The Open University 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;
- For every £1 of public funding received, we generate £5 for the Scottish economy;  
- 27% of new entrants come to us without 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 is the leading provider of part-time higher education in Scotland, and 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.

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
The Open University in Scotland welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Scottish Government consultation document, Putting Learners at the Centre. The key points from our response are summarised below.

Efficient, Flexible, Learner Journeys
The OU welcomes the attention articulation has been given by the Scottish Government, given the important role it plays in widening access to higher education, retraining and upskilling.

For the high proportion of HN students who study part-time and wish to articulate on a part-time basis, lack of certainty about student support is a significant barrier.

Anomalies in HNs that act as a deterrent to articulation could be addressed as part of the refresh of HNs, but we would caution that both the vocational and academic aspirations of HN students should continue to be met.

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1 Economic Impact of The Open University in Scotland, Biggar Economics 2011
The suggestion that good practice in RPL should be adopted more widely is to be welcomed.

The Open University in Scotland acknowledges the need to address the potential duplication between the sixth year of study in school and the first year of university.

We welcome the assertion that part-time learning should be a ‘greater feature moving forward,’ and would like to see part-time study presented as a valid option to young people.

We commend the commitment to offer a place in post-16 education and training to all 16 - 19 year olds, but caution that there will be an ongoing need to retrain and up-skill people in the workforce.

1.2 Widening Access
The OU in Scotland endorses the view that examination grades alone are not an indicator of potential, but is concerned by the suggestion that only a limited number of individuals can benefit from HE.

The role of access courses in providing a route to university for adults should not be overlooked, and informal learning opportunities should be supported, as a step in encouraging people to consider more formal learning pathways.

The Open University would like to see the impact of outcome agreements evaluated before a statutory duty on wider access is considered, and is concerned by the suggestion that SIMD is used as the basis for access targets.

1.3 Maintaining Scotland as a global leader in university research
The Open University welcomes the aim of encouraging HEIs to grow their research and develop research relationships across and outwith the sector.

1.4 Fair and affordable Student support
The OU in Scotland welcomes the suggestion of centralising student support, which could address inconsistencies in support for part-time and distance learning students.

The Open University in Scotland warmly welcomes the proposals to offer a wider group of part-time students a contribution towards their fees and would like to see what further support could be given to part-time students on low incomes.

The decision to convert the Postgraduate Student Allowance Scheme into a loan scheme and extend the scheme to part-time students is to be welcomed.

1.5 Effective and sustainable delivery
The Open University in Scotland welcomes proposals to encourage collaboration amongst education providers, and believes this should extend to collaboration at a national level.

To support greater collaboration, artificial barriers between institutions in terms of funding and data collection need to be removed.

The Open University is currently in discussion with the Scottish Funding Council to explore how its unique model of delivery could help strengthen provision in rural areas.
While there is much potential to deploy new technologies to enable greater geographical reach of HE, there are ongoing issues about access to high speed broadband.

The Open University in Scotland agrees that HEIs should play to their strengths and believes this should also apply to mode and intensity of study, and delivery of provision.

The Open University would like to see any college mergers implemented in a way that does not undermine existing articulation agreements, and that the value of part-time provision is fully acknowledged during the planning stages of mergers.

1.6 Simplification of the Funding System and Income Generation
The Open University in Scotland warmly welcomes the settlement for HE and the decision to reinvest savings in the teaching grant from RUK students across the sector.

Given the broad review of funding for universities and colleges, The Open University would like to highlight that is the only Scottish HEI to be funded on an outcome basis, in that funding for teaching grant is based on student completions and not on student enrolments as in the rest of the sector. The OU believes that all HEIs should be funded on the same basis.

The Open University welcomes the Scottish Funding Council’s decision to distribute funding from the Horizon Fund on the basis of outcome agreements.

1.7 Performance, governance and accountability
The Open University strives to be an exemplar of good governance in the HE sector and will take into consideration any recommendations from the Scottish Government’s review.

2. INTRODUCTION
The Open University in Scotland welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Government’s pre-legislative consultation paper, Putting Learners at the Centre.

We particularly welcome the acknowledgement in the paper that higher education, not only makes a vital contribution to the economy but, is also, ‘a civilising force, which has had a major influence on the country and society’, as well as the commitment to a free inclusive system for all.

The Open University in Scotland fully supports the guiding principles set out in the paper, and is committed to working with the Scottish Government to deliver a system that puts the learner at the centre. We recognise the need for greater collaboration within and across the sectors, and as a national education provider with modular provision, The Open University is in a unique position to build on existing partnerships to make a strong contribution to this agenda, at both a regional and a national level.

The Open University in Scotland has outlined its views on this aspect of the paper and other areas pertinent to part-time students, in more detail below.

3. EFFICIENT, FLEXIBLE LEARNER JOURNEYS
The Open University in Scotland supports The Scottish Government’s aim of establishing a flexible and fair post-16 education system, which meets the needs of learners and employers, and delivers courses as efficiently as possible.
In this section we have set out where we believe there is scope to improve the learner journey, while reducing duplication across the sectors, alongside highlighting the contribution The Open University is currently making to this agenda.

3.1 Encouraging articulation
The Open University in Scotland actively encourages students with HNs to progress on to its degree courses, and its modular approach facilitates curricular fit between HNs and degrees. To date, The OU in Scotland has developed articulation agreements with 23 Scottish colleges, as well as piloting projects to support articulation (see example below). In 2009/10, just under 900 new OU undergraduates in Scotland (about 14%), whose previous entry qualifications were known, had an HN or equivalent qualification.

**Partnership with Adam Smith College**

The Open University in Scotland has commenced an innovative new curriculum partnership in the Social Sciences which reduces the time required to achieve an honours degree. Students at Adam Smith College who have completed HND Social Sciences are not only able to progress to the final year of a BA (Hons) Social Science with The OU but can also continue to use the college as their base, giving them access to the college facilities as well as peer support from their fellow students.

There is also a dedicated ‘Learning Space’ at the college for Open University students.

Further information about the partnership can be found on the Adam Smith website at: [www.adamsmith.ac.uk/student/courses/course/BASOC](http://www.adamsmith.ac.uk/student/courses/course/BASOC)

The OU in Scotland recognises the important role that articulation plays in widening access to HE, as well as providing opportunities for retraining and upskilling, and we therefore welcome the attention it has been given by the Scottish Government. The OU operates an open admissions policy, which does not require previous qualifications, but in areas of credit transfer it is important that the credit transferred is appropriate to the subject area. We would therefore welcome further details on the proposals for legislation to guarantee articulation and how it would address the issue of credit transfer between different subject areas.

Research undertaken by The Open University with its articulating students suggests that students who enter part-time degree courses with an HN often switch the direction of their study and that for many, there is a time lag between leaving college and starting a degree. It would be helpful for these issues to be taken into account in considering measures to encourage further articulation.

The Open University in Scotland would also like to highlight the high number of college students that study HNs on a part-time basis. In 2009/10, over a third of students on advanced level courses at Scottish colleges, were studying on a part-time basis.

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2 From college to The Open University: tracking learner journeys Pete Cannell, Ronald Macintyre & Joan Thomson The Open University in Scotland 2010
time basis. A significant barrier for such students wishing to articulate to degrees is the lack of certainty surrounding student support for part-time students and the contribution they may have to make towards their fees (outlined in more detail in Section 6). This is a particular issue for many students in ‘hard to reach’ communities as the evidence suggests these students feel more comfortable studying below full-time intensity until they have reached higher levels of confidence.

Given the significant numbers of HN students at colleges currently studying on a part-time basis, The Open University in Scotland also has concerns about whether the impact of the changes to college funding may disincentivise part-time provision, thereby limiting the number of students who can access degrees through the HN route.

The Open University would also recommend that education providers are encouraged to look beyond establishing articulation routes at a regional level, to offer greater choice is available to learners who may wish to move to degree courses out with their region.

The Open University would welcome greater consideration being given to the issue of reverse articulation i.e. that colleges are enabled and encouraged to credit HE modules from students that start degree courses and then switch to take up HNs. The OU believes that SQA should be encouraged to come forward with plans to facilitate this process.

3.2 Refresh of HNs
The Open University in Scotland welcomes the proposed refresh of HNs as an opportunity to address some of the anomalies that currently act as a deterrent to articulation. For example, HNCs are usually 96 credits and can include units at SCQF level 6, while the first year of a degree course is the equivalent of 120 credits at level 7. To address this shortfall in credit, The Open University in Scotland has developed the use of modules, such as Make your experience count, which allow students to accredit their prior experiential learning and thereby top-up their HNCs to 120 credits. However, this issue would benefit from being addressed through a sector-wide approach.

Although HNs were originally conceived of as vocational qualifications, The Open University in Scotland supports the view in the consultation paper that some students are increasingly seeing HNs as the first step towards a degree. As highlighted in our response to Building a Smarter Scotland, OU in Scotland research demonstrates that the proportion of OU students declaring ‘route to a degree’ as their ‘main motivation’ for studying for an HN rose from 6 per cent in 2005 to 21 percent in 2009.

However, The OU would caution that both the academic and vocational aspirations of those taking HNs need to be supported, and that while some HNs may increasingly being used as routes to degrees, this is unlikely to be the case for all subject areas.

3.4 Effectiveness of SCQF
The SCQF complements the flexibility of The OU’s modular system; together they facilitate students taking some modules with The Open University before moving to another university as well as students moving to The OU from other institutions.

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.

Ibid
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 referred to in the consultation paper with respect to articulation, does not apply to OU students. Rather, as highlighted above, the main barrier for HN students wishing to articulate to OU degree courses is the lack of certainty around financial support for part-time students.

3.5 Recognition of Prior Learning

The Open University believes recognition of prior learning (RPL) is key to reducing duplication in the learner journey and welcomes the suggestion in the consultation paper that good practice in RPL within the sector should be adopted more widely. The Open University has been at the forefront of developing innovative approaches to help individuals gain credit for their prior informal learning and we would be happy to participate in sharing practice across the sector.

3.6 More effective transitions from school to university

The Open University in Scotland recognises the potential for duplication in learning between the sixth year of study in school and the first year of university. This is less of an issue for OU students as The Open University offers a three year honours degree. However, we recognise the need to explore what more could be done across the sector to facilitate advanced standing for pupils entering university with qualifications offered in sixth year, including those pupils that take HE modules with The OU in Scotland.

Through the Young Applicants in School Scheme (YASS), The Open University is currently offering HE modules to pupils in 79 schools across Scotland, enabling them to access a greater range of subject choices and gain the experience of organising their own learning. The highest number of schools participating in YASS is in the Highlands and other rural parts of Scotland, demonstrating the demand for a broader curriculum choice in rural areas, where economies of scale may prevent schools offering their pupils the full range of Advanced Highers and/or Baccalaureates. However, currently, HE credit gained in this way cannot be counted towards a Scottish Baccalaureate and neither, normally, is it recognised by other HEIs.

Addressing both these issues has the potential to assist participating pupils gain advanced entry to degree courses.

Young Applicants in Schools Scheme

Amy Errington studied the module *An introduction to law in contemporary Scotland (W150)* alongside her school studies at Biggar Academy as part of The OU’s Young Applicants in Schools Scheme. This is what she said of her experience:

‘Because I’m going to study journalism and politics I knew W150 would give me some knowledge about law which will be a big part of my university course. I can apply things I’ve learned to my modern studies course at school now too.’

‘At first when I started I found it very different from a taught course at school but when I got used to that I really enjoyed it. I like the freedom of being able to study when I wanted. That was one of the reasons I did it – so that I would know what it’s like to study at university level, and on my own as well.’
3.7 Part-time
The Open University in Scotland welcomes the assertion in the consultation paper that part-time learning should be a, ‘greater feature moving forward’ and the acknowledgement that part-time study is relevant to school leavers as well as mature students.

The Open University would like to see part-time HE study presented as a valid option to young people by those agencies that offer career advice in whatever format such advice is delivered i.e. in brochures, on-line or face to face. From our experience we are aware that a growing number of young people choose to work full-time or undertake apprenticeships whilst they study part-time, and this must be acknowledged in careers advice.

3.8 Graduate apprenticeships
The Open University in Scotland welcomes the commitment to deliver a wider range of vocational progression routes and more high-level apprenticeship opportunities. Currently, The OU is delivering a BEng degree to students in two very large engineering companies in Scotland, many of whom had previously entered employment through apprenticeships. The OU is now exploring how to build on this experience with both the engineering and IT industries to deliver high level apprenticeships.

3.9 Appropriate places in learning for all 16-19 year old
The Open University in Scotland commends the Scottish Government on its commitment to offer a place in education and training to all 16-19 year olds. While there is an obvious need to target resources in the current budgetary environment, The OU believes that to achieve sustainable economic growth there will be an ongoing need to incentivise people already in the workforce to retrain and up-skill. The Open University in Scotland would therefore like to see that any changes to post-16 education result in a system with sufficient flexibility to offer provision to a range of learners now and in the future.

4. WIDENING ACCESS

Widening access to higher education is at the core of The Open University in Scotland’s mission. We therefore welcome the Scottish Government’s ongoing commitment to support greater participation from certain groups, particularly those from the most deprived backgrounds.

We also welcome the acknowledgement that student support and articulation routes play an important role in widening access, and we have said more about these issues in sections 3.1 and 6.2.

Over the last ten years, The Open University in Scotland has made a significant contribution to widening access, with the number of OU students living on low incomes\(^5\) doubling in this period. Currently, there are over 5,000 students on low incomes studying with The Open University, accounting for over 30% of our undergraduates.

The views of The Open University in Scotland in relation to the specific issues raised in the consultation paper on widening access are set out below.

\(^5\) Annual incomes below £16,500
4.1 Targeting
The success of the open admissions policy operated by The Open University in Scotland, which encourages individuals to enter higher education regardless of what qualifications they hold, demonstrates that qualifications and grades are a narrow indicator of the potential of an individual to benefit from higher education. The OU therefore welcomes the recognition that universities should look beyond examination grades as an indicator of potential.

However, we are concerned that the consultation paper gives the impression that there are a limited number of individuals from particular backgrounds that would benefit from HE, who need to be ‘sought out’. Moreover, the paper suggests that it is only young people leaving school that have such potential.

The experience of The OU is that there is a broad range of people who can successfully progress through higher education, but for many of them, the time to consider and benefit from university is not straight from school.

The Open University in Scotland believes that while it is important to encourage young people from all backgrounds to consider HE, the role that access courses play in providing routes to university for people that did not attain university entry qualifications during their school years, should not be overlooked. In 2010/11, 1,630 students registered on Open University access modules demonstrating the high level of demand to pursue higher education at a later stage in life. Moreover, OU data demonstrates that access courses are more likely to attract individuals from low-income households and/or the most deprived quintiles of the SIMD.

The Open University in Scotland strongly supports the view in the consultation paper that a key part of widening access lies in transforming the life chances of children and families through ongoing interventions. We believe an essential part of this agenda is offering opportunities to adults to return to education, so they can be positive role models for their children and inspire them to fulfil their educational potential.

The Open University in Scotland: building partnerships, widening access

Through its Openings programme, The Open University in Scotland offers a suite of credit bearing access modules, which are designed as a bridge into HE study. In 2010/11, 1,630 students from across Scotland went on to an Openings programme. For many adults, Openings, offered on a part-time basis through distance learning, is the only route into higher education.

Since 2005, The Open University in Scotland has been developing community-based partnerships with local organisations to establish sustainable paths into higher education and progression routes to further study. Using this model, students are recruited and jointly supported by the local OU project worker and the community partner, which allows the partner to develop a better understanding of the practicalities of accessing modules and funding.

In addition to providing the course materials, OU staff ensure that appropriate progression advice is available to students near the end of their module. To date, The Open University in Scotland has developed over fifty such partnerships across Scotland, with a range of agencies, including local authorities’ Community Learning Development Partnerships, unions and voluntary organisations. In 2010, over 300 students came to The Open University through these partnerships.
4.2 Access to informal learning
The Open University in Scotland believes that informal learning opportunities should also be supported as an important step in encouraging people to consider more formal learning pathways. New technologies offer significant potential to engage large numbers of people in informal education. For example, many OU resources are now available for educators and informal learners to download via iTunes or the OpenLearn website. Currently, OpenLearn provides more than 6,000 hours of tuition, and in September 2011, The Open University became the first university in the world to reach 40 million global downloads on iTunesU.

There is scope to build on open access resources, such as OpenLearn, in Scotland to provide a national centre for excellence in informal learning, by offering organisations from different sectors the opportunity to share their information on an easily accessible platform. HEFCE has funded a similar project ‘SCORE’ which is based at The Open University. The three year project (2009-2012) aims to support individuals, projects, institutions and programmes across the higher education sector in England engage with creating, sharing and using open educational resources.

iSpot – informal learning through new technologies
iSpot is a website (www.ispot.org.uk) developed by The Open University which is open to anyone interested in wildlife and the environment. Users can upload pictures and share observations from their local areas, join discussion groups and forums, and learn from others willing to impart their expertise and knowledge on the site.

iSpot aims to:
• improve confidence and skills in observing, identifying and appreciating wildlife of all sorts and in all environments;
• increase understanding, engagement, enjoyment of wildlife especially those who are not engaged in wildlife already and who may not have access to appropriate support by other means;
• make science more accessible to people;
• improve confidence and skills in using online tools and encourage participatory learning through social networking; and
• offer a pathway from informal to formal accredited learning.

4.3 Wider Access Indicators
The Open University in Scotland shares the concerns raised by Universities Scotland over the use of the SIMD as the basis for access targets. The evidence suggests that such location-based criteria skew outcomes and lead to unintended consequences. As a national provider, The Open University recognises that while the SIMD may provide a helpful indicator in densely populated areas, it fails in rural and semi-rural communities, where there are a limited number of MD20 data zones.

4.4 New Statutory Duty
The Open University welcomes the current approach of outcome agreements being developed by the Scottish Funding Council with individual universities and hopes that these agreements will offer the basis for a rigorous but nuanced understanding of the effectiveness of widening participation practice. As such, we would like to see these agreements given time to bed down and their effectiveness evaluated before a statutory duty on wider access is considered.
5. MAINTAINING SCOTLAND AS A GLOBAL LEADER IN UNIVERSITY RESEARCH

The Open University receives its research funding through HEFCE, but engages in many research partnerships and knowledge exchange related activities in Scotland. For example, in 2002, The Open University and The University of Edinburgh established Innogen, a centre for the study of innovation in life sciences, which works globally with industry, scientist and policy makers.

Academic staff based in Scotland also make an important contribution to the Scottish research base and have particular expertise in areas such as pedagogy and social policy.

The OU welcomes the aim of encouraging HEIs to grow their research and develop research relationships across and out with the sector, and would welcome evidence of the benefits of establishing a single knowledge exchange office.

6. FAIR AND AFFORDABLE STUDENT SUPPORT

The Open University in Scotland warmly welcomes the Scottish Government’s aim to improve participation, retention and progression in learning, through ensuring student support arrangements are fair and affordable.

6.1 Centralised student support

The growth of separate support arrangements for different types of students over many years has led to a system, which is complex for the learner to understand and navigate. The Open University therefore welcomes the suggestion of centralising student support, which offers the potential to establish a simpler and fairer system, which places the student at the centre and facilitates progression between different sectors and different modes of study. Such a system could address many of the inconsistencies that currently exist, particularly for part-time and distance learning students, which are outlined in more detail below.

6.2 Student support for part-time students

Currently part-time students studying at HEIs are not eligible for the financial support that is available to full-time students. In addition, part-time students are ineligible for specific types of funding available to full-time students, such as, the childcare grant. Given the additional support that will be made available for full-time HE students, particularly the provision of a minimum income of at least £7,000 for the lowest income students, The OU would like the Scottish Government to explore what further support could be given to part-time students on low incomes, as part of the review of the student support system.

6.3 Student support for distance learning students

The Open University in Scotland welcomes the Scottish Government’s recognition in recent discussions of the anomaly whereby distance learning students studying at full-time intensity cannot access the financial support that is available to full-time students based at a campus. We would urge the Scottish Government to examine the current arrangements for full-time distance learning students as part of its review of student support and explore the potential for these students to be provided for under the minimum income guarantee.

6.4 Fee support for part-time students

The Open University warmly welcomes the development of proposals to put in place a system, which will offer a wider group of part-time students a contribution towards their tuition fees. We look forward to ongoing constructive engagement with the
Scottish Government and key stakeholders from the sector to establish a more streamlined system for part-time students, which will go some way to addressing the disparity between fee support available to part-time and full-time students.

6.5 Support for Postgraduate Students
The Open University in Scotland welcomes the decision to convert the Postgraduate Student Allowance Scheme into a loan scheme and to extend this scheme to part-time students. We believe that this arrangement will encourage more people to undertake postgraduate courses.

7 EFFECTIVE AND SUSTAINABLE DELIVERY

7.1 Regional collaboration
The Open University in Scotland welcomes the proposals to support collaboration to offer a broad curriculum without duplication at a local and regional level. The Open University in Scotland has national reach, distinctive delivery through supported open learning, and a wide range of modules at different levels. As such, it is in a unique position to support the regionalisation agenda through offering a wide curriculum choice to students, irrespective of where they live, by supplementing course provision at a local or regional level, and by working with other education providers to identify courses which could draw on existing modules.

Over the years, The Open University in Scotland has worked in partnership with a number of colleges and universities to offer students broader curriculum choice without duplicating existing courses. The modular nature of OU provision lends itself well to establishing course options that allow students to take some modules with The Open University in Scotland and some modules with other institutions.

Dundee Scottish History Collaborative Scheme

The Open University in Scotland developed a partnership with the University of Dundee to offer greater choice for its students by drawing on existing provision. As a result of the partnership, OU students now have the option of taking Scottish history courses with the University of Dundee. Students that choose to study some modules with the University of Dundee can opt to return to The OU or to continue studying with the University of Dundee.

Since this partnership was established in 1998, 942 OU students have counted Scottish history modules from the University of Dundee towards their degree.

To support the regionalisation agenda and fully realise the vision of a system, which puts the learner at the centre, institutional funding and student support arrangements need to be reviewed so that collaboration rather than competition is encouraged between HEIs to support those students who want to study modules from more than one institution at a time.

7.2 Meeting the needs of employers
The geographical reach of The Open University in Scotland and the range of established courses means that we are in a strong position to immediately address the high-level skill needs of new companies moving into a particular area. As such, The OU in Scotland is keen to work in partnership with other education providers at a regional level to ensure that the needs of companies, as well as individual students, can be met promptly.
7.3 Collaboration at a national level
In addition to looking at education provision at a regional level, The Open University in Scotland believes it is essential to look also at the national picture, as this is the level at which many companies, public sector bodies and third sector organisations need to plan.

The experience of The Open University, as outlined in the examples below, is that as many workforces transcend local and regional boundaries, they require education and training that is consistent, but which takes account of the local needs of employees spread across different locations as well as employees who move between different sites.

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<tr>
<th>National training with Princess Royal Trust for Carers</th>
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<tr>
<td>The Open University in Scotland is currently working with the Princess Royal Trust for Carers, which supports carers in community settings across Scotland, from Orkney to Dumfries and Galloway. Through its unique network of 29 Carers’ Centres it supports 46,000 unpaid carers, whose support needs vary widely.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Through examining the client base in each of the 29 centres and the support needs of carers, the study will provide an informed picture of the learning and training needs identified by staff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Open University's experience and expertise in areas of ethnographic research will allow the Trust to take a nuanced approach to developing an effective training strategy for centre staff. Such an approach not only takes into consideration the diversity of existing knowledge and experience, but is also informed by an understanding of the local training needs within widely diverse contexts.</td>
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<th>National training with Community Energy Scotland</th>
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<tr>
<td>The Open University in Scotland has recently reached an agreement with Community Energy Scotland to support their activities in providing training and advice to community-based renewable energy projects across Scotland. This initiative builds on The Open University’s expertise in renewable energy.</td>
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7.4 Rural provision
The Open University in Scotland recognises the particular challenges of providing education for rural populations. Given that relatively large sections of the Scottish population live in remote and rural communities, it is essential that a post-16 education system is established which ensures that everyone in Scotland is able to access higher education regardless of where they live.

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.
OU access provision in Dumfries and Galloway

‘Openings for progression’ is a multi-exit programme in Dumfries and Galloway where the sustained presence of local OU staff members supports pockets of students across the whole region, from Sanquhar to Stranraer. The programme has seen a year on year increase in registrations on OU access modules and a 34% increase in student progressing to undergraduate level over the course of the initiative (in April 2011, the undergraduate headcount was 503.) Students also progress on to Dumfries and Galloway College or one of the Crichton campus HEIs.

Issues of scale in Dumfries and Galloway mean that campus-based access provision in the area is limited in its scope. However, distance learning increases the range of opportunities for residents as well as offering a real opportunity for a truly flexible and truly learner-centred approach to widening access.

The Open University is presently in discussion with the Scottish Funding Council about how it could further support 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.

It is also worth highlighting that while distance learning supports students in rural areas, it also facilitates access to HE for individuals in urban areas whose type of work may make it difficult for them to attend a campus. Mode of delivery is as important as availability of curriculum to ensure higher education is available to everyone regardless of where they live or the type of work that they undertake.

7.5 Use of new technologies
The Open University welcomes the acknowledgement in the consultation paper that new technologies, including virtual learning environments, have the potential to offer greater choice for the learner and extend geographical reach, through distance learning.

As the leading provider of distance learning, The Open University fully recognises the value of new technologies to enable geographical reach, particularly to people living in rural and island communities, but we are aware that many of our students in rural areas still struggle with access to high speed broadband.

7.6 Differentiation of provision
The Open University in Scotland supports the Scottish Government’s encouragement to HEIs to play to their strengths and promote themselves to different markets. We believe this should apply to mode of study and delivery of provision, as well as curricular provision, and would highlight that The Open University’s contribution to the HE system is as unique as that of the SSIs, in terms of offering part-time, distance learning on a national basis, as well as being a centre of expertise in technological and pedagogical innovation.

7.7 College mergers
The Open University acknowledges the rationale behind the move to regionalise Scottish colleges. However, as The Open University in Scotland has partnership
agreements with 23 colleges, we would urge that the mergers are implemented at a pace that ensures established articulation agreements remain in place and that college students hoping to progress from HNs to degree courses are not adversely affected by the changes in the college sector.

In addition, The Open University would strongly advise that the role of part-time provision at colleges in widening access and workforce development is fully acknowledged during the planning stages of any mergers.

8. SIMPLIFICATION OF THE FUNDING SYSTEM AND INCOME GENERATION

The Open University in Scotland warmly welcomes the settlement for the higher education sector under the Scottish Government’s draft budget. We particularly welcome the commitment to restore the unit of resource for teaching to the level equivalent to Academic Year 2010-11.

Below, we have set out comments on those issues raised about funding to the sector which affect The Open University in Scotland.

8.1 RUK Fees consultation
Due to the nature of its provision, The Open University in Scotland does not have students from the rest of the UK, and as such, is not directly affected by the legislation to allow Scottish HEIs to set their fees for RUK students at up to £9,000 a year.

We recognise that this decision will create savings for the sector by reducing SFC funded numbers for RUK students. The Open University welcomes the decision to reinvest this funding across the sector and not just to subjects of strategic importance, particularly as this stream of additional funding is not open to The Open University to generate additional funds.

8.2 Reforming funding for higher education
Given that the Scottish Government is undertaking a broad review of funding for universities and colleges, The Open University would like to highlight that it is the only Scottish HEI to be funded on an output basis in that funding for teaching grant is based on student completions and not on student enrolments as in the rest of the sector. The Open University in Scotland is not strongly minded about whether the sector should move to outcome based funding, only that there should be a level playing field so that all HEIs have access to the same opportunities and are subject to the same challenges.

The Open University welcomes the Scottish Funding Council’s decision to move to distribute funding from the Horizon Fund on the basis of outcome agreements.

9. PERFORMANCE, GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Governance arrangements at The Open University are taken very seriously, primarily to ensure legal and regulatory compliance, but also to support informed and transparent decision-making. Details of our views in relation to governance can be found in our response to the Scottish Government’s review of Higher Education governance, which is located on our website, or available on request.

The Open University strives to be an exemplar of good governance in the HE sector and will take into consideration any recommendations from the review to inform the university’s governance arrangements.
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:
Una Bartley, Policy and Public Affairs Manager
Tel: 0131 549 7195
E-mail: u.bartley@open.ac.uk

Putting Learners at the Centre

RESPONDENT INFORMATION FORM
Please Note this form must be returned with your response to ensure that we handle your response appropriately

1. Name/Organisation
   Organisation Name
   The Open University in Scotland

   Title  Mr  Ms x  Mrs  Miss  Dr  Please tick as appropriate

   Surname
   Bartley

   Forename
   Una

2. Postal Address
   10 Drumsheugh Gardens
   Edinburgh

   Postcode  EH3 7QJ  Phone 0131 549 7195  Email u.bartley@open.ac.uk

3. Permissions - I am responding as...
   Individual / Group/Organisation
   Please tick as appropriate

   (a) Do you agree to your response being made available to the public (in Scottish Government library and/or on the Scottish Government web site)?
      Please tick as appropriate  Yes  No

   (c) The name and address of your organisation will be made available to the public (in the Scottish Government library and/or on the Scottish Government web site).
Where confidentiality is not requested, we will make your responses available to the public on the following basis.

*Please tick ONE of the following boxes*

- Yes, make my response, name and address all available
- Yes, make my response available, but not my name and address
- Yes, make my response and name available, but not my address

Are you content for your response to be made available?

*Please tick as appropriate*

- Yes
- No

We will share your response internally with other Scottish Government policy teams who may be addressing the issues you discuss. They may wish to contact you again in the future, but we require your permission to do so. Are you content for Scottish Government to contact you again in relation to this consultation exercise?

*Please tick as appropriate*

- Yes
- No