The Open University is a triumph of progressive thinking which has inspired, enthused and educated for nearly 50 years.”
Henry McLeish, former First Minister of Scotland, Holyrood Magazine 2013

Brief history

The Open University was established in 1969 by Royal Charter. The university has strong links with Scotland, with Harold Wilson making the announcement of a ‘university of the air’ at a speech in Glasgow Concert Hall in 1963, after which he handed implementation of the project to Scottish MP Jennie Lee, before Walter Perry, another Scot, was appointed as the first Vice-Chancellor.

Mission

The Open University’s mission is to be open to people, places, methods and ideas.

Open to people

The Open University (OU) plays a unique role in 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 that 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. We believe it is the qualifications with which our students leave, rather than those with which they enter, that count.

In 2013/14, over 20% of OU students in Scotland did not have standard university entry qualifications.

“It was sheer genius...to trash the notion that entry to university required formal qualifications.”
Dame Elish Angiolini, former Lord Advocate of Scotland, April 2013, after accepting an honorary doctorate from The Open University in Scotland

Open to places

The Open University changed the face of higher education with its innovative pedagogy and exploitation of new technologies, becoming the world’s first successful distance teaching university.

The flexibility of our unique model of supported open learning allows our students to study wherever they choose - in their own homes, their workplace or at a library or study centre – allowing them to plan their study around their other commitments.

The OU’s ongoing use of new technology allows students across Scotland to study for a degree no matter where they are located. The highest concentration of OU students in Scotland is in rural areas, demonstrating the role The Open University plays in allowing people located in rural parts to access higher education. There are currently 1,730 OU students in the Highlands and islands and more than one in every 200 adults in Shetland studies with the OU.

In addition, The Open University is the only university that allows students located on any of Scotland’s islands to take their exams without leaving the island.
Open to methods and ideas

The Open University continues to lead the learning revolution, placing innovation at the heart of our teaching and research. With unparalleled expertise in deploying new technologies, the OU is a world leader in open education resources, making its academic expertise freely available to individuals in Scotland and across the globe.

OU Anywhere

Since 2013, OU students have been able to study for their qualifications whenever and wherever it suits them, using a new tablet and smartphone App OU Anywhere. With OU Anywhere all the textbooks, videos and other materials an OU student needs can be downloaded, facilitating study at home, in the office, or on the move.

On-line platforms

The OU’s various online platforms have allowed tens of millions of people across the globe to access its learning materials:

iTunesU
Over 65 million downloads have been made from the OU’s presence on iTunesU.

OpenLearn
Over 8,000 hours of free, open educational material is available on OpenLearn, including the Gaelic in Modern Scotland and Cànan nan Gàidheal units. The OpenLearn site had more than five million visitors in 2013, of which 50% are outside the UK. 10% of visitors to OpenLearn go on to our ‘Study at the OU’ website.

YouTube
The OU’s YouTube channel is the most popular of any university in Europe.

FutureLearn
In 2013, the OU launched Futurelearn, the first free online platform for MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) from UK universities including the Universities of Edinburgh, Glasgow, Strathclyde, Dundee and Aberdeen.

OU/BBC partnership

The Open University’s unique partnership with the BBC continues to flourish and evolve. Nearly 300 million ‘views’ and ‘listens’ of OU/BBC-produced programmes take place each year in the UK. Academic experts from across the University are involved in all OU/BBC productions. Recent examples include the 2014 series The Secret History of Our Streets which had a focus on streets in Edinburgh, Glasgow and Aberdeen, and the Life Story series with David Attenborough.