

The Open
University

SCOTLAND

OPEN LEARNING CHAMPIONS

Guide to Open Pathways

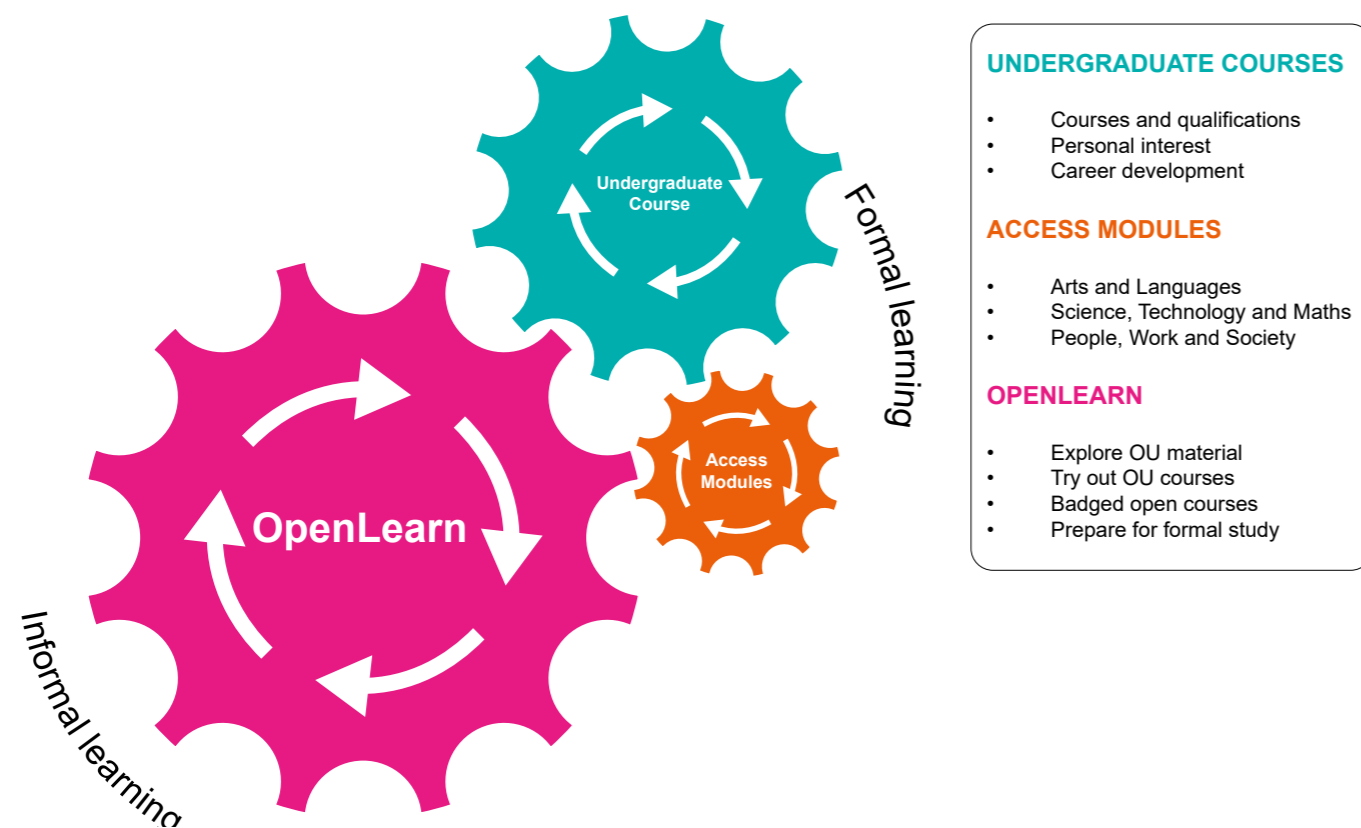


Welcome to Open Learning Champions

OpenLearn is the Open University's home of free learning. There are thousands of resources, from one minute videos to 50 hour courses, on every subject you can think of. Finding your way through it can be daunting, but with your support learners can find the subject and level that's right for them. Open Pathways is a resource to get people started on their learning journey. This guide is intended to help you support learners on that journey.

Whatever your role, if you have an interest in using open learning with the people you support, learners, volunteers and colleagues, you can call yourself an open learning champion.

MAPPING PATHWAYS FROM INFORMAL TO FORMAL LEARNING WITH THE OPEN UNIVERSITY



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WHAT IS 'OPEN PATHWAYS'?

Open Pathways is a resource for people who are thinking about getting back into learning at any age or stage in life. It is intended to help people explore free online learning and plan their learning journeys.

The learner chooses how much time to commit, the level of study, and the pace they progress at. Open Pathways can be used by organisations, volunteers and workers to support learners in diverse settings to explore the learning opportunities on OpenLearn.

www.open.edu/openlearn/education/open-pathways

OpenLearn is the home of free learning from The Open University. You can explore a wide range of resources and try out free courses at:

www.open.edu/openlearn

This guide is designed to be used alongside Open Pathways, so you can support and guide learners on their journey. It offers suggestions for using the Open Pathways resource to support your work with learners and case studies of how other Open Learning Champions are using the resources.

What do I need to get started?

All that's needed to get started is access to a computer, tablet or smartphone and the internet.



Open Pathways is available online and as an interactive pdf at **www.open.edu/openlearn/education/open-pathways**

We recommend you use the online version of this guide and Open Pathways so you can follow the links to the OpenLearn materials.

WHO ARE OPEN LEARNING CHAMPIONS?

Open learning champions come from many different organisations around Scotland and have diverse roles. The one thing they have in common is an interest in open learning and the opportunities it offers for people who may not consider themselves ‘learners’.

Some champions are involved in learning and development as part of their job, while others see it as a way of helping the people they support to meet the outcomes that are important to them. Champions have an existing relationship with learners so open learning can be explored in a familiar space with someone they trust.

We know that learners are more likely to engage in online resources, and to complete a course, if they have support. This support can be 1:1 or with a group, light touch or intensive, signposting to resources or delivering a course yourself – how you use the resources is up to you.

The Open Learning Champions project has been run by the Open University in Scotland since 2015. We run regular workshops about open learning for people with a role in supporting learners, clients, volunteers or staff.

Most of our champions come from third sector and community organisations, but we also have champions who work in widening access to college or university, libraries, trade unions or social enterprises.

Some of our workshops are themed around specific learning contexts, such as the third sector, community learning, carers or accessibility.

You may have come across this resource while taking part in a workshop or other Open Learning Champions event. Champions receive a certificate on completion of the workshop and receive a quarterly newsletter with details of network events and new resources. You might be interested in finding out more about the project:

www.open.ac.uk/scotland/our-work/open-learning-champions



If you would like to take part in a workshop or arrange one for your organisation, please contact:
Scotland-engagement@open.ac.uk

EXPLORING OPENLEARN



Before you start supporting learners to access OpenLearn, it's a good idea to get familiar with navigating it yourself.

The Open Pathways guide has a section on getting started, setting up an OpenLearn account and accessibility on **page 4**. Take some time to find your way around and maybe sign up for a course yourself. This will help identify any areas where your learners may need support.

www.open.ac.uk/Scotland/openpathways

All OpenLearn resources are free and can be studied at any time and at the pace that suits the learner. You can start a course, then take a break if life gets in the way and pick up exactly where you left off. There is no time limit. This flexibility can be a benefit for learners with busy lives, but it can also mean that it's easy to lose motivation. This is where support from a champion can make the difference.

Here are some things that are good to know before recommending resources to learners:

Levels

It's important to get learners started at the level that's right for them. You may find something that sounds like just the thing but if the level is wrong it might put someone off learning. There are OpenLearn resources at three levels of difficulty. Open Pathways only suggests introductory (level 1) resources which should be accessible to most learners. Intermediate (level 2) are undergraduate level and are usually extracts from content in Open University degree modules. Advanced (level 3) are postgraduate level and are usually extracts from Open University master's level modules. A few newer resources are at level 0 (beginner) level and focus on foundation skills such as maths and English.

Length

There are OpenLearn resources as short as one minute and courses as long as 50 hours. Try and match the resource to the amount of time a learner is able to commit to it. Some champions still haven't managed to complete a badged open course (24 hours long) themselves so this probably isn't the best place to start for most people. Short videos can be a good starting point to engage learners (see **page 6** of Open Pathways) before moving on to something more challenging (**page 8**) and then on to badged courses (**page 10**) when they feel ready.

OLC tip: There are new video resources posted on OpenLearn's YouTube channel every week.

www.youtube.com/user/OUlearn

Searching

There are lots of ways to search for resources. Searching by subject will come up with everything from short videos to long courses on that subject, so will need to be filtered by length and level. Courses will only return resources that offer a certificate of completion or digital badge to recognise learning. You can narrow this search to just badged open courses, which are all 24 hours long. You can also search by skills, such as digital, communication or study skills – but make sure they are the level you are looking for.

For learners with a particular interest in all things Scottish, the OpenLearn Scotland hub collects resources on Scottish history, society and culture in one place:
www.open.edu/openlearn/society-politics-law/openlearn-scotland

Lydia is Community Engagement Officer with a community learning project in Midlothian. The project works with adult learners of all ages.

“Open Learning Champions for me is about reaching out into the community. I work with community learning groups and we talk about OpenLearn as a next step. Supporting them to get online and use the materials is what makes the difference – I could bore people forever about how wonderful OpenLearn is, but until you actually sit them down and get them going on it, it doesn't really make sense. You can have an incredibly mixed group but OpenLearn has something for everybody. Searching with learners for subjects they are interested in can show them how to explore the platform. It can be a bit overwhelming so I like to jump straight to a starting point at the right level.

Most of my learners don't have a computer or a laptop at home, so they use a tablet or a public library. That digital divide means they need support to get started. Doing a wee thing in a subject that interests you makes you more comfortable in the digital space.”

“ OpenLearn is something fun and engaging that helps increase digital skills but not in a boring IT class. ”

Learners who are not confident online may need to develop their digital skills before getting started on OpenLearn.

The digital skills section on OpenLearn can give you ideas of resources you can use with learners to build their confidence, from opening an email account to staying safe online.

www.open.edu/openlearn/skills-for-work

If you work with digitally excluded communities, they may not have access to the internet other than on their phone and data can be expensive. Libraries and community learning centres can provide access to computers for learners to build their digital skills and access open learning without using their data.

OLC tip: have a look at the TV and Radio section on OpenLearn for free materials you can order from BBC series such as Blue Planet, The Secret History of Our Streets, or Coast. These can be useful for group activities or for learners with a particular interest, such as Scottish history or geography.

BUILDING DIGITAL CONFIDENCE



OFFLINE AND BLENDED LEARNING

Although all the resources on OpenLearn are online, they are available in a range of formats so they can be used offline too.

Some learners may not have access to the internet at home, they may not be digitally confident, or may just prefer to learn offline.

Champions use the resources in many different ways. You can print off a whole course as a Word document or PDF, or download it as an e-book so it can be read offline. Video and audio material can be downloaded on a memory stick so it doesn't use up data. Some people like to use a pen and paper to work through activities, though some of the interactive elements, such as quizzes, will be lost this way.

'Blended learning' is an approach that combines online and offline learning. Champions can deliver a course with a group where they work together on offline activities, then do reflective activities and quizzes on their own at home, and come back to discuss what they've learned with group. Delivering online courses this way means that learners have the benefits of social interaction, peer support and a facilitator.

It also means you don't have to deliver the whole course – you can pick and choose the elements most relevant for your learners and create a tailored course for them. You can use elements of OpenLearn materials within a course you already deliver, such as quizzes or videos. Rather than signposting someone to a whole course, for example Staying safe online (24 hours), you can just download or print the section on choosing strong passwords.

You don't have to be an expert in a subject to facilitate an OpenLearn course as all the learning content and activities are provided.

CASE STUDY BLENDED LEARNING WITH CARERS

Caring Counts is a reflection and planning course for carers and features the experiences and personal reflections of carers. Reflecting on their own journeys helps carers to recognise the skills they have gained from their caring role and begin to think about their next steps.

www.open.edu/openlearncreate/caringcounts1

Ann is team coordinator of a project that supports carers of people with mental health issues and provides training for carers from across Glasgow. They use *Caring Counts* with people who have been caring for a long time.

"The course is never the same twice, as we adapt it to each group to make sure everyone can access it. We run it with groups of 4-6 people over three sessions, one week apart. Between sessions, people reflect on what we've covered. We also show them how to access OpenLearn. As we go through the course, we identify what people are interested in, and signpost to resources on OpenLearn, such as *Understanding depression and anxiety*. We make sure it's at the right level and length for the learner and provide a description.

Mental health carers can experience social isolation due to stigma and because the person you care for takes up all your time, energy and head space. Delivering the course this way encourages peer support and fosters relationships. The group gives them confidence, builds resilience and provides a supportive environment where they can be honest about the good and bad times without judgement."

“ We've seen transformations in people, and in a very short time.”



THIRD SECTOR AND VOLUNTEERS

The Open University shares its social justice mission with the values of the third sector. There are lots of resources for volunteers and staff working in the third sector on OpenLearn and OpenLearn Create.

OpenLearn can support third sector organisations to deliver staff and volunteer development, learning resources for the people you support, and even the tools to create tailored resources, such as Volunteer Scotland's *Involving Volunteers* course.

You can search for these resources using 'voluntary sector' but the easiest way to find them all is on the Leadership Resources for the Voluntary Sector page that collects lots of relevant resources in one place.

There are specific resources for volunteer managers and on collaborative leadership, as well as an introduction to working in the sector.

www.open.edu/openlearn/education-development/leadership-resources-the-voluntary-sector

CASE STUDY VOLUNTEER-SUPPORTED LEARNING

Katie is volunteer coordinator at a psychiatric hospital for long-stay patients. Her contact with open learning champions came through a workshop for members of the Volunteer Edinburgh network and her interest in seeking out resources she could share with learners.

“Our focus is on getting to know the learner as an individual. We discuss what interests them, then explore suitable resources on various platforms – OpenLearn, FutureLearn, Coursera, YouTube, Khan Academy. Many patients struggle with concentration and motivation which impacts on the selection of material.

Learners are matched to a volunteer who they meet once a week and work together on a laptop for an hour at a time. The aim of the volunteer is to support the learner's access to resources, to develop their interest and focus, digital literacy and social interaction. Some learners may not have the digital skills for navigating resources, so the volunteer provides this support. Volunteers and learners can have a conversation about the learning material which makes the social interaction more focused and supportive.”

“ Open learning can provide an escape from hospital routine and puts the learner in charge.”



LEARNING AT WORK

Open learning champions tell us that they share OpenLearn resources with colleagues. There are lots of resources to support staff development.

You could signpost to relevant resources or think about setting up a study group in your workplace with interested colleagues. Group-based learning at work is a great way of engaging people and keeping each other motivated to study.

Trade unions are a good source of workplace learning for union members. Some union learning representatives are open learning champions. They help learners get familiar with OpenLearn and identify how they might use it for personal and professional development and as a stepping stone to accredited learning.

Open Pathways contains three pathway documents with suggestions for resources to develop work-related skills under different headings. These are:

- **Digital skills**
- **Leadership and management**
- **Health and care**

CASE STUDY UNION LEARNING

Khadija is Partnerships Officer with the OU in Scotland and works with trade unions to deliver workplace learning for union members. She runs open learning champions workshops for project workers, learning organisers and union learning representatives so they can support union members to access open learning.

Khadija also provides tailored workshops using OpenLearn resources related to workplace learning needs. For example Unison hosted a workshop on CPD opportunities for care support staff, which explored the health and social care links on OpenLearn.

The Communication Workers Union (CWU) hosted a workshop on the Open University's *Secret History of Our Streets* for members with an interest in local history. They were also signposted to other resources available on OpenLearn.

“The workshops are designed to introduce unions to OpenLearn and support members to embark on lifelong learning journeys.”



CREATING OPEN RESOURCES

OpenLearn Create is a sister platform to OpenLearn. It offers a range of free online learning resources but but it also makes the tools available for you to remix them or create your own.

All OpenLearn Create resources have a creative commons licence. This means you can remix them and tailor them to your learners. You can pick and choose parts of a resource that you want to use, then mix these with some of your own content to create a new resource.

The tools also enable you to build your own course from scratch. There's even a course on *How to make an open online course* so you can learn about all that creating a course entails before you get started.

www.open.edu/openlearncreate/course/view.php?id=2221

Most of the work needs to be done before using the tools on OpenLearn Create. You need to decide on learning outcomes and generate content for your course. You could involve your learners in creating content and building the course with them. This is called co-creating open educational resources.

www.open.edu/openlearncreate/

CASE STUDY CO-CREATING RESOURCES WITH REFUGEES

Maggie is the Director of Bridges Programmes, who worked in partnership with The Open University in Scotland on a co-created course called *Reflecting on Transitions*, for refugees and other New Scots, based on their stories and lived experience.

“Reflecting on Transitions takes a case study approach and explores the circumstances and issues that have affected real life choices. It offers clients the opportunity to take stock in a supported way and in a safe place.

From there they can think about ‘what next?’ Open Pathways offers an opportunity for migrants from other parts of the world to take a first step into learning here and/or to gauge whether they have the language skills they’ll need to succeed in education, training or employment.”

“ Open Pathways is a first step into learning in English that allows learners to gauge their language skills.”



NEXT STEPS

OpenLearn is used by organisations across Scotland and in the rest of the UK to widen access and support transitions from informal to formal learning.

If you have learners who are considering formal study, there is information on **pages 18 - 22** of Open Pathways. Here are some ideas for supporting them in planning the next stage in their learning journey.

Open Pathways can be a flexible way to explore what subject they are interested in and what they'd like to do next. Once they've decided that they want to move on here are some things you can encourage them to think about before signing up for formal study.

Making time – OpenLearn lets you stop and start learning at your own pace but formal study isn't as flexible. It's a good idea to find out if you can put the time aside for studying every week. FutureLearn courses are free to sign up to but they are time limited (see **page 12** of Open Pathways). This can be good practice to see if you're ready for the pace of formal study.

Choosing the right level – take time to figure the level that's right for you. It's better to start gently, for example with an Open University Access module, rather than jump in at the deep end and find it's not right for you. Another good stepping stone is *Making your learning count*, an OU module that gives you credit for your OpenLearn study or other achievements such as an Adult Achievement Award or workplace learning. If you've studied before you might be able to transfer credit so you don't have to start from scratch (see **pages 19 - 20** of Open Pathways).

Study skills – there are lots of resources on OpenLearn to help develop study skills, such as essay writing and referencing, so you can build confidence before your course starts (see **page 16** of Open Pathways).

Funding – some learners may be put off formal learning because of the cost, but all Open University undergraduate module costs are covered by the Part-time Fee Grant for learners in Scotland with a personal income of up to £25,000 per year.

Disability support – OU study offers accessibility, flexibility and support for disabled students. It's a good idea to register early for your course so that any supports you need can be put in place in plenty of time for your start date. Talk to an advisor or visit:

help.open.ac.uk/topic/disability

“This is university but it's not terrifying”

SHEILA

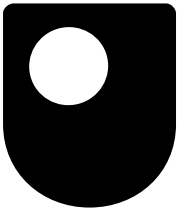
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