

Scotland's Educational and Cultural Future Response from The Open University in Scotland

March 2014

Summary

The Open University in Scotland welcomes the opportunity to submit a response to the Scottish Parliament's Education and Culture Committee inquiry into 'Scotland's Educational and Cultural Future'.

In this short submission we have set out key relevant facts about The Open University in Scotland and responded to the specific issues raised in the inquiry's call for evidence.

The Open University in Scotland

The Open University in Scotland delivers open supported learning to over 15,000 students across all postal districts in Scotland. It has more than 100 staff based in its Edinburgh office and over 550 associate lecturers living in all parts of Scotland who teach our students.

Under the Further and Higher Education Act (Scotland) 1992, The Open University in Scotland is a 'designated institution' in Scotland and, since 2000, has received its main teaching funding, as well as a number of strategic grants, from the Scottish Funding Council.

Key facts about The OU in Scotland

- Voted top in Scotland for overall student satisfaction since 2006 by the National Student Survey
- For every £1 of public funding received, the OU generates £5 for the Scottish economy¹
- We have partnership agreements with 15 colleges plus SRUC over 12 regions
- 60,000 students have graduated with the OU in Scotland since 1973
- 13% of our students live in remote areas
- 14% of our students have a declared disability
- 21% of our students do not have standard university entry qualifications
- 39% of new undergraduates are resident in the two most deprived SIMD quintiles
- 45% of new students live in low-income households²

The Open University in Scotland plays a unique role in Scottish society by making higher education open to all and promoting social justice through the development of knowledge and skills. The University was founded on the belief that communications technology could bring higher education to people who had not had the opportunity to attend traditional campus universities. One of the most fundamental ways in which The Open University makes higher education accessible is through its open access policy, i.e. for most of our qualifications and modules there are no formal entry requirements. As a result we have a diverse student population and a high proportion of more students from non-traditional backgrounds.

We also work closely with a range of partners across the whole of Scotland, including employers, trade unions, public sector bodies, third sector organisations and community organisations to promote and facilitate higher education to a broad section of the population. For example, we are currently working with organisations supporting carers such as the Scottish Young Carers Services Alliance (SYCSA), Carers Trust Scotland and local Carers Centres to support more carers study from home and fit their learning around their caring commitments.

The OU in Scotland also has formal partnership agreements with 15 colleges, plus SRUC, over 12 regions which support college students with HNQs articulate into degree courses. Through our partnership with the Scottish Prison Service we are able to facilitate access to higher education for those prisoners who have not previously had the opportunity to study at this level before. There are currently 40 OU students in 9 prisons in Scotland.

The Open University operates successfully across all four nations of the UK and was created to open access to higher education. Whatever the constitutional settlement in Scotland, the OU remains committed to delivering accessible and high-quality higher education to a diverse range of students as outlined above.

Response to issues raised by the Inquiry

The Open University in Scotland teaches over 15,000 students, all of whom are domiciled in Scotland. Issues relating to immigration and fees for RUK or EU students, therefore, do not directly impact on the university or its students as we provide education opportunities for students in their home country.

While the majority of research funding received by The Open University comes from HEFCE, we have two collaborative research centres in Scotland with the University of Edinburgh (Innogen) and the University of Stirling (the Institute for Social Marketing). In addition, The OU has over 35 research partnerships with other Scottish Universities. As a world leader in the development of Open Educational Resources (OERs), The Open University is also working with partners across Scotland to use OERs more effectively in different contexts such as workplace and community settings. The Open University believes there are many advantages in having a common pool of research staff and facilities across the UK and supports the view of Universities Scotland that whatever the constitutional settlement there are benefits to retaining a common research 'ecosystem'.

As stated above, The Open University currently operates across all four nations of the UK taking into account the different higher education funding arrangements and needs in Scotland, England, Northern Ireland and Wales. The Open University's model of delivering high quality education part-time and flexibly means that it is able to work within any constitutional settlement in Scotland.

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, Úna Bartley, Policy and Public Affairs Manager: u.bartley@open.ac.uk or 0131 549 7195

1. *Economic Impact of The Open University in Scotland*, Biggar Economics 2011
2. Households with an income below £16,500