SUBMISSION BY THE OPEN UNIVERSITY IN SCOTLAND

Draft Recovery Plan for Manufacturing

December 2020
Draft Recovery Plan for Manufacturing – The Open University in Scotland Submission

Question 3: Focusing on workforces

3(a). For this 12 month Plan, please let us know in your opinion, on a scale of 1-5 (1 being low and 5 being high), how would you rank each of the proposed actions listed in terms of priority.

SWF5: Through National Manufacturing Institute Scotland (NMIS) and the Manufacturing Skills Academy provide innovative and agile skills interventions to enable employers to respond to the emerging needs of new technologies and workplace practices, supporting businesses and creating higher skills provision for individuals.

SWF6: Develop a skills partnership programme to support regional and cluster development, to promote collaborative models of workforce and leadership, and to develop and foster agile communities of practice to support Fair Work and deliver future skills requirements.

SWF7: Establish fast-track employment models to address emerging skill shortages and jobs growth.

SWF8: Initiate actions to mitigate the debilitating impact of graduate unemployment, creating meaningful work experience, education, training and employment opportunities across the manufacturing sector to optimise graduate talent.

SWF9: In partnership, develop learning experiences to promote and enhance commercial awareness, foster enterprising behaviours and encourage progressive leadership practice within our manufacturing sector.

N/A

3(b). Looking at these five actions, in your opinion, is there anything that the recovery plan partnership can do to help ensure the success of these proposals?

N/A

3(c). Can you, or your organisation, help and play a part in any of these five actions to support this national endeavour? If so, please provide detail.

The Open University in Scotland can play a key role in quickly developing a learning support programme for those sectors most adversely impacted by the pandemic, supporting displaced workers to reskill and upskill to gain new employment opportunities in manufacturing growth sectors, such as renewables.

Given The OU in Scotland’s role as a leading provider of high-quality, supported online distance learning, we are able to roll out a quality and consistent learning offer across the manufacturing sector in Scotland to support workers to reskill and upskill to gain new job opportunities, contributing to economic recovery post-pandemic and Scotland’s future economy.

The OU rapidly developed a number of online skills packages to support those facing redundancy or furloughed during COVID 19. This work supported people to gain new skills and employment opportunities, alongside supporting businesses to meet skills gaps.
We launched a new CodingSkills training programme, fully funded by the Scottish Funding Council’s Upskilling Fund during the national lockdown to support people to upskill and reskill for digital career. Working with Skills Development Scotland (SDS) and Partnership Action for Continuing Employment (PACE), the course was actively promoted to those in the sectors most likely to be impacted by the pandemic, including hospitality, retail, travel and tourism, and manufacturing.

There was huge demand for the course – with 675 applications for the original 40 places, which was later increased to 55.

Before the pandemic, The OU in Scotland was already working with organisations and trade unions to provide targeted support for employees facing redundancy to learn new skills to increase their employment opportunities.

A pilot project by The OU in Scotland provided redundancy support to 850 staff at the international Michelin tyre plant in Dundee after it announced it would be closed in 2020. We worked sensitively with factory managers, unions and other partners in the city to develop a skills employability package for Michelin’s workforce and their families to help accelerate alternative employment opportunities and strengthen the employment potential of family units.

Support included developing a dedicated learning portal for Michelin staff, access to OU advisors, support on course choices, and a range of free badged open courses specifically focused on core skills such as digital, smart cities, renewable energy and entrepreneurship.

Many of those who undertook OU courses had experienced a long gap since being in formal education and welcomed the flexibility and support they received during their learning. **We are open to everyone, regardless of age, income, geography and background and with no requirement for entry qualifications.** The OU has always operated an open entry policy.

Over the course of the programme, the workforce was able to find new employment in Dundee and surrounding areas. This has included workers gaining the skills needed to gain employment in the new Michelin Scotland Innovation Parc on the factory site, which focuses on sustainable transport and low carbon energy.

In another example, The OU in Scotland has also been working in close collaboration with Shetland based software development company Mesomorphic to support the development of its workforce through flexible distance-learning opportunities due to its remote location.

The company specialises in creating bespoke software for small and medium businesses and is part of an expanding group of digital technology companies in the rural area, known as ‘Silicon Croft’.

Mesomorphic provides opportunities for anyone who would like to gain work experience within a software development environment, including work experience for young people on the island, a Code Club school programme and working with charities like Moving On that support individuals who face barriers to employment to find and sustain work.

As a company that experiences geographic challenges when attracting new talent, apprenticeships and online learning have proven to be an effective way to develop talent, avoiding the time and cost associated with travelling from a remote location to attend on campus classes.

We believe that The OU in Scotland as a national online learning provider can play an important role in helping support both the immediate and the 12-month actions on skills and the workforce that
are set out in the Recovery Plan for Manufacturing. That may be through our initiatives such as Microcredentials or working in partnership with others to support employees, employers and communities.