	Develop an affordable and sustainable research portfolio that is externally benchmarked for excellence (through the Research Excellence Framework) and delivers recognised benefits to the OU, its mission and strategic objectives.
<b>Why</b>	To justify investment, secure external funding and maintain the benchmarks of excellence that underpin the University's reputation and brand.
<p>The Open University in Wales will be actively involved in supporting the OU's institutional programme aimed at delivering the above objectives. This focus area includes focusing research on key areas of excellence that are sustainable within a broader OU framework, and supporting activities that underpin bids for external research funding. In addition to this, we will be focused on the following priorities in this area for Wales:</p>	
<b>Key priorities for The OU in Wales</b>	1. Promote The Open University's broad research and knowledge exchange portfolio and its benefits to Wales.
	2. Raise the profile of the University's open-access database of peer-reviewed research, Open Research Online (ORO).
	3. Build on The Open University's research and knowledge exchange assets to maximise their effectiveness and relevance to Wales.
	4. Seek new partnerships with HEIs and other organisations to support new knowledge exchange activity.
	5. Develop the research base of the academic community within The Open University in Wales.
	6. Contribute effectively to the understanding of skills needs and the development of work-related learning in Wales through action research.
	7. Stimulate and engage students and the general public in cultural activity and academic debate by bringing thought-provoking and inspiring events to a wider audience, including through the University's unique partnership with the BBC.
	8. Support the University's framework for Scholarship, particularly in the area of Professional Practice.
	9. Support and build on student research work, recognising links to workplace and community activities.
	10. Explore direct engagement with Welsh businesses via Knowledge Transfer Partnerships, the Academia for Business (A4B) programme and other established knowledge exchange vehicles.

## Focus Area: Business efficiency

<b>What</b>	Provide principles, tools, systems and methodologies to enable process owners to simplify business processes and align them better to student and customer needs.
<b>Why</b>	To reduce cost and improve the effectiveness of the business
<p>The Open University in Wales will be actively involved in supporting the OU's institutional programme aimed at delivering the above objectives. This focus area includes unified communications and re-engineering of Student Services administrative processes. In addition to this, we will be focused on the following priorities in this area for Wales:</p>	
<b>Key priorities for The OU in Wales</b>	1. Simplify business processes and align them better to student and customer needs in order to improve the efficiency of the day-to-day business operations.
	2. Maintain OU-wide customer service and learner support standards.
	3. Develop partnerships to allow new sources of income to fund existing OU in Wales' activity.
	4. Complete the move to e-communication as the default option for students, associate lecturers and customers.
	5. Contribute to OU-wide projects in order to maximise the return from the OU's investment in modules and qualifications.
	6. Explore shared service approaches to minimise costs and enhance service quality, where these would not diminish the benefits and efficiencies that derive from the University's UK-wide scale and operations.

## Focus Area: Business-to-Business strategy

<b>What</b>	Support a Business-to-Business strategy which develops innovative and versatile value propositions for organisations in the public, private and third sectors, leveraging our quality, scale and reach to create long-term strategic partnerships.
<b>Why</b>	To grow existing and new sources of sustainable net revenue from Business-to-Business for The Open University by ensuring the relevance of the Open University curriculum for business.
<p>Through its Innovation and Engagement Strategy the Open University in Wales will be actively involved in supporting the OU's institutional programme aimed at delivering the above objectives. The OU in Wales already engages extensively with employers and has established a number of community-based partnerships: in 2010 over 300 students came to the OU through these partnerships. This focus area includes creating and implementing an effective commercial Business-to-Business strategy. In addition to this, we will be focused on the following priorities in this area for Wales:</p>	
<b>Key priorities for The OU in Wales</b>	1. Define our product offerings and value propositions for the public, private (including SMEs) and third sector markets.
	2. Work with key partners including Sector Skills Councils, CBI Wales and the Federation of Small Businesses to maintain and grow the University's role as a major higher level skills provider for Wales.
	3. Continue to work with employers and trades unions to develop innovative models for the delivery of work-based and work-related learning.
	4. Work in partnership with Wales' colleges to create student-centred pathways from further education into The Open University.
	5. Promote amongst employers the benefits and unique attributes of OU students and graduates.
	6. Strategically contribute to modernising scientific and health informatics career pathways across the NHS in Wales via flexible, modular development programmes for existing employees.
	7. Work to mitigate the impact on the volume of learners associated with business-driven study programmes if part-time fees increase significantly in 2012/13.

## Focus Area: Market-led planning

**What** Ensure that the University is responsive to the market in Wales

**Why** To enable the University to continue to be economically viable and continue to successfully deliver its core mission.

The Open University in Wales will be actively involved in supporting the OU's institutional programme aimed at delivering the above objectives. The OU can demonstrate some success in this area over recent years, with student number FTEs increasing each year in Wales since 2008/9. In addition, there has been a 27% increase in the number of Welsh students aged 18 to 24 at the OU over the past two academic years. This focus area includes developing a new market strategy for the OU in the UK, and a fees and financial support strategy for 2012/13 and beyond. In addition to this, we will be focused on the following priorities in this area for Wales:

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|---|---|
| <b>Key priorities for The OU in Wales</b> | 1. Respond to the development of a new market strategy for The Open University in the UK by upholding the University's Four Nation UK Strategy and maintaining our commitment to Wales' national priorities.  |
|   | 2. Become the leading national part-time provider of flexible pathways for students with Higher Nationals or Foundation Degrees (or equivalent awards) to achieve undergraduate degrees, by building on the development of partnerships with individual colleges. |
|   | 3. Maintain funded student numbers in both priority and non-priority subject areas overall, increasing student numbers in specific market segments.   |
|   | 4. In line with Welsh Government and HEFCW priorities, maintain and grow delivery of STEM subjects.   |

## Focus Area: New international business

### What

To develop an effective International Strategy and enabling business models in order to generate sustainable new streams of net income, both from existing markets and as yet undeveloped new prospects.

### Why

To grow existing and new sources of net income in international markets in order to have a sustainable and diversified business for the future.

The Open University in Wales will be actively involved in supporting the OU's institutional programme aimed at delivering the above objectives. In 2010 The OU secured grant income from the Welsh-based Waterloo Foundation to further extend its successful teacher education and training work in Sub-Saharan Africa (TESSA). This focus area includes identifying priority markets, and evaluating and defining partnership models. In addition to this, we will be focused on the following priorities in this area for Wales:

### Key priorities for The OU in Wales

1. Look to develop institutional and sector-wide collaborations with international partners.
2. Taking the study of Wales to the wider UK and the world via its distance learning modules on the Welsh language, Welsh history and contemporary Wales, enhancing where appropriate international activities of the Welsh Government.
3. Continue to develop globally accessible, free, high quality online learning resources for informal learners and educators to access through the *OpenLearn* website or to download via iTunesU, including materials that explore the history, culture and contemporary society of Wales.

## Focus Area: People and culture

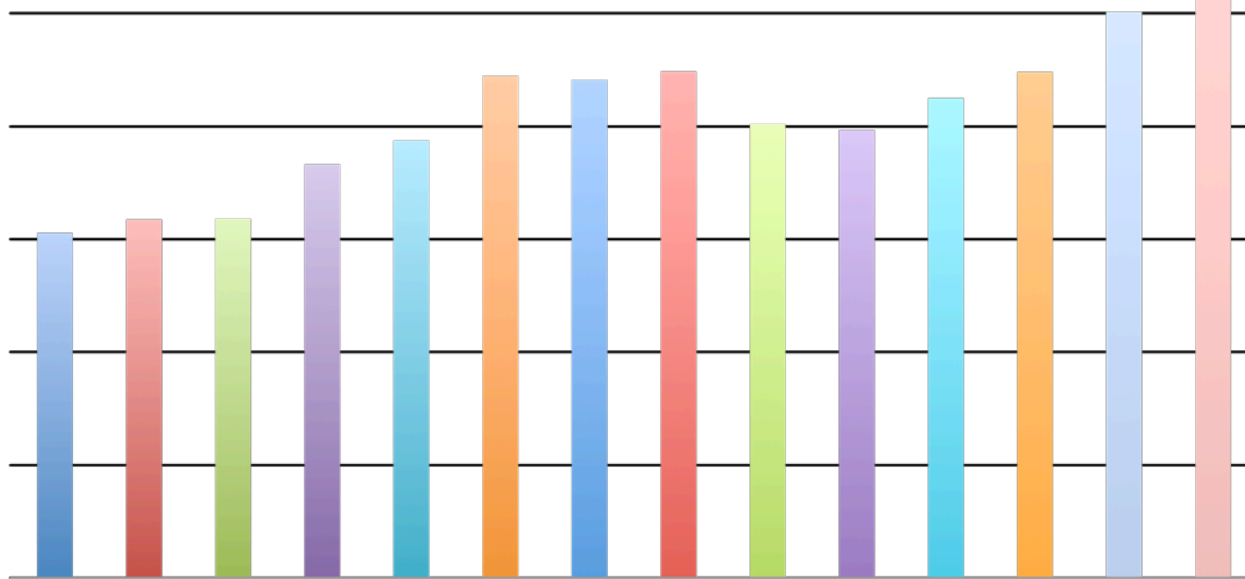
**What** To engage staff with our strategic objectives

**Why** To increase the agility and performance of the University

The Open University in Wales will be actively involved in supporting the OU's institutional programme aimed at delivering the above objectives. We will be focused on the following priorities in this area for Wales:

<b>Key priorities for The OU in Wales</b>	1. Support the development and training of teaching staff to promote effective learning and teaching, particularly in the use of on-line media.
	2. Ensure staff have access to development opportunities which support both business and their personal career objectives.
	3. Raise awareness across the University of relevant legislative and policy requirements, bi-lingual and cultural needs in Wales in line with the University's Four Nations strategy.
	4. Continue to enhance sustainability and improve awareness of energy efficiency among all members of The Open University in Wales community and seek to retain Green Dragon Status Level 2.
	5. Ensure that the University's Equality and Diversity plans reflect the needs and requirements of Wales.

### Open University Undergraduate and Postgraduate students in Wales 1996/97 to 2009/10



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