The Open University in Scotland

The Open University in Scotland is the leading provider of flexible learning and embraces a core set of values which makes it the most distinctive Scottish higher education institution.

The Open University in Scotland is open to people, places, methods and ideas, and promotes educational opportunity and social justice by providing high quality university education to all who wish to realise their ambitions and fulfil their potential.

Key facts about The Open University in Scotland:
- Ranked first for overall satisfaction for the past six years by the National Student Survey;
- Partnership agreements established with 23 of Scotland’s colleges;
- For every £1 of public funding received, we generate £5 for the Scottish economy\(^1\);
- 27% of new entrants do not have standard university entrance level qualifications;
- Over 30% of our students have an income of £16,500 or less;
- Our students live in every postal district in Scotland;
- The median age of our students is 32;
- In 2009/10 we granted 1,780 applications to transfer credit from other institutions.

The Open University currently offers more than 500 modules to over 16,000 students.

The Open University in Scotland receives teaching funding from the Scottish Funding Council and is a member of Universities Scotland.

Introduction

The Open University in Scotland welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Government’s consultation paper on College Regionalisation.

The Open University is the leading provider of part-time higher education in Scotland and currently has partnership agreements with 23 of Scotland’s colleges. We support the agenda for greater collaboration across sectors, and as a national provider with modular provision, we are uniquely placed to build on our existing partnerships with Scotland’s colleges to make a strong contribution to this agenda.

The views of The Open University in Scotland on issues raised in the consultation paper are outlined in more detail below.

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\(^1\) Economic Impact of The Open University in Scotland, Biggar Economics 2011
Meeting regional need - part-time provision at colleges

The Open University in Scotland welcomes the acknowledgement that the provision of part-time learning is important for adults in employment, and we support the Scottish Government's aspiration to see a regional approach that will enhance the capacity of colleges to plan and deliver part-time provision. The Open University in Scotland is currently developing provision in work based learning to meet the needs of employers and employees, and as such, is well placed to respond to the needs of local, regional and national employers.

As well as being important in facilitating adults in employment to up-skill and retrain, part-time provision also has a significant role to play in encouraging people to enter education and progress to higher levels. The evidence suggests that many students, particularly those from ‘hard to reach’ communities, feel more comfortable studying below full-time intensity until they have reached higher levels of confidence. Moreover, many students are not in a position to study at full-time intensity due to caring and other commitments.

Part-time provision in colleges is also a key factor in facilitating articulation from HNs to degree courses. In 2009/10, over a third of students on advanced level courses at Scottish colleges, were studying on a part-time basis.

Given the important role part-time education plays in articulation, widening access and retraining, The Open University in Scotland would urge that part-time provision is incentivised in the early stages of any collaborative ventures between colleges, through funding and other arrangements.

Improved collaboration with universities

The Open University in Scotland aims to provide an active role in ensuring that the regionalisation of colleges provides a framework for joint working between schools, colleges and university to ensure more coherent provision.

The modular approach of The Open University facilitates curricular fit between HNs and degrees, and places it in a strong position to support collaboration at a regional level. The Open University in Scotland currently has articulation agreements with 23 Scottish colleges and actively encourages students with HNs to progress on to its degree courses. In 2009/10, just under 900 new OU undergraduates in Scotland (about 14%), whose previous entry qualifications are known, had an HN or equivalent qualification. Moreover, The Open University operates an open-entry credit based admissions system (which extends to SVQs and PDAs, as well as HNs), and as such, the lack of certainty around articulation for some students completing an HN does not apply to those who choose to study with The Open University.

Given its geographical reach, The Open University is also well placed to support articulation to those colleges that have been identified in the consultation paper as potentially needing a national approach. In addition, The Open University is able to undertake collaborations which go beyond regional level to support all colleges, for example, by making articulation routes that have been developed with one college, available to all other colleges offering the same HN.

As well as encouraging articulation through its formal agreements, The Open University also facilitates transition into colleges for students who have completed

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2 Data requested from the Scottish Funding Council shows that 18,767, students were studying part-time at an advanced level, compared to 29,886 studying at full-time intensity.
OU access courses. This is a pathway into every college that is available to students across Scotland regardless of where they live.

The Open University looks forward to progressing further partnerships under the regionalisation agenda which will encourage more students to move between college and degree courses. However, we would urge that every care is taken to ensure existing partnerships with colleges are not adversely affected by the proposed structural and funding changes to the college sector.

Meeting needs of rural students
The Open University in Scotland recognises the particular challenges of providing education for rural populations. We would support a wider partnership for post 16 provision around the Crichton campus for students in Dumfries and Galloway, and a regional approach in the Highlands and Islands to strengthen the partnership between UHI and the colleges as proposed by the consultation paper.

As a national provider, economies of scale enable The Open University to offer a full range of course options via distance learning to rural populations across Scotland including individuals in Dumfries and Galloway and the Highlands and Islands. Currently, The Open University in Scotland has around 3,000 students in the Highlands and Islands and over 500 students in the Dumfries and Galloway. The Open University is presently in discussion with the Scottish Funding Council about how it could further support and expand provision in Dumfries and Galloway and the Highlands and Islands, and we look forward to continuing our collaborations with other education providers in these areas to strengthen the available provision.

The Open University in Scotland believes mode of study, i.e. open supported learning, is as important for students in rural areas, as availability of curriculum, to ensure education is accessible to everyone in Scotland, regardless of where they live.

Estimating regional need
In estimating regional need, The Open University welcomes the inclusion of ‘the numbers of people of all ages with low qualifications in a region’ as an indicator, but would also like to see an indicator that looks at income levels and engagement with lifelong learning and part-time learning.

Negotiating Outcome agreements
The Open University in Scotland would welcome the opportunity to work in collaboration with colleges in any given region, to develop pathways to higher level skills.

Further information
The Open University in Scotland is happy to expand or clarify any of the points in its response.

For further information, please contact:
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