

THE OPEN UNIVERSITY

STRATEGIC PLAN

TO 2021/22



The Open
University

50
YEARS

PEOPLE PLACES METHODS IDEAS

“

The Open University is a unique institution which has touched the lives of millions of people over the last 50 years; inspiring learning and opening up education to all.

As we proudly look forward to our next 50 years, our Strategic Plan builds on this remarkable history and ensures that The Open University continues to deliver genuine value for its students, partners, employers and society across the UK and beyond. We are committed to doing what we do best - promoting educational opportunity and social justice through our innovative supported open learning, underpinned by world-class academic research.

The key strategic priority for The Open University continues to be student success. Working in partnership with our students, we will ensure that the student voice guides what we do. It is through our scale, reach and our ability to support students to succeed, that we are able to transform lives and achieve our positive impact on society and the economy.”

Malcolm Sweeting
Pro-Chancellor



CONTENTS

About The Open University	03
One University, four nations	05
Our mission, vision and values	07
Our strategy	08
Our 5 strategic objectives	09
Student success	10
Excellent teaching and research	11
Growth and sustainability	12
Technology that enables success	13
Dynamic and inclusive culture	14
Our strategic success measures	15



ABOUT THE OPEN UNIVERSITY

The Open University (OU) is the largest university in the UK by student population, and has a significant global reach through a network of alumni in over 150 countries, international partnerships and research. We are the only university to receive funding from, and operate in, all four nations of the UK.

The OU was established in 1969 with a unique aim. Our mission was to provide a new style of university education that was truly open to people, places, methods and ideas, to improve lives and enrich communities in the UK and across the world. Having reached our 50th year, and with more than two million people who have studied with us, the commitment to our mission is as strong as ever. That's why we continue to be innovative and to evolve our teaching methods and technology, to support student success in a rapidly changing world.

A UNIQUE INSTITUTION

The OU is unique. A world leader in open access, supported open learning and open educational resources, our distance learning approach sets us apart from other universities. Our commitment to open entry means the OU has an unrivalled reach and influence on today's society. Our flexible approach supports people of all ages and backgrounds to study and achieve their potential. Our teaching and research is changing people's lives, expanding human knowledge and understanding, driving economic growth and building fairer societies across the world.

OPEN, AMBITIOUS, INNOVATIVE AND INCLUSIVE

With no entry requirements for most of our courses, we believe education should be open to all. Over 174,000 students are currently studying with us, and these include:

- More than 24,000 disabled students.
- Almost 1800 students in prison or other secure environments.
- Students sponsored by FTSE 100 companies and major public services like the police and the NHS.
- In excess of 1000 students on apprenticeship courses.

Some other highlights include:

- An overall satisfaction rate of 87% in the latest National Student Survey.
- Our unique partnership with the BBC, which reaches over 260 million people a year through OU/BBC co-productions.
- Free-to-use courses and modules on our OpenLearn in-house platform, which received 7.8m views in 2017/18.
- Providing free educational resources to teachers and healthcare workers in sub-Saharan Africa and India, reaching over 2 million people.
- Our position as one of the top three space science centres in the UK.
- A Business School that is part of the top 1% of global business schools who are triple accredited.
- Our continued commitment to the principles of environmental protection and sustainable development.



 The OU skyrocketed my confidence and gave me the opportunity to start a business I love. It has changed my life for the better. 🌟🌟

CHLOE BURROUGHS
BA (Hons) Business Studies



 I've been tutoring with the OU for 25 years and I've definitely seen it change lives. The success of the students, that's the real delight. 🌟🌟

DOUGLAS LEITH
OU tutor



 A new beginning is what it's all about, and the OU has reminded me it is possible. I know I'm capable of so much, so I just want to keep exploring it. 🌟🌟

FINLAY GAMES
Open degree



 It's a real privilege to be part of our students' journey, to watch them change and develop. 🌟🌟

REHANA AWAN
OU tutor



Milton Keynes



Cardiff



Edinburgh

ONE UNIVERSITY, FOUR NATIONS

The OU delivers world-class, flexible distance learning education to people across the four nations of the UK, Ireland and worldwide; creating life-enhancing opportunities for learners across the globe through the educational resources we provide, our international partnerships and research.

In England, we are the largest provider of part-time education. As is the case across all four nations of the UK, we are highly rated for student satisfaction, and through our scale and reach we make a major contribution to addressing widening participation and access to education. We work with employers in both the public and private sectors to address important skills gaps and, through our continued investment and success in degree apprenticeships, we enable students to acquire the skills that society, the economy and employers need. Aligned to government priorities, our cost-effective model of flexible and lifelong learning is a key way to meet the economic and social challenges ahead.

The Open University in Wales is building on the support arrangements introduced for part-time learners in Wales to grow student numbers, championing the University's appeal to learners in Wales. We are developing our professional markets, particularly with regards to health and education, working to become the education provider of

choice for employers and businesses, and seeking to grow our degree apprenticeship, postgraduate and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) offer. We work with a wide range of partners to contribute to the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales and Welsh Government policy to widen access to part-time education and meet the needs of society and the economy.

The Open University in Scotland is funded for the delivery of learning and teaching by the Scottish Funding Council (SFC). Each year we submit an outcome agreement to the SFC demonstrating what we deliver in return for public investment and how we are responding to Scottish Government policy priorities, particularly in relation to widening access, skills development and working with industry. We are working in partnership with schools, colleges, universities, employers, trade unions and community-based organisations, to deliver on the recommendations of the Commission on Widening Access.



Belfast

In **Northern Ireland** The Open University is working with the Department for the Economy and elected representatives to support the current Higher Education Strategy and identify how our model of higher education can continue to enhance the lives of citizens. We have enhanced engagement with employers, developed new partnerships with the further education sector, implemented a successful widening access plan and developed knowledge exchange capability – all of which are priorities in this strategic period.

In the **Republic of Ireland**, we have built strong partnerships with employers, like national broadcaster RTÉ, and with Enterprise Ireland through our innovative 'Open for Growth' scheme for growing businesses. We are well placed to grow our student numbers and to contribute to the University's international work with Dublin as a base for our work within the European Union.



John grew up in Cardiff and was unable to read or write. He reached his mid-30s having never read a book, and it was later discovered he has severe dyslexia, ADHD and Meares-Irlen syndrome. Despite these challenges, John graduated with an OU science degree at the age of 46.

John Spence
BSc (Hons) Health Sciences

Fatema fled from her home country of Bangladesh to Cyprus at 16 without finishing school. Investing all of her time in daily survival, she never had the opportunity to resume her schooling. Upon hearing about the OU and its open-to-all policy, she enrolled on a social work course.



Fatema Islam
Foundation degree



Sam is a software engineer in Aberdeen. He transferred credit from a college Higher National Diploma towards his OU Bachelor of Science (Hons) degree in Computing and IT Practice. Sam gained this in two years while working full time and was shortly after promoted to software developer.

Sam Orme
BSc (Hons) Computing and IT Practice

OUR MISSION, VISION AND VALUES



Open to people, places, methods and ideas

We promote educational opportunity and social justice by providing high-quality university education to all who wish to realise their ambitions and fulfil their potential. Through academic research, pedagogic innovation and collaborative partnerships, we seek to be a world leader in the design, content and delivery of supported open learning.

Most of our undergraduate courses have no formal entry requirements. We believe that the qualifications our students have when they leave are the only ones that matter. We are committed to promoting equal opportunities for all, and close monitoring makes sure that we live up to our ideals.

To reach more students with life-changing learning that meets their needs and enriches society

In a world which is fast-moving, complex and uncertain, we aim to increase the positive impact that the OU has on society and the economy through our teaching, research and wider public engagement; providing our students, now and in the future, with the unique opportunity to achieve their full potential.

In achieving our vision and mission, we remain true to a clearly defined set of core values

We are:

- **Inclusive**, playing a unique role in society by making higher education open to all and promoting social justice through the development of knowledge and skills.
- **Innovative**, leading the learning revolution, placing innovation at the heart of our teaching and research, continuously seeking new and better ways to inspire and enable learning, and creating world-class research and teaching.
- **Responsive** to the needs of individuals, employers and communities, and dedicated to supporting our students' learning success.

OUR STRATEGY

The Open University mission:

Open to people, places, methods and ideas

Our vision:

To reach more students with life-changing learning that meets their needs and enriches society



People and values
Inclusive, Innovative, Responsive



OUR 5 STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

The key strategic priority for The Open University continues to be **student success**. It is through our scale, reach and ability to support students to succeed, that we are able to achieve our positive impact on society and the economy.

This is underpinned by a set of 4 related strategic objectives, which together will achieve the overall vision:

- delivering **excellent teaching and research** - to enhance our distinctiveness, reputation and, above all, student success
- enhancing our future **growth and sustainability** - by diversifying our reach and sources of income, and managing and challenging our costs to ensure our financial sustainability
- investing in **technology that enables success** - both student-facing technology and our own internal systems
- fostering a **dynamic and inclusive culture** - by investing in staff to recognise and maximise their contribution to our success.

We will track our progress in achieving our vision through a number of high-level measures of success, which will be supplemented by the close monitoring of additional leading indicators of performance.



STUDENT SUCCESS

Ensuring **student success** – it is through our scale, reach and our ability to support students to succeed that we are able to achieve our positive impact on society and the economy

WE WILL

- Support our students to succeed by understanding our students' study goals and ensuring they get onto the right study path at the right level
- Support our students to progress successfully through and complete their chosen module(s) or qualification
- Deliver a high-quality and flexible student experience with high levels of student satisfaction
- Support students to achieve positive career and personal development outcomes

HOW WE WILL ACHIEVE THIS

- We will deliver supported open entry for all undergraduate provision, helping students get onto the right level and study option for their needs
- We will improve communications with continuing students through our frontline services to support their progression
- We will implement a robust, flexible, study-intensity model, making it easier for students to vary their rate of progress through their qualification
- We will develop and embed an institution-wide strategy for student employability and career progression with a greater sense of shared understanding, ownership and responsibility
- We will ensure that the student voice guides our decision making, working closely with the Open University Students Association to achieve this
- We will increase student satisfaction to ensure an excellent student experience
- We will reduce gaps in progression, attainment and satisfaction for specific groups of students, wherever these arise
- We will develop and embed an institution-wide strategy for widening access and success, meeting our commitments to the funding bodies of all four UK nations



EXCELLENT TEACHING AND RESEARCH

Delivering **excellent teaching and research** – to enhance our distinctiveness, reputation and, above all, student success

WE WILL

- Invest in making the OU a stronger, more vibrant university with enhanced academic distinctiveness and reputation, and making a major contribution to student success
- Through a collaborative approach, we will ensure our curriculum, teaching and research work together to maximise their positive effect on a diverse community of learners, to improve access to Higher Education, enhance quality and student outcomes, and create new knowledge to impact on society, culture, the economy and governments

HOW WE WILL ACHIEVE THIS

- We will continuously improve the design and delivery of our learning and teaching to enhance student satisfaction and contribute to a strong Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) performance
- We will ensure ongoing sustainability of our curriculum portfolio and take opportunities for growth across the UK and internationally, using innovation to test new markets where appropriate
- We will revise aspects of the curriculum portfolio to better support lifelong learning and reflect diversity
- We will review, and potentially expand, curriculum and validation partnership activity to support strategic aims
- We will develop, test and implement a strategy for the Research Excellence

Framework (REF) 2021 that achieves a strong performance, in accordance with the ambitions in our Research and Enterprise Plan

- We will increase sustainability and commercialisation of research, including through growth of new markets and improved cost recovery, and a greater focus on engaged research
- We will strengthen our scholarship activities and increase our impact to inform and enhance our teaching and learning, and therefore student outcomes
- We will enhance the inclusivity and vibrancy of our academic communities, including through equalising opportunities for academic staff career progression and greater integration of Associate Lecturers and students



GROWTH AND SUSTAINABILITY

Enhancing our future **growth and sustainability** – by diversifying our reach and sources of income, and managing and challenging our costs to ensure our financial sustainability

WE WILL

- Ensure we are financially sustainable on an ongoing basis
- Diversify our reach and sources of income
- Manage and challenge our cost base
- Create headroom for reinvestment back into our University, and value for our students

HOW WE WILL ACHIEVE THIS

- We will encourage and invest in new and diversified sources of income that will deliver net return to our University through:
 - > Developing a long-term strategy and action plan for growing international revenue
 - > Devising a clear approach to developing offers for students and corporate customers focusing on our short, flexible, learning development provision using both OU and FutureLearn platforms for the UK and international audience
- We will continue our focus on growing apprenticeships in the UK
- We will implement cost reductions from agreed and planned strategic change activities
- We will review operational spend across the University in line with business as usual requirements and financial affordability
- We will prioritise resourcing for strategic change that adds value and operational activities to increase student numbers



TECHNOLOGY THAT ENABLES SUCCESS

Investing in **technology that enables success** – both student-facing technology and our own internal systems

WE WILL

- Ensure that our digital platforms for students are leading edge and accessible, through continuous innovation and improvement, based on student needs
- Invest in core systems to simplify and standardise our technology platforms and ensure they remain fit for purpose and accessible through continuous innovation and improvement
- Streamline our data and analytics provision to support evidence-based approaches to enhancing student success
- Adopt effective practices that enable us to test and learn from new innovative technologies and ideas

HOW WE WILL ACHIEVE THIS

- We will align technology-based functions and activities in order to create synergy and identify new opportunities for innovation, improved ways of working, and an enhanced service to students
- We will ensure a single, coordinated approach for data curation and provision
- We will continue to involve our staff in the design and development of our core systems, to ensure the most appropriate solution is implemented
- We will follow an 'adopt not adapt' principle for technology solutions, thereby capitalising on best practice and methods
- We will decommission technology no longer required in line with the introduction of new technology, establishing and applying an approach of continual review and evolution to support the need for further improvement



DYNAMIC AND INCLUSIVE CULTURE

Fostering a **dynamic and inclusive culture** – by investing in staff to recognise and maximise their contribution to our success

WE WILL

- Invest in our people, teams and management to ensure our people are engaged, equipped and supported
- Create a culture of collaboration and inclusion to ensure all parts of our community are aligned in achieving our long-term ambitions and enable student success

HOW WE WILL ACHIEVE THIS

- We will optimise our People Services to provide a centralised professional and efficient service, supporting all staff and line managers and improving the employee experience of the OU
- We will implement Management Practices and a People Charter to embed an excellent employee experience
- We will develop our employee recognition scheme to value the contribution of our staff
- We will develop our approach to staff welfare and inclusion
- We will work in partnership with students and staff to enable greater collaboration and to ensure their voices are heard
- We will implement the new Associate Lecturer employment contract

OUR STRATEGIC SUCCESS MEASURES

We will track our progress in achieving our strategic objectives through a number of high-level measures of success.



As the OU operates in all four nations of the UK, these measures will be monitored at a nation level as appropriate.

PEOPLE PLACES METHODS IDEAS



Visit open.ac.uk

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

50
YEARS