

THE OPEN UNIVERSITY IN SCOTLAND **ANNUAL REVIEW** 2020-21

Reaching across Scotland



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DIRECTOR'S INTRODUCTION



Welcome to The Open University in Scotland's report on our activity in 2020-21.

With notable growth in students and online learning linked to the pandemic and a continued need for agile skills delivery, it has been both a demanding and remarkable year.

Our work in 2020-21 has achieved wide reach and impact. With 22,000 students and almost half a million informal learners, we connect with people in every parliamentary constituency, and in every corner of the country from Dumfries and Galloway to the Shetland Islands. This makes us the fourth largest university in Scotland and, with around three quarters of our students combining work and study, the largest provider of part-time higher education.

But it is not just about numbers. Importantly, our quality remains extremely high with OU students in Scotland rating satisfaction with their overall experience at 92%.

In 2021, we launched a prospectus for the Scottish Parliament, Skills+ Scotland, highlighting our potential to widen access further and support economic recovery. We will progress its ambition over the next five years as our unique distance learning model is increasingly recognised as a means to deliver at scale across Scotland.

We also played a key role in delivering the OU's presence at COP26 and led a number of innovative collaborations which were part of the international climate summit in Glasgow. Partnerships have been central throughout our achievements and this report shares some examples.

Over the last year, the majority of our staff and students have continued to face uncertainty with the wider challenges of the pandemic and have continued to work from home. Yet, we have delivered enhanced support to our students, notable growth in student numbers, and great uptake of our short courses and free learning. I'm exceptionally proud of this response.

The University has a vital role to play in society by providing access to learning for everyone and through partnerships which build skills and enterprise. I am hugely grateful for the commitment of our many partners from the public sector, third sector, businesses and communities across Scotland.

I hope you enjoy reading this year's review and please do get in touch if you want to learn more.

Susan Stewart

Director of The Open University in Scotland

LIFE-CHANGING LEARNING



At The Open University in Scotland, we are proud to help people from all parts of society, to develop their knowledge, acquire new skills and achieve life-changing qualifications.

As Scotland recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic, the OU's ethos of being open to people, places, methods and ideas is as relevant today as it was when the University was founded over 50 years ago. We support our students and learners to achieve their goals with outcomes that open up new opportunities in life and work.

A good example, driven by reform of health and social care delivery in Scotland, is our advocacy with NHS Education Scotland to extend our nursing programmes and support those looking to transition into, or advance in, the health and social care sectors. Our funded programme, delivered in partnership with health boards across Scotland, includes routes for those already working in healthcare support worker roles to become registered nurses. This develops the NHS workforce and supports people to achieve degree level education while continuing to work.

Across many other sectors, we continue to advance flexible higher education programmes which support both workforce and individual skills development. This work makes a vital contribution to Scotland's growth and the confidence of our citizens.

Professor Paul Gray

OU Council Member for Scotland

OUR VISION
Life-changing learning
that enriches society

OUR YEAR IN NUMBERS



22,000
students in Scotland



Fourth largest
university in Scotland in
terms of student numbers



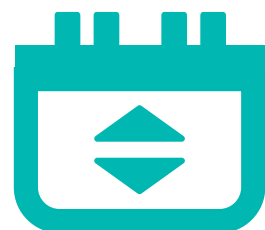
We have students
in every Scottish
parliamentary
constituency



92%
for student
satisfaction, National
Student Survey 2021



467,000+
visitors from Scotland
to OpenLearn



28 years old
is the average age of
new undergraduates



23%
of OU students live in
remote or rural areas



24%
of OU students in
Scotland declare
a disability



All 32
local authority areas currently
participate in our Young
Applicants in School Scheme



73%
of our students are in
full-time or part-time work



1,000+
students are sponsored
by their employers to
study with us



640
staff work for the OU
across Scotland

OUR FUNDING 2020-21

£23.3m
in Scottish
Funding Council
Grant

£23.5m
fee income

Includes YASS,
our national
schools bridging
programme and
graduate
apprenticeships

In addition to the core grant from Scottish Funding Council:

£1.3m
Widening
Access and
Retention Fund

£2.2m
Pre-registration
nursing

£588k
Capital
Maintenance

£310k
University
Innovation Fund

£204k
Upskilling Fund

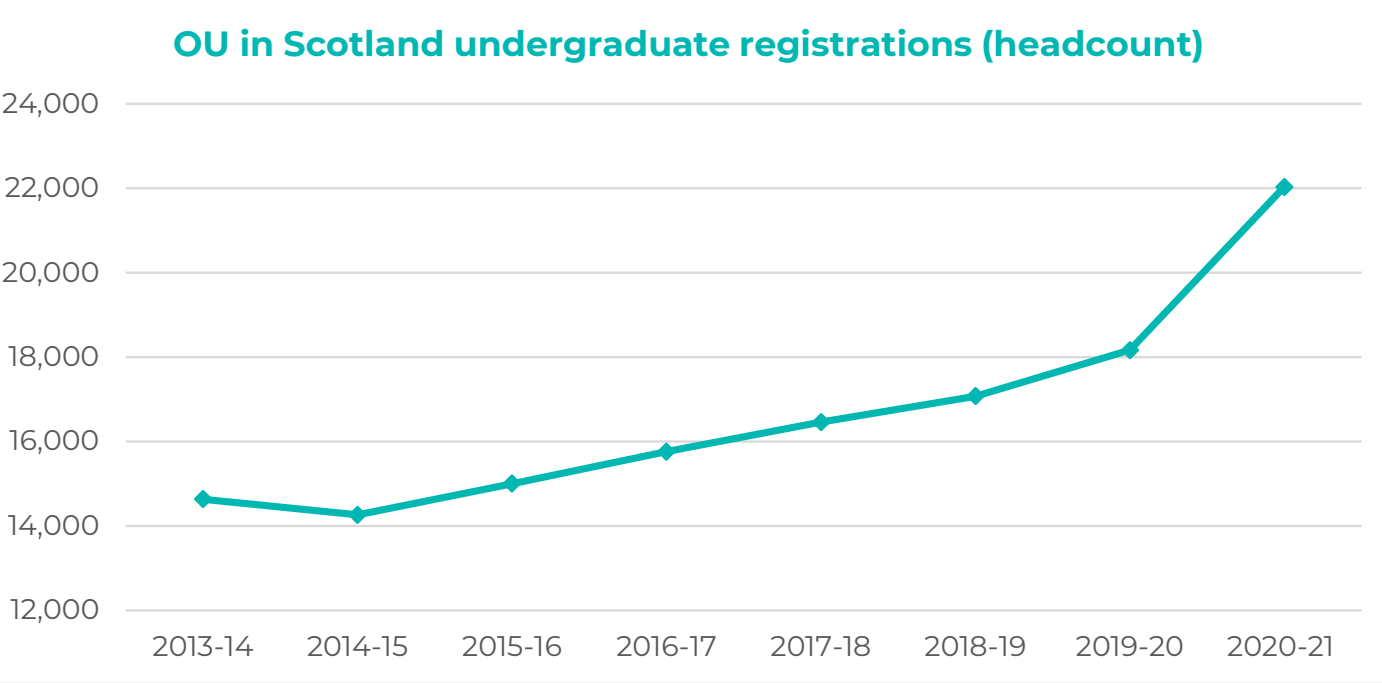
£156k
National
Transition
Training Fund

Up to
£1m
accessible for
SME training via
Flexible Workforce
Development
Fund

£186k
Disabled Student
Allowance

£100k
Support for
student mental
health counselling

STUDENT NUMBERS



We have seen consistent growth year on year over an extended period currently with a record 22,000 people currently studying with us.

We experienced an exceptional increase in the number of Scottish undergraduate entrants in 2020-21, reflecting the OU's UK-wide pandemic recruitment with more students turning to the flexibility of supported distance learning, particularly through funded provision of short courses, microcredentials and modules. We anticipate a return to pre-pandemic recruitment in the next academic year.

REACH ACROSS SCOTLAND

Widening access to higher education is a key policy driver for the Scottish Government and it has long been at the heart of our work in Scotland. We are continually seeking new ways to match our core curriculum, microcredentials and free OpenLearn content to the learning needs of people across Scotland.

We continue to partner with all 15 regional colleges in Scotland to provide college students with progression routes to flexible degree level study. With Ayrshire, City of Glasgow, and Fife Colleges we have collaborated on campus-based delivery providing students with the opportunity to transition to an OU degree within the familiar environment of their local college. Dundee and Angus College have successfully integrated OU Access modules into their wider access programme, *OU Options*, at the college.

Development of our Young Applicants in School Scheme has achieved even greater reach across all 32 Scottish local authority areas. Supporting students making the transition from school to university, over 1,200 school pupils took OU modules in 2020-21 and a record breaking 177 schools participated. Pupils were offered a range of open modules to choose from in subjects such as accounting, economics, engineering and law. They were able to study at home during the periods of remote learning which provided an important contribution to the school curriculum during this challenging time.



85%

of OU graduates remain in the location where their study was undertaken, meaning this investment in talent and skills benefits local communities

Throughout the pandemic we have supported staff from nine colleges in transitioning to online delivery, with college staff benefiting from OU fully-funded microcredentials in areas such as *Creating Courses for Adult Learners* and workshops facilitated by OU academic experts in online teaching. We worked collaboratively with other tertiary education institutions in Scotland on the creation of a Pathways website to help increase the visibility of learner routes from college to degree study. It won the *Best Use of Technology in Education* award at the 2021 Herald Digital Transformation Awards.

In a new project this year, we collaborated with The Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations and all 32 Scottish local authorities to provide workplace skills to young people.



Student Sarah MacNeil, Isle of Barra

Innovation: Football club collaboration

New partnerships and collaboration are building rich impacts that benefit society and business. Our work with Scottish Professional Football League clubs in Scotland, including Celtic, Dundee, Hibernian and Rangers, has piloted a range of innovative employability programmes for delivery in the community.

Already young people, those re-entering the jobs market and refugees have benefited by achieving new skills and confidence. These bespoke delivery partnerships are tailored to the needs of the community associated with the individual football clubs. Programmes are developed from conversations with partners where we understand their needs and develop solutions which work for them.

Charlie Bennett, then Chief Executive Officer, Hibernian Community Foundation described the work as the perfect coming together of the football club and its community foundation with the commitment of the Open University “to support upskilling across local communities through exciting employability programmes that will support people in their journey back into employment.”

DRIVING STUDENT SUCCESS

We strive to provide the best support to our students encouraging them to achieve their goals across the whole student journey. During 2020-21 we expanded the Scotland-based student recruitment and support services team to enhance our integrated service to enquirers and students.

Initiatives to support students included enhanced mental health counselling with Scottish Government support, free access to period products with Scottish Government support and providing digital grants via the Scottish Funding Council Digital Inclusion strand. We focused the latter at student carers and our care-experienced students and helped them to buy hardware or software; valued support to many of these students who only have their phones or shared equipment to study with.

We undertook a new Personal Learning Advisor Pilot in Scotland where over 50 new entrants who are either care-experienced students and student carers in Scotland can access one to one coaching and mentoring support.

A range of activity helped students to connect, share their experiences and build a sense of community. This included consulting on our plans through the Scottish Student and Staff Engagement Group, a dynamic programme for Student Voice Week and informal online *Big Blether* events run with the OU Students Association.

The *Big Blether* series, which is supported by the National Union of Students Scotland's Think Positive project, focused on mental health and wellbeing in 2021.

Highlighting commitment to our first Student Mental Health Agreement we extended the university's TogetherAll partnership, an online mental health and well-being resource available free to students, to offer a virtual therapy service to our students in Scotland

We also joined forces with Carers Trust Scotland to help improve provision to students who are studying alongside providing unpaid care for a family member or friend. The Carer Aware module, supported by the Scottish Funding Council, helps university staff to better understand the challenges faced by many student carers. Co-created with student carers, it draws on their own lived experiences.



212,500
people have studied with
The Open University in Scotland



Irina Lisovyy, maths module student, Perth

Innovation: Supporting students into employment

An innovative Scottish pilot to develop employability support for OU students has been successfully extended across our UK student population. *Achieving your Goals* explored career readiness, career support needs, areas of occupational interest and levels of confidence with almost 1,400 Scotland-based students.

Tailored interventions such as giving access to one-to-one support and providing resources achieved better awareness and usage of careers and employability services. This increased student confidence with 82% of the participants recommending *Achieving your Goals* to others. In 2020-21, the programme has expanded to over 3,300 OU students across the UK and in all faculties.

A particularly successful strand is *Elevate*, a six-month Career Mentoring Programme for students who are disabled, carers, care experienced, Black and Minority Ethnic or from disadvantaged backgrounds. It matches students with a mentor in a sector they are keen to pursue a career in. 2021 Elevate Mentee, Charlie M. Torres said: "It gave me the confidence and self-esteem I was lacking."

STUDENT STORIES

The stories of our students demonstrate the work that we do across all parts of Scotland, providing opportunities to people from all parts of society.



OU study unlocks ambition

An OU degree course unlocked new ambitions for Glasgow based Zara Dyer who was told she had ‘no prospects’ at school but now studies part-time while working as a support advisor for people who have experienced alcohol and substance abuse. She featured on our podcast *Life...On Our Terms* talking about how she built the confidence to follow her dream to start her own counselling clinic, “I fully intend to continue learning for the rest of my life. That’s come from the OU giving me a voice,” says Zara.



Language course delivers pupil benefits

Our Teachers Learning to Teach languages (TELT) programme supported Aberdeen-based teacher Hazel Taylor to upskill and introduce new ideas in her classroom. The course contributes to delivery of the Scottish Government’s 1+2 language policy and is approved by the General Teaching Council for Scotland. Delivered flexibly, it fitted well around Hazel’s full-time role and her pupils have benefited. “I have been more adventurous in my planning of languages activities,” she says, “so the children have had a more varied and engaging experience.”



Developing BME inclusive curriculum

Scottish postgraduate social work student Kamal Ibrahim is a co-researcher on a new project to develop Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) student designed inclusive modules. The project will gather reflections on the shared and lived experiences of BME students to enhance inclusivity in the curriculum. Currently working with the Multi-Cultural Family Base in Edinburgh, Kamal was driven by the opportunity to “listen to the views of students of BME background on relevant issues that might impact on their learning experiences to develop a more inclusive curriculum.”



OU opportunity for care experienced student

Glenrothes based Elyse Hocking left school without the qualifications she would need to attend university, but her life has changed since The OU welcomed her “with open arms”. Aged 13 months, Elyse became care experienced and was legally fostered by her maternal grandparents who were disabled so she also became their care giver. She praises the support from the OU and the Student Awards Agency Scotland: “Care experienced students typically don’t have the capabilities to fund educational courses or have the grades to attend a ‘brick university.’”



OU helps student carer ‘climb mountain’

The OU helped Emma McQueen take the first step towards her dream of becoming a teacher, supporting her to balance studying for a degree, looking after her family and being a full-time carer to her autistic son. The Falkirk based Bachelor of Science graduate felt that she faced several barriers to university study but OU advice identified that previous college credits could take her one-third of the way towards her degree. “My story is a case of what you can achieve if given the opportunities and support.”



New focus for couple dealing with multiple sclerosis

OU studies are giving a vital focus to married couple Karine and Sarah Mather while coping with the challenges of Karine’s primary progressive multiple sclerosis. The Edinburgh-based couple were attracted to studying with The OU because it gave them both the option to be students at home, making study more accessible for Karine and helping Sarah to balance her part-time job and caring responsibilities. Karine welcomes the access support she has received, saying “The Open University have made it so easy for me to achieve my goals.”

MAKING AN IMPACT

Over the last year we have worked collaboratively with businesses, local authorities, the NHS, social care, the third sector and trade unions to provide skills through multiple programmes driving economic recovery.

Our focus on skills development came to the fore in response to the COVID-19 pandemic where we advocated for new Scottish Government funding to support those who were at risk of redundancy, those who needed to reskill to compete in a pandemic jobs market, and small to medium-sized enterprises who needed to refocus their business during a period of rapid change. Across microcredentials and short courses, we targeted Scottish skills gaps in digital, coding, business, management, the green economy as well as online learning design and delivery for many sectors who had previously never operated in that way.



90%
of organisation leaders in Scotland
would consider enrolling in the
OU's short funded courses
OU Business Barometer 2021

Young people, those on low incomes, employees furloughed or made redundant benefit from over 800 fully funded courses mainly supported by the Scottish Funding Council's Upskilling Fund and the National Transition Training Fund. Businesses and organisations supported over 1,000 Scottish employees to study part-time with the OU and over 100 small to medium sized enterprises across Scotland accessed OU training via the Scottish Government's Flexible Workforce Development Fund. Over 100 workers in healthcare support level roles across the NHS joined our innovative path to nursing, allowing them to gain a degree part-time while continuing employment.

We are also working with businesses to solve industry challenges, identify opportunities for further collaboration and develop lasting partnerships. Our work with the Scotch Whisky Research Institute collaboration is a strong example of this approach. A research collaboration, supported by a Knowledge Transfer Voucher scheme, is exploring Innovative biosensor technology, which could significantly improve the whisky industry production process and offer a competitive advantage.

We celebrated small business rural enterprise in partnership with the Scottish Council for Development and Industry through sponsorship of a new Highlands & Islands Business of the Year Award. The award was made to Mesamorphic, a Shetland based IT company who are also one of our leading Graduate Apprenticeship providers.



Graduate Helen Kafantari Maciver, Isle of Lewis

Innovation: Building community learning skills

An OU in Scotland pilot is developing a new workforce offer for the community learning and development sector in partnership with Education Scotland and the CLD Standards Council for Scotland.

Community learning and development (CLD) provides young people and adults with skills for life, learning and work. It also focuses on growing community-led groups and services that make communities more cohesive, sustainable and better able to overcome the challenges they face. The project is funded by Scottish Government to address skills gaps identified during the pandemic.

The three deliverables are an online skills development portal, the provision of up to 200 funded microcredentials supporting CLD practitioners, and the development of a network of regional champions to deliver workshops and learning clubs. This exciting collaboration in a new sector is offering CLD practitioners new skills in online learning, accessible and inclusive practice, mental health in learning, and embedding social, race and gender-related equity and evaluation.

EXTENDING KNOWLEDGE

We engage with partners, policymakers and the public across Scotland on contemporary issues, and use our expertise to support real-world challenges and aspirations, from industry to the third sector.

The COVID-19 pandemic has helped to spotlight the position of migrant workers, refugees and asylum seekers, with growing calls for new approaches to policy in this area at national and local level to promote the benefits these citizens can bring to the Scottish economy. We have collaborated with partners in the Universities of Parma, Edinburgh and Glasgow to collect the narratives of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers and explored the barriers and enablers to their life in UK. Based on findings, the collaborative project teams have produced a list of recommendations for the Scottish Government and local authorities.

Academics, archivists, museum curators, research students, and public historians came together to explore aspects of Glasgow's cultural history through three themes: engagement; wellbeing; international. The Cultural History of Glasgow Research Network project was delivered in partnership with Glasgow Life and funded by the Royal Society of Edinburgh. With almost 40 active members, the project delivered a variety of events and outputs for range of audiences.

Intergenerational family audiences enjoyed a series of events on maths as part of the Glasgow and Edinburgh science festivals. Audiences participated



5000+
people participated in our
knowledge exchange events

in popular code-breaking tasks to discover the names of trees in the Glasgow Botanic Gardens as part of a week-long event in the Glasgow Science Festival. An online activity for Edinburgh Science Festival called *Out for the Count: The Mathematics of Voting Systems* engaged audiences in an interactive and fun introduction to a number of real-life voting systems.

We engaged with a wide public audience through book festivals across Scotland, most of which continued online in 2021. Our flagship event with the Edinburgh International Book Festival saw Scottish First Minister Nicola Sturgeon MSP in conversation with Douglas Stuart, Booker Prize winning author of *Shuggie Bain* in front of an in-person audience and over 1,100 people online across the world.



First Minister Nicola Sturgeon and author Douglas Stuart

Innovation: New approaches for Zambian teachers

African teachers can access a new school-based continuing professional development programme on OpenLearnCreate which was produced by the OU in Scotland.

Our Zambian Education School-based Training (ZEST) project developed the programme in Zambia in collaboration with the Ministry of General Education, with the input of 600 teachers and District Officials from Central Province. It is supported by World Vision Zambia and funded by The Scottish Government. The programme is designed to support a learner-centred approach to active teaching and learning with six courses for teachers or those who support teachers.

ZEST is also using low-cost battery powered tiny portable computers, Raspberry Pi, to support teachers to share professional development resources. Moodlebox, a Raspberry Pi version of Moodle, allows teachers to access the open educational resources in an offline environment via their mobile devices. We are planning to promote the use of Raspberry Pis across 420 schools in Zambia.

STUDENT STORIES

These stories of our learners demonstrate how we support people in work and enterprise to develop skills helping to foster sustainable communities and business across Scotland.



Care home worker realises nursing dream

From a young age Elvira Viray dreamt of becoming a nurse but put her ambition on hold due to “little resources, financial difficulties, and family responsibilities”.

While working at a care home in the rural Highland area of Ballachulish, she completed an OU access course to nursing and the maths qualification she needed to apply for our Scottish Government funded nursing degree programme. Now a full-time staff nurse at the home, she credits the OU’s flexibility for making it possible to study while looking after her family.

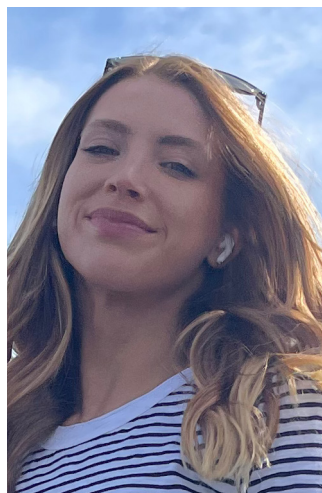


OU studies launch entrepreneurship journey

It was while studying for an OU MBA that Greenock-based Claudio Marturano made the decision to become an entrepreneur and start his own business.

Originally trained as an aircraft maintenance engineer, he is now the Chief Executive Officer and Chairman of the T-C-Alliance, which offers aviation training and consultancy.

To help decide where to study, he compared price, impact on career, ease of use, availability of support, and accreditation: “Ultimately, The OU scored as the best overall for what I wanted to achieve.”



Environmental science powers business

Environmental Science graduate Erin Charters from Loch Lomond was inspired to start her electric bike hire business during an OU module on renewable energy.

The young Scottish entrepreneur and mum featured in the *MTV Generation Change* programme and her story has been highlighted in support of COP26 goals.

She wants to spark sustainable change within her community: “I started Cycle Luss with the idea of wanting to make an impact and wanting to give people the opportunity to experience what electric power is.”



Microcredential provides new skills

A fully funded business management microcredential helped Jonny Perriam upskill after being furloughed. It supported him to deliver a new post pandemic business direction as he returned to his role at Edinburgh Rugby.

His role involves marketing Edinburgh Rugby’s offering and attracting new commercial partners in the city, Scotland and beyond. He said: “It was the perfect time to learn more about marketing and use it, as Edinburgh Rugby look to launch a more outbound approach to marketing commercial opportunities.”



Supporting unions to learn online

OU short courses helped teaching union project worker Pauline McColgan provide vital support to members as teaching moved online in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Pauline undertook a series of microcredentials in online teaching which helped her respond to the professional learning needs of Educational Institute of Scotland members across Scotland.

She explains: “The opportunity to study with the OU arose through Scottish Union Learning, who recognised the need for project workers to develop their own digital skills in order to support their members.”



Career changing OU study

When Alastair Bruce decided to undertake the OU’s Introducing Astronomy course, he didn’t know that it would lead to a whole new career as an astronomer.

Having originally trained as an actor, he had always been interested in astronomy. The course led to an OU Bachelor of Science (Honours) degree and then a PhD in astronomy at another university.

Now an astronomer and the first Planetarium Manager at Dynamic Earth in Edinburgh, Alastair says the OU offered the flexibility to explore a new direction ‘without the pressure of a full-time degree’.

LEADING SUSTAINABILITY

We played a key role in the planning and delivery of the OU's contribution at COP26 in Glasgow in November 2021.

Drawing on our expertise in communicating ideas to a mass online audience, we commissioned the COP26 hub on OpenLearn creating a legacy resource to engage the public on the challenges of climate change, and the urgency to take action now. This includes a specially created animation about the COP process and a series of articles drawn from the OU community and its partners.

We brought together indigenous artists and speakers from The Open University and Glasgow Museums to discuss the connections between citizens, culture and climate at an event in the prestigious Green Zone. A dynamic cultural collaboration, *Ancient Knowledge and Modern Thinking: Climate Perspectives in Folk Art* was positively received by the live audience and had over 1,600 views online.

Two further popular events were delivered with the Mitchell Library. *Writing to save the Planet* used creative writing and expression as a medium to engage the wider public on issues related to the environment, drawing on the host city as a stimulus to generate ideas.

We worked alongside arts organisation, Border Crossings, and the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences on a series of events involving a totem designed by Tonic Artist Jun Tibericio dedicated to COP26. The totem travelled over 9,000km from Mexico to the UK. Public audiences joined

two events, one in Glasgow in the Hidden Gardens, and the other on the Crichton Campus in Dumfries, where the totem ended its final journey in a return to the earth ceremony.

For two weeks, the world was captivated on all aspects of climate change. The University's nine official observers over the COP fortnight were all staff resident in Scotland and their experiences were reported widely over that time. They will continue to influence ways in which we can draw our expertise as a global leader in online distance learning to address this critical societal challenge.



We have committed to divestment from fossil fuels by 2023, decarbonising our energy supplies by 2030, and being 'net zero' by 2050.



Innovation: Pupils stage Mock COP26

Four secondary schools from across the Scottish Highlands took part in a Mock COP26 to raise awareness and increase understanding of the landmark global political conference. Organised in partnership with the Highland One World Development Education Centre and Developing the Young Workforce, the event involved Culloden Academy, Millburn Academy, Speyside High School and Dingwall Academy.

Held virtually, the event brought together fifth-year and sixth-year students across the four schools. They negotiated in groups for the best results for their chosen country, while trying to make a difference in the battle against climate change. Dingwall Academy participant Millie Simpson said: "Attending the Mock COP26 was one of the best things I've ever done. It was amazing how we all worked as a team ... I have discovered what I want to focus on in the future and which area I would like to go into at university."

We are now developing this concept as another way of engaging with schools across Scotland.

PROMOTING INCLUSION

A key focus for the OU in Scotland is ensuring that people from communities and groups who are the most disadvantaged can access higher education to help improve their life opportunities.

In 2021, we carried out our four-year Public Sector Equality Duty Report which aims to identify and engage with a wider range of learners in Scottish society, remove barriers learners may face when accessing higher education and develop greater diversity in our curriculum and range of study options. A wide range of projects in the year contributed to these objectives.

A new collaboration with Deaf Action is creating two new short courses on British Sign Language (BSL). Aimed at educators, people working in health services, hospitality and retail, the rollout of the courses will help provide employment opportunities for deaf people in these industry sectors in line with the Scottish Government's BSL National Plan 2017-23.



40%
of new undergraduates live
in Scotland's 40% most
disadvantaged areas

The Corporate Parenting in Higher Education module was co-produced with *Who Cares? Scotland* and 15 other higher education partners. Care experienced students co-designed the free course to support staff in Scotland's universities and colleges to better understand and support those who have experienced care.

The OU in Scotland was one of six institutions in Scotland, selected across colleges and universities, to pilot new Advance HE pilot race equality training for higher education leaders. This was developed by the Scotland Anti-Racist Project.

We contributed to a UK-wide OU project to develop a more authentic portrayal of distance learning for Black and South Asian students. We recognised that images of these students are not authentic or relatable and don't reflect the reality of their lives or of distance learning. Falkirk based graduate Ali Salik features in the inspirational student portraits commissioned in partnership with Alamy by Press Association's photographer Inzajeano Latif.

A five-year review of our successful Open Learning Champions project recommended new approaches to building relationships with people in disadvantaged communities through our network of 400 champions. Champions support learners to access open educational resources, particularly using the OU's free learning platform OpenLearn and develop their confidence in learning.



Graduate Ali Salik, Falkirk

Innovation: Learning for forced migrants

We engage in Enhancement Themes, a three-year national programme supported by QAA Scotland, driving quality and innovation in teaching and learning across the higher education sector in Scotland. The current theme *Resilient Learning Communities* focuses on meeting the changing needs and values of an increasingly diverse student community in a rapidly changing external environment.

Under this theme, we hosted a round table event, *Open to People*, exploring issues for forced migrants. The session looked at how the OU in Scotland can collaborate to provide tailored learning pathways for this group. As a result, we are taking forward three proposals with external partners to develop tailored support for *English for Speakers of Other Languages* on OpenLearn, employability skills and pre-entry study support.

This included *Open to People: pathways into study*, an innovative pilot for learners with forced migration background is being run in partnership with Bridges Programmes and the Scottish Refugee Council. We have also partnered with Connecting Scotland to provide digital equipment and Wi-Fi for participants.

ENGAGING EXTERNALLY

Engaging with the Scottish Government and other key stakeholders to ensure higher education policy and funding outcomes are favourable to the OU in Scotland and its students continues to be a priority.

Ahead of the Scottish elections in May 2021, we launched our *Skills+ Scotland* prospectus at a webinar with Holyrood Events entitled *Building an Inclusive Economic Recovery*. Post-election, we provided new MSPs with bespoke briefings highlighting our work in their constituency or region. To date we have met with two-thirds of the newly elected MSPs to develop our relationships over the lifetime of the parliament.

In a dynamic programme across the year, we have engaged with key Committee Convenors and Scottish Government ministers to discuss the themes in our prospectus and key policy areas for the OU in Scotland: widening access; economic transformation and skills delivery; health and social care; and green skills. This included providing evidence to the Economy and Fair Work Committee's inquiry into *Scotland's Supply Chain*. Across a number of stakeholder events, we have promoted the upskilling and re-skilling agenda as an essential part of Scotland's recovery from the pandemic.

Our revitalised Scottish External Advisory Group chaired by Professor Paul Gray, our OU Council Member for Scotland, has met twice. Already members have collectively and individually made invaluable

contributions with their strategic advice not least informing our response to the Scottish Government's consultation on a 'National Care Service for Scotland'. Their insight has also helped to shape the development of our public affairs strategy.

The work of the OU in Scotland was recognised in a parliamentary motion lodged by Martin Whitfield MSP highlighting the success of our national programme, Young Applicants in Schools Scheme, with record students enrolling, an increase in participating schools and coverage in each of Scotland's thirty-two local authorities. We have also built wider understanding of the OU's work in Scotland, supported this year by a redevelopment of our website:

www.openuni.scot



88%
of MSPs have a high regard for
the work of the OU in Scotland
2021 MSP Survey



Graduate Mat Davies, Edinburgh

Michael Matheson MSP Falkirk West, and Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero, Energy and Transport undertook a Bachelor of Arts degree and then a Diploma in Applied Social Sciences with the OU.

"The OU was cutting-edge concerning the social policy changes that were happening at that time... I think it helped me being able to bring real, lived policy experience to my studies."

Emma Roddick MSP for the Highlands and Islands, previously studied with the OU while working for the Scottish Ambulance Service.

"I was working with the Scottish Ambulance Service and it worked perfectly as my shifts were different every day and it didn't matter. It's just a fantastic route into higher education for people who maybe can't access it in a typical way."

Liam Kerr MSP for North East Scotland has completed a number of different courses with the OU, for leisure and to support his career development. Most recently at MBA stage 1, he gained a Postgraduate Diploma in Business Administration.

"I was attracted by the impressive credentials of the Business School, the established learning structure and the calibre of the teaching staff, and the cost was significantly below that of the more traditional universities."



FIND OUT MORE

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February 2022

Data: Unless otherwise stated, figures throughout relating to OU in Scotland students are based on Full-Time Equivalent statistics for academic year 2019-20. Impact data is from the Economic and Social Impact of The Open University in 2018-19, London Economics, November 2020.

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