

# NEWSLETTER

## September 2022



## Welcome

Welcome to the September issue of the Open Learning Champions newsletter.

In this special edition, Outgoing Access, Participation and Success Manager, Gill Ryan, reflects on evaluating five years of the Open Learning Champions project.

If you have trouble opening this, please contact [scotland-engagement@open.ac.uk](mailto:scotland-engagement@open.ac.uk) and Kat will send you a link to the online version.

## Evaluating Champions

---

The [Open Learning Champions project](#) delivers workshops to community and third sector organisations across Scotland to introduce them to [OpenLearn](#), the OU's free learning platform, so they are confident supporting people to access online learning. The champions can also help learners plan the transition from informal to formal learning. Champions have existing relationships with people in disadvantaged communities with whom the OU in Scotland is keen to engage.



*Open learning champions at a network event in 2019.*

A recently launched Open Learning Champions evaluation report represents five years of the project: from when it started in 2016 to mid-pandemic in 2021. The

evaluation used a variety of sources including workshop evaluations, annual survey responses and OpenLearn user data reports. We also carried out a survey in 2021 on the impact of Covid-19 for champions.

At the time of the evaluation, we had nearly 400 Open Learning Champions, in 150 organisations across Scotland, within 27 of Scotland's 32 local authorities. (We now have 500 open learning champions in communities across Scotland).

"I knew nothing about The Open University until I started working with you. Now I think everybody needs to know about OpenLearn because it's a hidden resource, it's just brilliant." Open Learning Champion, 2020

From early in the project, we noticed that champions were signposting significant numbers of learners to OpenLearn: 28% of champions reported that 10 to 50 of the learners they were working with were using OpenLearn, whilst 13% of our champions were signposting OpenLearn to more than 50 learners. Champions don't just promote OpenLearn with their learners, but with colleagues, family and friends. This suggests a 'cascade effect' with an impact that's impossible to quantify.

## Measuring Impact

---

Champions have reported learner outcomes such as increased confidence, digital skills, gaining certificates and badges, and plans to move on to formal study. By far the most reported outcome was increased confidence. Some of the champions reported that learners had gone on to study with the OU having started their journey in OpenLearn. Champions tell us they are significantly likely to signpost learners to formal OU study and are confident doing so.

Looking at data on undergraduate students registering with the OU in Scotland, we can see that at least 850 students in 2019/20 in Scotland began their journey on OpenLearn, representing nearly 5% of new undergraduate students registering.

"When I first met you, I couldn't even send an email! Now on Saturday nights instead of sitting down in front of the telly I'm sat on the computer and learning stuff." Learner, 2020

There is a challenge in tracking learner journeys from engagement with champions into formal study. While some champions can confidently report learners progressing onto formal university study, many champions support learners for a shorter time due to short-term project funding, so are unable to report on the learners' progression.

Numbers accessing OpenLearn in Scotland have increased significantly since the project began. In 2017/18 the big jump was credited to the 'Blue Planet effect', as viewers flocked to OpenLearn to order materials from the OU/BBC co-produced TV series Blue Planet 2. Then in 2019/20 there was a 92% increase in visitors due to

the pandemic; at one stage daily visitors to the site increased from 40,000 a day to more than 200,000. The continued growth in 2018/19 could be in some part attributed to our champions.

## What we've learned

---

- We're reaching thousands of learners across Scotland through Open Learning Champions.
- Those learners are from communities we are keen to engage.
- The learners are having positive outcomes, such as improved confidence and digital skills.
- Tracking longer-term learner outcomes is a challenge!
- Some learners are continuing their journey from OpenLearn into OU study.

## What's next?

---

We are excited by the potential that OpenLearn and Open Learning Champions offer to supporting the Scottish Government's Adult Learning Strategy. We will use this evaluation to continue to inform our work in this area.

You can read the full Open Learning Champions [project evaluation report \(pdf\)](#) and you can find out more about the [Open Learning Champions project](#).



### Open Learning Champions workshops

We are currently unable offer face to face Open Learning Champions workshops. If your organisation would like to host an [Open Learning Champions](#) workshop later in the year, [please get in touch](#).



### Reminder

Remember to follow @OUScotland and @OUfreelearning on Twitter for updates and tweet us using **#OLchamps** if you have anything to share.

You're welcome to share this with your colleagues, learners and networks. If you no longer wish to receive these

**More information on Open Learning Champions workshops here**

mailings, you can [unsubscribe here](#) and we'll take you off the mailing list.

**Keep well,**

**Gill, Ewe and Kat**



The Open University is incorporated by Royal Charter (RC 000391), an exempt charity in England & Wales and a charity registered in Scotland (SC 038302). The Open University is authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority in relation to its secondary activity of credit broking.

---

**The Open University in Scotland**

[Scotland@open.ac.uk](mailto:Scotland@open.ac.uk)