

## **Open University submission to the Education and Skills Committee**

### **Introduction**

The Open University's (OU) mission is to be open to people, places, methods and ideas. Social justice and equality of opportunity are at the heart of everything the OU does and widening access to higher education is the ambition on which it was founded. The OU is committed to extending opportunities for educational success to those who would otherwise be excluded from higher education.

The OU in Scotland is one of Scotland's nineteen higher education institutions and receives funding from the Scottish Funding Council. The OU accounts for more than half of all part-time undergraduates in Scotland, with 15,765 students in 2016/17.

### **Entry**

The OU operates a unique open entry policy which means that no entrance qualifications are required for the vast majority of undergraduate provision. Prospective students do not apply to the OU via the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS). Instead, they register directly with the OU.

### **Teaching**

The OU's distinctive teaching model is based on personalised distance learning. Students do not go to university; rather, the university comes to them. The emphasis is on flexibility, allowing students to study at a time and place that suits them, enabling them to fit their learning into their busy lives and around other commitments.

Although some students study at full-time intensity (120 credits per year), most OU students study part-time at about half this intensity (60 credits per year) and will therefore take around six years to complete an honours degree.

OU study is modular. Modules can be studied on a standalone basis or can be combined to follow pathways to achieve specific named qualifications. The OU also offers a suite of Open qualifications, which allow students to build and tailor their study based on their own needs. Every student is assigned an Associate Lecturer, a personal tutor who supports the student through their module.

### **Students**

Student numbers have been growing for several years: from 14,635 students (6,200 FTE) in 2013/14 to 15,765 (7,570 FTE) in 2016/17. The OU's 15,765 students are found all over Scotland, from Selkirk to Shetland, from Mull to Montrose, and in every Parliamentary constituency.

- 17% of new undergraduates live in areas in the most deprived quintile of the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD20)
- Almost a quarter of students live in rural or remote areas
- 21% have declared a disability
- 74% of students are in full- or part-time work
- 69% of new undergraduates earn less than £25,000
- 17% of new undergraduates lack traditional entry qualifications
- 18% have a college Higher National Certificate or Diploma
- The median age of new undergraduates is 26
- Students range in age from school-age to 96.

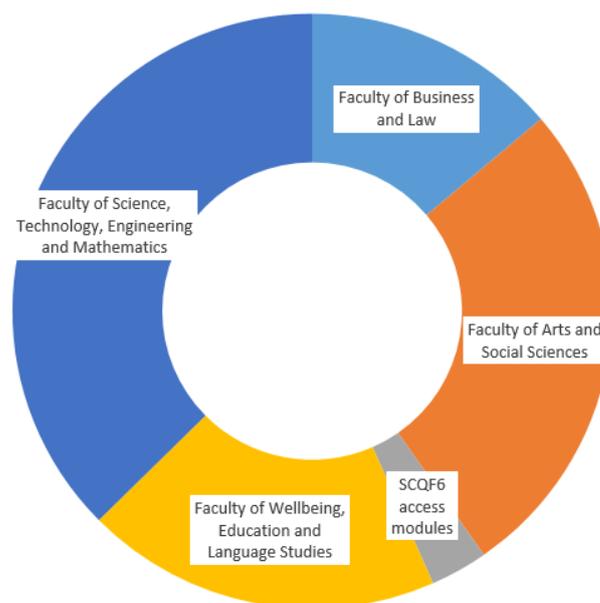
## Areas of study

The OU is organised into four faculties. We also offer three broad access modules at SCQF level 6, designed to help students to prepare for degree level study.

The chart shows the proportion of Scottish module registrations by faculty.

42% of OU students in Scotland studied STEM subjects in 2016/17. Of these students, 47% were female.

The OU in Scotland is working, as part of its Gender Action Plan, to further improve the proportion of women studying STEM subjects and men studying health and social care subjects.



## Funding

The OU, uniquely among Scottish HEIs, is funded by the SFC on completion. The ongoing growth in student numbers is such that there is now a significant gap between our total number of students and funded places.

Almost two-thirds of OU undergraduates are in receipt of the Scottish Government's Part-Time Fee Grant (PTFG), administered by the Student Awards Agency Scotland, which waives tuition fees for students earning under £25,000. This proportion has grown every year since the PTFG's introduction in 2013/14 and as it is means-tested arguably represents an access measure in its own right.

Part-time undergraduate students earning over £25,000 pay fees. However, OU fees in Scotland are maintained at a significantly lower rate than in England because of the teaching grant the OU receives from the Scottish Funding Council.

Part-time students are not generally eligible for maintenance support. The recently-concluded independent review of student support, which had as its central recommendation a proposal for a minimum student income, did not address this issue. Despite citing fairness and parity as two of its values, the review group instead made its proposals on the basis of mode of study rather than need.

## Learner journey

Learner journeys are not linear. Different learners have different needs and ambitions and therefore will take different journeys to achieve those ambitions. This must by necessity include multiple entry and exit points, giving learners the flexibility to study in a manner that suits them and their circumstances.

In an increasingly dynamic economy, in which it is anticipated that the development of new technology will have an ever-increasing impact on jobs, there is a pressing need to recognise that the learner journey has to enable learners to up-skill and re-skill in order to change jobs and careers throughout their working lives.

## More information

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