**OU in Scotland case studies for the Digital Strategy for Scotland**

**Case Study: Supporting low paid and unemployed to learn valuable coding skills**

The Open University (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.

The OU 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.

**Coding Skills+ by The Open University** launched in November with support from the SDS Digital Start Fund, is a 13-week, fully funded part-time training programme designed to give participants the knowledge, skills and employability support needed to apply for entry-level software development jobs with employers across Scotland.

People who are unemployed or on low incomes benefit from training including Python programming skills which can lead to in-demand, high quality jobs in digital across key sectors of the Scottish economy.
Case Study: Overcoming geographic challenges to develop new talent

The Open University (OU) in Scotland has 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.

After working in professional kitchens for nearly a decade, employee Jacob Mercer joined Mesomorphic with very little experience in software development or coding. Through The OU’s IT: Software Development Graduate Apprenticeship, he has been able to remain in Aberdeen while working remotely full-time for the company and flexibly study at the same time.

Funded by Skills Development Scotland (SDS), the graduate apprenticeship is a relatively new apprenticeship in Scotland. In its second year it already experienced a 150% boost in new starters and has been found to be valuable in attracting and retaining staff, alongside supporting staff to develop vital skills and future-proof their business.
Case Study: Working in partnership with the third sector

In a world increasingly dependent on computers and new technology, the Everyday computer skills: a beginner’s guide to computers, tablets, mobile phones and accessibility course aims to break down some of the barriers to learning essential digital skills experienced by disabled people and carers.

Launched in August 2020, the free course has been designed with and for disabled learners in partnership with Lead Scotland, with funding from the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO) Digital Participation Fund, matched by The Open University (OU) in Scotland.

A group of 29 disabled people helped co-identify the digital skills they had or did not have, and provided ideas on specific content they would like to see.

The outline of the course content was guided by the UK Government’s Essential Digital Skills framework. Lead Scotland’s Learning Coordinator and four volunteers, three of whom have identified as disabled, each worked on specific sections to co-produce and complete the whole course.

Optimised for accessibility and to be compatible with assistive software, the course supports people with different abilities and skill levels to flexibly explore and adapt the course content. Those that complete the course receive a digital badge and certificate of achievement.
Case Study: Growing Scotland’s digital talent of the future

Since 2018, The Open University (OU) has been working collaboratively with global IT services and solutions leader DXC Technology to support its existing employees to upskill and reskill to help address its digital skills shortage.

DXC Technology helps companies across the globe run their mission-critical systems and operations while modernising IT, optimising data architectures, and ensuring security and scalability across public, private and hybrid clouds.

The company is keen to support early careers and help employees to develop an entry-level skills set, growing talent from within. Staff have been supported by The OU to undertake a Master’s Graduate Apprenticeship in Cyber Security, funded by Skills Development Scotland (SDS).

The online flexible learning programmes are designed around individual, team and organisational needs and much of the learning is integrated with work, so there are benefits on many levels.

After starting a Graduate Apprenticeship in Cyber Security with The OU, employee Lauren Ross found that she was able to apply her new skills and knowledge in the workplace immediately, alongside exploring new areas of Information security for her such as quantum computing and its impact on cryptography, and the security risks of driverless cars.

Laura is also a STEM ambassador, including supporting activities promoting coding and app creation for young girls.