



Scholarship Plan

2024–2029

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1. Context

The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) plays a crucial role in our University's innovative and student-responsive approach to teaching and learning and its mission to be open to people, places, methods and ideas. Scholarship positions our university as an institution, where teaching and learning are underpinned by practitioner-led systematic inquiry, grounded in context and conducted in partnership with students.¹

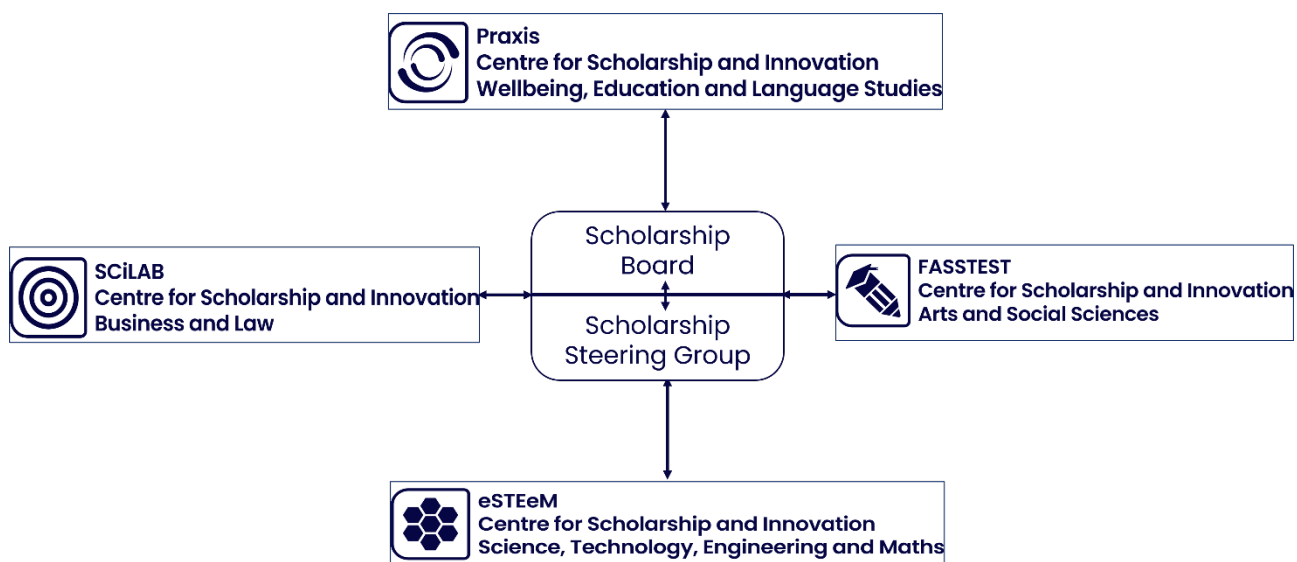
In addition, the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning

- is integral to building on The Open University's (OU) position as a global leader in the field of open, online and supported distance learning.
- ensures that students have opportunities for active involvement in enhancing learning.
- engages staff to enhance their professional identities and knowledge.

¹ Scholarship' is understood here as the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL), which involves the systematic investigation of teaching and learning practices that is practitioner-led, grounded in context and conducted in partnership with students, using a range of research methodologies. SoTL builds on and contributes to an international, peer-reviewed body of literature in order to establish and share good practice in teaching and learning (see: Boyer, 1990; Center for Engaged Learning, 2024; Felten, 2013; HEA, 2016; Minocha, 2021; Potter and Kustra, 2011).

- supports the development of successful module and programme designs.
- facilitates collaboration between students and staff in academic and academic-related roles, building communities of practice within and across faculties.

The [2018-23 Scholarship Plan](#) set out to “add value through using our research and scholarship to inform and enhance our teaching and learning and therefore student outcomes”. The Plan proposed a number of processes including the establishment of “centres for scholarship and innovation in each Faculty” to “increase collaboratively- developed, research-informed, knowledge exchange and teaching that meets the needs of students”. These Centres have established peer-reviewed funding streams with regular project calls, supporting a total of more than 400 projects since 2018, underpinned by clear priorities (aligned with institutional priorities and faculty business plans), robust support structures, reporting processes and dissemination opportunities, with impact on policy and practice and feeding into the University’s 2023 Gold- rated TEF (Teaching Excellence Framework) submission to the Office for Students.



The Centres for Scholarship and Innovation based in each faculty form a networked community co-ordinated through the Scholarship Steering Group, which includes stakeholders from across the university working together to implement the Scholarship Plan. The Scholarship Board provides strategic oversight, is chaired by the PVC-R & I and includes the PVC-S, Academic Lead for Scholarship as well as the Centre Directors.

Scholarship undertaken in the Centres has both Faculty and University-wide impact on the quality of the student experience. Findings of projects supported by the Centres for Scholarship and Innovation are leading to numerous innovations and improvements in module design, resources for students and staff as well as shaping assessment and learning and teaching policy. Project findings have been widely disseminated within and beyond the University and published in a wide range of peer-reviewed publications, contributing to national and international debates, theory building and knowledge exchange in open and supported distance education as well as discipline specific scholarship.

2. Focus of the 2024–29 Scholarship Plan

To develop the 2024–29 Scholarship Plan, we consulted the OU community through stakeholder events, workshops and surveys for staff and students. This consultative process was coordinated by the cross-faculty Scholarship Steering Group, with oversight being provided by a new Scholarship Board, chaired by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor Research and Innovation.

The Plan aims to further enhance the impact of scholarship activities on student outcomes and learning experiences both at the OU and in the wider higher education community. A particular goal of the Scholarship Plan is to enhance the impact of scholarship on policy and practice at an institutional level, supporting the delivery of the [Teaching and Learning Plan \(internal link only\)](#), the [Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Plan](#), [Access and Participation Plan](#) and the University's four nations' [Access, Participation and Success Strategy](#). There will be an emphasis on ensuring that projects respond to the most important challenges faced by the University and are designed to deliver, maximise and capture impact with institutional support and commitment to integrate scholarship into learning design as well as teaching and learning policy and practice.

The Scholarship Plan has three main focal points:

- [Focus 1: Knowledge Production, Dissemination and Impact](#)
- [Focus 2: A Challenge-Led Approach to Deliver the Teaching and Learning Plan](#)
- [Focus 3: Engage Students as Partners](#)

2.1 Focus 1: Knowledge Production, Dissemination and Impact

Purpose

The aim is to proactively maximise the impact of scholarship across the OU by enhancing communication and collaboration to effectively integrate scholarship into policy and practice and strengthen our position as a global leader in open, online and supported distance education. Building on the success of the faculty-based Centres for Scholarship and Innovation, we will increase the influence of past and future scholarship projects on our module design, to support innovation, promote equality, diversity and inclusion as well as enhance learning experiences, student outcomes and employability. We will also increase collaboration with external partners to further enhance the reach and impact of scholarship activities.

Key Activities

- Strengthen collaboration across the institution, so scholarship becomes an integral part of learning design, module production, quality enhancement processes and policy development.
- Strengthen collaboration with other Higher and Further Education institutions to enhance knowledge production and increase scholarship reach and impact.
- Consolidate our presence in the international SoTL community.
- Support project teams to design projects with impact in mind.
- Gather and record impact of scholarship more effectively.
- Enhance the Scholarship Exchange to make project findings more accessible with intuitive ways to highlight common themes and facilitate collaboration.
- Contribute to a central Teaching and Learning Hub that brings together the Scholarship Exchange, Learning Design Hub, Assessment Hub, Employability Hub and Tuition Programme VLE.
- Embed scholarship more effectively in staff induction, development and promotion pathways as well as Advance HE/Applaud accreditation.
- Support scholarship projects with high potential for external impact and external funding, for example through the Open Societal Challenges programme.
- Work with MarComms to increase the visibility of scholarship in external communications, showcasing impact.

Evidence of Outcomes

- Consistent references to scholarship findings in University teaching, learning and assessment policies as well as reporting and planning documentation, such as Quality Monitoring and Enhancement (QME) reports and specifications for modules in production (such as REP03 and REP11).
- Increased interaction with the Scholarship Exchange via analysis of engagement data.
- Visible sharing of project impact evidence across the University.
- Visible presence in the national and international SoTL community, for example conference presentations, keynote speeches and publications in peer reviewed journals as well as public engagement via social media channels.
- Scholarship feeding into future TEF (Teaching Excellence Framework) and nations' QAA (HE Quality Assurance Agency) processes as well as REF (Research Excellence Framework) and KEF (Knowledge Exchange Framework) submissions.

2.2 Focus 2: A Challenge-Led Approach to Deliver the Teaching and Learning Plan

Purpose

Teaching across the OU is undergoing major changes due to innovations in the types of programmes we provide, new modes of delivery and new methods of assessment. Societal, national and international drivers, such as the availability of generative AI tools and improvements in virtual reality environments, create new opportunities for the OU to enhance the delivery of our mission.

Scholarship activities will play a crucial role in identifying and responding to the most important challenges for higher education, our University and our students and provide leadership in these areas. Our Teaching and Learning Plan sets out the path for enhancing teaching and learning. Scholarship activities will align strongly with the Teaching and Learning Plan to respond to urgent challenges in open, online and supported distance education. They will contribute vital new insights to inform ongoing strategic planning and innovation in this area.

Key Activities

- Strengthen mechanisms across the institution to prioritise and scale up scholarship activities that align with major challenges identified by the Teaching and Learning Plan, support the activity of pan-University programmes, such as the Tuition and Assessment Programmes, and lead to tangible benefits to the student learning experience.
- The Scholarship Board will undertake horizon-scanning exercises and annually report on key issues for the University to identify new challenges.

- With support from their units, Centres for Scholarship and Innovation will facilitate the creation of diverse project teams that include different staff roles.
- Provide funding at both faculty and pan-university level for scholarship activities.
- Pursue opportunities to collaborate with external partners and SoTL networks to effectively identify and address complex teaching and learning challenges.
- Core involvement of Centres for Scholarship and Innovation in University-wide change programmes relevant to teaching and learning.

Evidence of Outcomes

- Peer-reviewed project calls that highlight and prioritise emerging challenges and new opportunities.
- Contribution of scholarship to meeting the targets of the Access and Participation Plan and the four nation's Access Participation and Success Strategy, including the reduction of awarding gaps.
- Contribution of scholarship to reducing the effects of the key challenges highlighted by the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Plan.
- Inclusive, diverse project teams.

2.3 Focus 3: Engage Students as Partners

Purpose

To increase collaboratively developed, research-informed knowledge exchange and teaching that meets the needs of our students, we will commit to actively engage students as partners (including as advisors and co-researchers) in scholarship activities. We also aim to communicate the benefits and outcomes of scholarship activities more effectively to current and prospective students to enhance the OU's reputation and attract more students to the OU.

Key Activities

- Ensure that active engagement of students in scholarship is designed to benefit students.
- Implement the Scholarship Steering Group's Student Engagement Framework that sets out a mechanism for engaging students as partners in scholarship.
- Strengthen links with the Open University Students Association and Student Voice/Satisfaction Groups.
- Engage with alumni.
- Work with MarComms to enhance external communication to current and prospective students about the benefits of scholarship to their learning experience.
- Improve mechanisms for feeding back outcomes of scholarship to student participants.

- Centres of Scholarship and Innovation to monitor student involvement in scholarship projects and to develop local approaches to increasing student engagement.

Evidence of Outcomes

- Showcase examples of student partnership and promote students' accounts of the value of their involvement in scholarship activities.
- Increase in the number and diversity of students actively contributing to scholarship activities and benefitting from this involvement.
- MarComms analysis of impact of scholarship on the OU's reputation.

3. List of references

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