OpenLearn: 2022 in Review

The Open University
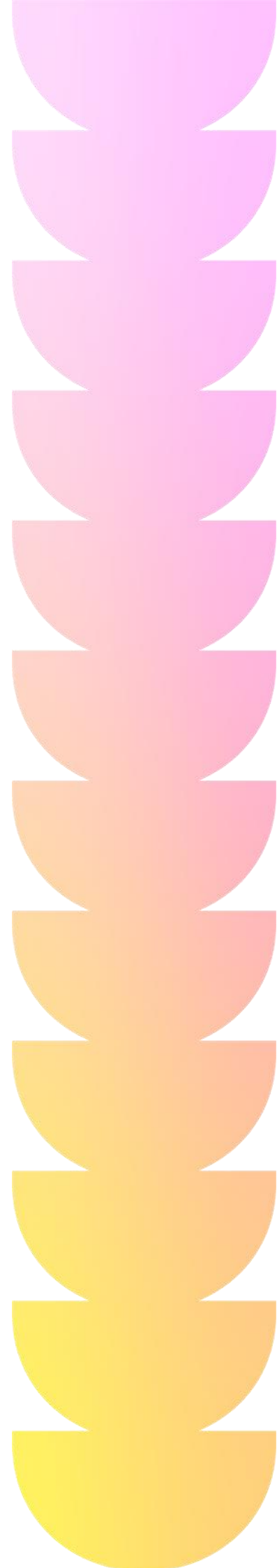
OpenLearn

Welcome

Whilst 2022 has seen a return to relative normality in pandemic terms, the OpenLearn team has continued to adjust and respond to newly emerging challenges. We have continued to provide learning to millions of visitors through productive, creative and innovative approaches to developing new materials, as highlighted in this report.

One thing in particular that has stuck with us since the OpenLearn pandemic data were published is the increase in educators using OpenLearn. 20% of our pandemic survey respondents said they were teaching in some form, using OpenLearn for their own professional development – both *how* to teach online and *what* to teach – and to find resources for their students. In 2022, for the first time Google Classroom was amongst our top referrer sites, a sign that perhaps the practice of using OpenLearn in teaching may be sticking around.

Requests from several schools prompted us to investigate changing the minimum age of account creation on OpenLearn from 13 to 11, so that all secondary school aged children could participate and earn free certificates and badges. Whilst this presented technical challenges it has forced us to think about the demographic of our learners and how this impacts what we offer.
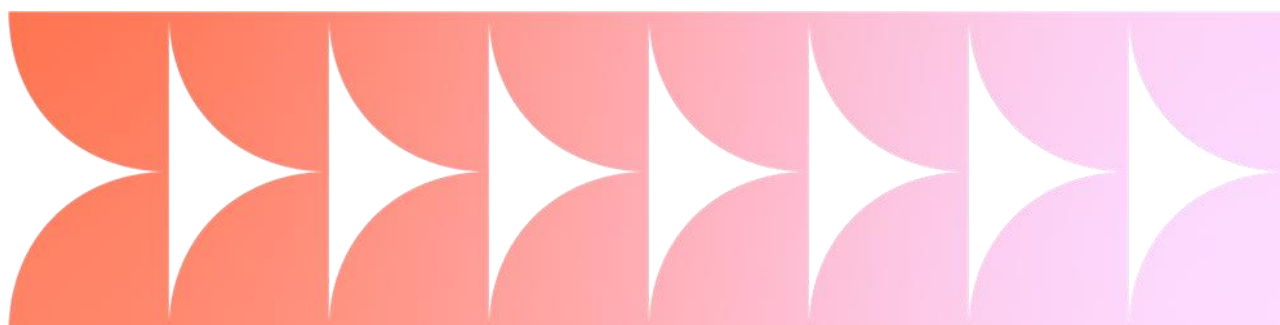
It seems that educators have stayed with us and are continuing to use OpenLearn. In doing so, they are passing on the gift that is Open Educational Resources to a new generation.

Dr Patrina Law, Head of OpenLearn
Jane Roberts, Head of OpenLearn

Contents

About OpenLearn

OpenLearn attracts more than 10 million visitors each year from around the world. Whether it's a 60-second animated video or a 24-hour course you're after, you'll find it on www.openlearn.com for free. Get a quick introduction to OpenLearn in our new animation.

Delivered by The Open University as part of its Royal Charter commitment to support the wellbeing of the community, OpenLearn has reached over 100 million visitors since 2006. Our vision is to break down barriers to education through free educational resources, addressing access, lack of confidence, and cost. What started as a two-year experiment is now a core part of the OU family!

Our content

OpenLearn is home to around 1,000 courses, and more than 8,000 articles, interactive activities, podcasts and videos covering just about everything from beginner's Spanish to fake news. Collections such as the race & ethnicity hub bring together topical content for particular audiences or events. Everything on OpenLearn is free!

All of our learning material is written by academics and subject specialists who are experts in their field. This includes extracts from formal OU modules, academic research output, and bespoke items commissioned especially for OpenLearn.

Almost all content on OpenLearn is released under a Creative Commons licence, meaning it can be shared, reused and adapted by educators and organisations around the world for free.

Our learners

We are really proud to reach learners who traditionally face barriers to higher education. In 2020 14% of OpenLearn users considered themselves to have a disability; for 19% English is not their first spoken language, and 15% were unwaged and/or unable to work.[1]

Each year thousands of OU students use OpenLearn to augment their formal studies, including completing their new student induction, developing study skills, researching their next module, or keeping their mind active between modules.

This year learners earned 535,000 free certificates and 68,000 free digital badges for completing OpenLearn courses. Hear directly from our learners in our collection Why I study with OpenLearn.

Our other channels

The OpenLearn YouTube channel hosts over 1,700 bite-sized videos including our globally popular '60 second adventures' in subjects such as philosophy, economics, history of English, astronomy and religion.

eBook versions of OpenLearn courses are available on Amazon Kindle and Google Play.

You can also find us on:
Facebook (@ouopenlearn)
Twitter (@oufreelearning)
Instagram (@openlearn)

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[1] Responses to 2020 OpenLearn platform survey.

2022 Headline data

14
million visits to OpenLearn

5.2
million YouTube video views

370k
Kindle downloads

40%
UK

11%
US

10%
India

9.7%
click through to online prospectus

790k
course enrolments

38k
digital badges issued

OpenLearn started 2022 with big celebrations, having achieved the milestone of 100 million visitors since launching in 2006.

Top free courses
1. MSE's Academy of Money
2. Understanding autism
3. Introduction to bookkeeping and accounting
4. Everyday English 1
5. Getting started with German 1

Top non-course content
1. Hitler's rise and fall: timeline
2. Do you have a photographic memory?
3. Slip slide collide
4. 12 famous Confucius quotes on education and learning
5. Photofit Me

Top YouTube content
1. The Silver Bridge disaster
2. The history of English
3. Shakespeare: Original pronunciation
4. What is shell shock?
5. Finance: The History of Money

Visits to Nation hubs

OpenLearn Ireland	8,200
OpenLearn Scotland	7,000
OpenLearn Wales	8,600
OpenLearn Cymru	1,600

Ukrainian resources

As part of the Open University's response to the unfolding crisis in Ukraine, OpenLearn launched a support package of free learning in the form of a page of curated resources for Ukrainian refugees. The page hosts free courses and resources to support language learning, skills for work and study, mental health and wellbeing, and links to targeted support and resources from other organisations. The page, along with the most popular relevant course, has also now been translated into Ukrainian.

In October a new course was launched focussing on Ukrainian culture and language, developed specifically for UK residents hosting refugees and service providers working with people who have arrived from Ukraine. Introduction to Ukrainian language and culture provides an insight into Ukrainian language, food, history, and ethnic and religious diversity, and gives learners a chance to chat in the course forums to find out more about supporting Ukraine's struggle.

We applaud the efforts taken by The Open University in attempting to equip externally displaced Ukrainian people with skills and knowledge that would make their stay in the UK easier. Delivery of targeted courses for the UK hosts should likewise allow them to be better aware about Ukrainian culture and language.

We support these resources being made available by the OU free of charge, and encourage the UK residents to make the most out of them.

Dmytro Zavgorodniy, Director General for the Directorate for Digital Transformation, Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine

Award wins for diversity and inclusion content

OpenLearn has always embraced diverse and inclusive content, and it has recently been rewarded with awards success and recognition for a number of items.

The Race and Ethnicity Hub received the 'Diversity, Equity and Inclusion' award for its outstanding contribution to the open education community at this year's **Open Education Awards for Excellence**. Launched following the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020, the hub is a collection of free resources – articles, videos, audios, timelines and courses – that help people understand both historic and contemporary ideas of race and racism, and how these ideas could inform our decisions and interactions.

The hub now contains more than 180 items exploring the themes of race, racism and ethnicity, and has been visited over 21,000 times since November 2020.

How to be a better LGBTQI+ ally, based on real life stories from LGBTQI+ young people, explores how to go about showing your support as an ally and helping young people thrive, rather than just survive. The interactive was a recent finalist in the highly prestigious 2022 **Learning Technologies Awards**, for the best learning technologies project in the public/non-profit sectors.

Good Hair: perceptions of racism explores how racism can manifest itself in schools and workplaces, through the story of a young person's experience with a school dress code. The full film version was a finalist at **The British Short Film Awards** 2022, for Best Drama, and has received an Honourable Mention at the **London Rocks Film Festival**.

Firstly, we are extremely proud, not only of the awards and recognition, but for the nature of the content that has been recognised. OpenLearn has long been a home for content that not only covers equality, diversity and inclusivity, but challenges thinking around these themes, and none more so than these three pieces of content.

This is testament to the quality of the content created, and the innovation and creativity of those behind it, both within OpenLearn and of the wonderful OU academics, without whom it simply wouldn't exist. We look forward to delivering more thought-provoking and challenging content, and to more success and recognition in the future.

Jane Roberts, Head of OpenLearn

Our partnerships

Every year OpenLearn delivers dozens of projects with continuing and new external partners, and 2022 has been no exception. A small selection of this year's new partnerships includes:

Northern Ireland (NI) Libraries – The OpenLearn Libraries NI hub is now featured as a direct link on the desktop of all computers in 96 libraries across NI.

BuffaloGrid – over 100 OpenLearn educational videos are available through BuffaloGrid's StreamSpot+ devices to users in rural areas and refugee camps across Africa and Asia who lack access to internet, mobile data services and/or electricity.

Prisoners' Education Trust – Exploring the history of prisoner education is an award winning course exploring the history of prison education in the British Isles, and is strongly recommended for the professional development of anyone working in prisons or criminal justice.

Police Service of Northern Ireland – the Community education and policing collection was completed in 2022 with the publication of the course Innovation in policing, exploring the ways in which innovation can apply in policing.

The Well HQ – Supporting female performance in sport and fitness and Issues in women's health in relation to sport and fitness explore health themes in women's sport, and address the problem of sports science research traditionally being male-dominated.
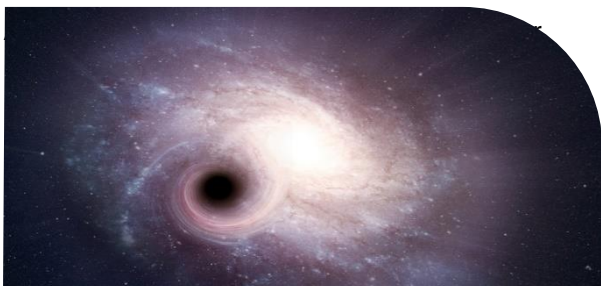
OpenLearn platform developments

Throughout 2022 we have continued to invest in developing OpenLearn, including moving to a fully Moodle site architecture and improvements to user experience including:

- Addition of a new subject area, Digital & Computing, bringing together content focussed on digital upskilling and essential modern workplace skills.
- Brand new search functionality including sort and filter options to make it easier to find what you're looking for.
- New types of interactive learning experiences, such as Out for the count.
- Including OU course codes in the OpenLearn course catalogue, making it easier to find an OpenLearn course derived from a specific OU module.
- Addition of the Ukrainian language pack supporting Ukrainian translated content.

Spotlights

There's so much that we are proud of from 2022, we can't fit it all in! Here's just a small selection of items we created this year that we want to share with you – it was very hard to narrow it down, so don't forget you can always find our latest content and most popular content collated on OpenLearn too.
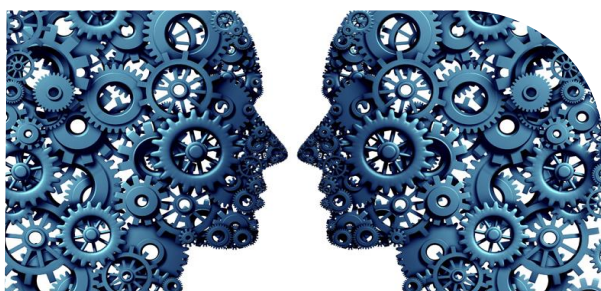

How to find invisible black holes | Article
Ever fancied being a black hole hunter? Adam McMaster, an astronomy PhD student at The Open University, explains how you can become a citizen scientist and start your search...

Can we be categorised by our DNA? | Video
"Race is just a social construct!" You may have heard experts say, but what does the science say? Can our DNA group us the way many imagine?

AI matters | Course
Artificial Intelligence (AI) represents great opportunity, but also significant disruption for modern societies and cultures. Investigate the historical, ethical and social issues surrounding this technology.

So, you want to be a nurse? A brief introduction to nursing | Course
This course provides an overview of what nursing entails. You will learn about the four fields of nursing in the UK, what nurse training involves, as well as what makes a great nurse.

What makes a good father? | Interactive
We all have our own ideas about what makes a good dad. What does a man have to do to earn this title, and have our standards changed over time?

Wimbledon – The Championships | Collection
A collation of our tennis content, offering an insight into what it's like competing at the highest level in sport, in the centenary of Centre Court.

Why riot? Community, choices, aspirations | Course
A free resource for young people to help them think critically about the choices they make and about how to act positively for change, around the issues they care about.
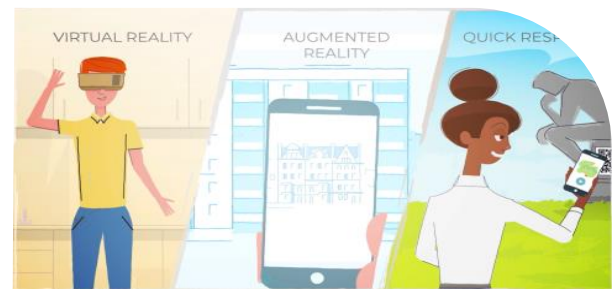

Studying social work law | 4 Courses
This set of four courses introduces the role of social work and explores how the law influences social work practice. You will learn the role of social workers in the UK and how the profession is regulated across the four nations.

Understanding science: what we cannot know | Course
Investigate the boundaries of our understanding across numerous scientific fields. Is it possible that we will one day know everything?

Using digital tools in teaching | Video
How can social media be used in a positive way in an academic setting? How can digital tools be used to engage students? How can podcasts be shared for teaching purposes? Explore these questions and more.

A gift at the end of life | Video
Two families who agreed to organ donation following their child's death share their lived experience of organ donation, grief and the life adjustments that have taken place since.

Diversity and inclusion in the workplace | Course
An introduction to the benefits and complexities of developing and supporting a diverse and inclusive workforce, including the positive impact of diversity on staff wellbeing.