



**THE OPEN UNIVERSITY IN SCOTLAND'S
OUTCOME AGREEMENT WITH
THE SCOTTISH FUNDING COUNCIL
2023-2024**

The Open University's Strategy for 2022–2027: Learn and Live

<https://about.open.ac.uk/strategy>

The infographic is set against a dark blue background. At the top left is the Open University logo. The main title 'LEARN AND LIVE: Our five year strategy' is centered in white. Below it, the mission, vision, and values are listed. The 'Our goals' section features five icons in rounded rectangular boxes: a hand holding a plant for 'Sustainability', three people for 'Societal impact', a network of four people for 'Greater reach', a ribbon for 'Success for our students', and a balance scale for 'Equity'. The 'OUR ENABLERS' section at the bottom consists of eight rounded rectangular buttons arranged in two rows: 'Live our values', 'Support each other', 'Secure and effective technologies', 'Manage change well', 'Decisions and data', 'Four Nations', and 'Steward our finances'.

2022–27

LEARN AND LIVE:
Our five year strategy

Mission: Open to people, places, methods and ideas.
Vision: Life-changing learning that enriches society.
Values: Inclusive, Innovative, Responsive.

Our goals

- Sustainability
- Societal impact
- Greater reach
- Success for our students
- Equity

OUR ENABLERS

- Live our values
- Support each other
- Secure and effective technologies
- Manage change well
- Decisions and data
- Four Nations
- Steward our finances

The Open University in Scotland vision:

To provide every student from the widest possible range of backgrounds across Scotland with a high quality and successful learning experience through open, flexible and innovative higher education.

Scottish Funding Council's priority areas for universities 2023–24:

1. Fair access and transitions
2. Quality learning and teaching
3. Coherent learning provision
4. Work-based learning and skills
5. Net zero and environmental sustainability response
6. High-quality research and innovation
7. University Innovation Fund

Priority area 1: Fair access and transitions

1. The Open University in Scotland supports the delivery of the Commission on Widening Access 2026 and 2030 sectors targets with 21.3% of our undergraduate entrants living in the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation most deprived quintile (SIMD20) in AY 2022–23. We continue to attract more entrants in full-time equivalent (FTE) terms from the most deprived quintile than the least deprived.
2. 75% of our undergraduate entrants in AY 2022–23 were in receipt of the Part-time Fee Grant from the Student Awards Agency Scotland (SAAS) to help towards their tuition fees. Neither the grant nor the income threshold (of £25,000 per annum), has changed since its introduction in 2013 despite inflation. This is impacting students who were in receipt of the part-time fee grant but now their income is just over the threshold, and they are unable to self-fund their studies. We are undertaking research to have a better understanding of the number of students affected.
3. The Open University in Scotland's [Corporate Parenting Plan](#) is published on our website. We exceeded our 2022–23 ambition for the proportion of entrants declaring care experience, with 134 undergraduate entrants (2.2%) with care experience registering last year. Unlike full-time students, care experienced students studying part-time are not eligible for the care experience bursary.
4. We saw a continued fall in the proportion of undergraduate entrants coming to the OU with an HN qualification in AY 2022–23 mirroring the overall decline in the number of HN qualifiers leaving Scottish colleges. The proportion of HN entrants who transferred credit from their HN qualification increased in AY 2022–23.
5. Early data for 2023/24 however suggests a decline in both the number and proportion of HN entrants transferring credit. This is suspected to be a result of both the changes in the college HN population and from industrial action in the college sector, which has delayed the award of some HN qualifications.
6. In October 2023 we entered into a new Articulation Agreement with SQA to extend the promotion and visibility of our progression routes for all HN students. Looking forward, we are collaborating closely with SQA on the redevelopment of HN qualifications under the "NH Next Gen project", with the aim of maximising the articulation routes available for learners taking these new qualifications.

7. Our [Young Applicants in Schools Scheme](#) (YASS) allows students in the final year of secondary school to experience higher education level study alongside their other subjects. The headcount number of YASS entrants was 933 students in 2022–23, with 23.1% coming from the two most deprived SIMD quintiles. We are seeing an increase of over 7% in applications in 2023–24.
8. In 2022–23 we launched a pilot with NHS Lothian and NHS Argyll & Bute using the OU Certificate of Higher Education in Healthcare Practice as a recruitment incentive and pre-entry onto stage 2 of OU pre-registration nursing programme for mental health. This pilot has already been successful in attracting and recruiting applicants who would not otherwise be able to access nursing, and with their retention. A final report on this first pilot will be produced Autumn 2023 when the first cohort complete the certificate. The pilot continues into 2023–24 expanding to accommodate more places on adult nursing for NHS Lothian. There is the potential for this pilot to be extended to other health boards beyond 2023/24 subject to the evaluation and further financial analysis.

Priority area 2: Quality learning and teaching

9. The Open University has been a provider of high quality, supported distance learning for over 50 years and we remain committed to using new and emerging technologies to make higher education accessible to more people around the world.
10. In September 2023, The Open University was awarded an overall gold rating in the Office for Students' Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF). In addition to this overall rating, the OU have also received two sub-ratings of Gold for Student Outcomes and Silver for Student Experience.
11. The Office for Students introduced changes to the National Student Survey in 2023 which removed the summative question on overall satisfaction for England. This has had a particular consequence for The Open University which operates across all four nations of the UK. We included overall satisfaction as an optional question and in Scotland achieved 88% (2nd place) but this data is not in the public domain. With full support from our Students Association, we have asked Office for Students that The Open University has an exception applied to add the overall satisfaction question to our core set of questions, allowing us to demonstrate in an equitable and complete way, the quality of student experience we provide across all four UK Nations.

12. After an unprecedented increase in the completion rate of both our continuing undergraduates and entrants in 2019–20, we have seen completion rates for both groups fall back due to an increase in students withdrawing from their studies before module end, from across nearly all demographic groups. Factors such as the cost-of-living crisis are impacting student behaviours and student time availability and will continue to have an impact going forward.
13. Work is in place within The Open University in Scotland and across the four nations to address these declines and improve student outcomes including the development of a structured induction experience and the use of exit milestone qualifications. There is inevitably a lag between action on retention and the impact showing in our data.
14. Unlike other higher education institutions, The Open University in Scotland is funded by Scottish Funding Council on student numbers at completion. As a result, all teaching grant received from SFC is directly linked to number of students successfully completing OU modules, across the student population. In 2022–23, we returned 6561.7 FTE completions eligible for funding, compared with non-controlled funded places of 4362.3 FTE (+50.4% above the number of places for which we receive SFC main teaching grant).
15. The Open University's [Student Charter](#), which was developed in partnership with the Students Association, sets out our aims for working together as a learning community, illustrates our shared values and what we can expect from each other.
16. The Open University in Scotland is passionate about ensuring the student voice is heard at all levels and helps inform our decision making. This is a core aspect of all activity, with development being led by our Access, Participation and Success team. We host online and face to face student consultation meetings, actively participate in the OU's Student Voice week each year with a Student Twitter Takeover and facilitate a 'Big Blether' focusing on study confidence and wellbeing.
17. The Open University in Scotland is currently reviewing the effectiveness of our biannual Student and Staff Engagement Group meetings to ensure meaningful representation from students, Associate Lecturers, faculty staff, academic-related and support staff.
18. The Open University is committed to supporting the well-being of its students and staff. The Open University's [Student and Staff Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy](#) has been developed in line with the Universities UK #stepchange framework for mental health in higher education, and is available on The OU in Scotland website.

19. This strategy aligns with The Open University in Scotland's [Student Mental Health Agreement \(SMHA\)](#) developed in partnership with the OU Students Association and with support from the National Union of Students Scotland's Think Positive project.
20. Using the Student Mental Health and Wellbeing Transition Fund 2023–24 we will continue to offer a virtual therapy service to our students in Scotland. We are also able to fund a Mental Health Advisor (Casework) in Scotland as part of a team providing a specialist, one-to-one support service for students needing guidance on managing complex mental health difficulties or severe emotional distress alongside their studies.
21. The Open University works with mental health support partners such as the text service Shout 85258 and TalkCampus to provide help to our students. We also offer an OU Wellbeing app to suggest positive habits to help maintain good wellbeing.
22. The Open University introduced the Report + Support system in 2022, to provide an easy and confidential way to report incidences of bullying, harassment, discrimination, sexual misconduct or hate crime.

Priority area 3: Coherent learning provision

23. The University takes advantage of its size and reach to develop vocational and work-based curriculum in partnership with organisations across a number of sectors; these are appropriate to the learning needs of the organisation and the individual. From Continuing Professional Development (CPD) workshops to the shaping of specific qualifications, we will continue to work with employers to understand their work-based learning needs and to ensure that our students can make a meaningful impact on the Scottish economy and society.
24. The Open University in Scotland and the National Trust for Scotland signed a Memorandum of Understanding in September 2023. The collaboration will provide a wide variety of learning options for the Trust's staff from free bitesize courses on the OU's OpenLearn platform to credit-bearing microcredentials. Our provision was mapped against the Trust's job families, providing a tailored selection of courses to support staff in their careers. In addition, content was mapped against key skills areas such as leadership, communication, creativity, sustainability and digital skills. We intend to role this model out to other organisations for 2023–34. This will include some key work with Scotland's 32 local authorities.

25. The increasing use of Open Educational Resources (OERs) in the workplace allows experimentation using that methodology to support learning and we are working with employers to develop OERs as part of bespoke learning packages for their workforce, particularly for employees who require an introduction to or reacquainting with formal learning.
26. The Open University in Scotland is delighted to have signed a Strategic Collaboration Agreement with NHS Education for Scotland in October 2023 which creates the opportunity over the coming year and beyond to harness the strengths and expertise of both organisations in the design and development of the current and future health and care workforce.
27. In 2023–24, we will maintain our strategic partnership with the STUC and Scottish Union Learning; building on our community outreach model to offer higher education to groups in the workplace. Typically, the participants are non-traditional learners.
28. The Open University in Scotland will continue its involvement in the South of Scotland Pathfinders work and represented on the Education & Skills Strategic Co-ordination Group. There are challenges for an organisation such as ours with national coverage to support numerous activities at a regional level.
29. New initiatives including *Graduate Futures* 3-day careers event and digitally badged *Graduate Skills Award* are designed to support Level 3 students and recent graduates successfully transition into career confident alumni.
30. Further to the success of the Open University's *Virtual Internships for Underrepresented Students* project winning the sparqs (Student Partnerships in Quality Scotland) Student Engagement Award in the 'Diverse Voices' category, our new AI-driven work experience activity pathway will proactively engage and support APS students to submit high quality internship applications, improve success in securing work experience opportunities and achieve longer term positive student outcomes.

Priority area 4: Work-based learning and skills

31. With three-quarters of our students in work while they study with us, and well over half of all part-time learners in Scotland, The Open University in Scotland is uniquely placed to support the skilling, reskilling and upskilling of the workforce through our work-based and work-related learning routes and experience in short course, modular delivery, Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), microcredentials, open educational resources and lifelong learning. We believe that part-time study and flexible work-based education initiatives can play an important role in supporting the economic recovery.

32. Over 2023–24 we will continue to fully utilise the SFC Upskilling Fund to develop and roll-out flexible skills-focused learning solutions, utilising our expertise in this area and working with partners and employers to ensure our provision is employer-led and meets the needs of the Scottish economy and employers' skills gaps.
33. We will continue to engage with Skills Development Scotland, Scottish Funding Council, Universities Scotland and the Strategic Board to ensure that the OU plays a central role in the development of the Future Skills agenda.
34. We have paused recruitment to our Graduate Apprenticeships in Cyber Security and Software Development due to issues of low take up. We continue to support our Graduate Apprentices from earlier cohorts through to the end of their qualification. We have continued to recruit high numbers of new students to our standard OU degree qualifications in the same subject areas (i.e. on modules which we offered within the cyber security and software development graduate apprenticeship programmes).
35. We have publicly made known our belief in the need for greater flexibility in the delivery of graduate apprenticeships and we continue to call for the development of a broader range of Graduate Apprenticeship frameworks that reflect the post-pandemic skills needs, e.g., social work, policing, nursing, and management at postgraduate level. Graduate Apprenticeships need to support the needs of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), the public and third sector who cannot best take advantage of the provision as it currently stands.
36. We welcome the recommendation in the Independent Review of the Skills Delivery Landscape by James Withers that the Scottish Government should ensure that there is provision in the system for those undertaking part-time learning to receive the same pro-rata level of funding support for living costs as those in full time education.

Priority area 5: Net zero and environmental sustainability response

37. The Open University has committed to divestment from fossil fuels by December 2023, decarbonising our energy supplies by 2030 and being 'net zero' by 2050 institutionally and across our supply chains. Our sustainability [policies, statements, reports and guidance](#) are available on the OU website.
38. The Open University in Scotland complies with the Climate Change (Duties of Public Bodies: Reporting Requirements) (Scotland) Order 2015 and will submit

its annual Climate Change report for 2022/23 to Scottish Government in November 2023.

39. The University is committed to:

- Monitor and report on energy consumption and carbon emissions
- Identify areas of significant energy use and set action plans to reduce energy demand and improve efficiency
- Adopt Net Zero Carbon building standard for new buildings and major refurbishments
- Integrate whole life carbon assessment and costings in business case and financial decision-making
- Embed net zero measures in architectural, mechanical, and electrical design standards and contractor handbook
- Continue to reduce operational energy use through retrofit projects to improve building energy performance
- Minimise energy demand through building fabric and service retrofits to improve building energy performance
- Heating and cooling policy that balances energy efficiency whilst maintaining thermal comfort levels
- Reduce carbon impacts from business travel choices
- Engage and embed energy responsible behaviours with all stakeholders through Go Green Programme, the Sustainability Planning Action and Reporting Kit (SPARK) tool and carbon literacy course.

40. *Responsible Futures* is a partnership between the University and the OU Students Association to embed sustainability in the formal, informal and subliminal curriculum which will be audited by our own trained students.

41. The Open University offers a wide range of [modules, qualifications](#) and careers information relevant to climate change and sustainability. The OU also provides free informal learning relevant to climate change on OpenLearn, iTunesU, YouTube and through its partnership with the BBC, reaching millions of people beyond our own students.

Priority area 6: High-quality research and innovation

42. The majority of The Open University's research funding is from UK Research and Innovation, with the SFC allocating a small amount of University Innovation funding to The OU in Scotland. The Research Excellence Framework 2021 recognised the OU's commitment to research and societal impact with 82% of its research impact assessed to be 'world-leading' (4*) or 'internationally excellent' (3*).

43. The Open University's [Research Plan for 2022-27](#) focuses on five activities:

- Open Societal Challenges
- The Next Generation
- Open Research
- Building On Our Strengths
- Improving Our Processes

The Open Societal Challenges (OSC) Online Platform is accessible to external stakeholders and potential collaborators here: [Open Societal Challenges](#).

In 2023-2024, we will continue to build an active research community in Scotland, contributing to some of the key societal challenges e.g. ageing well, climate change and inequalities in society.

44. The Open University Research Plan 2022-2027 is aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the UKRI Sustainability Concordat.

Priority area 7: University Innovation Fund

45. The Open University in Scotland utilises the University Innovation Fund (UIF) Platform Grant from Scottish Funding Council to maintain its knowledge exchange and innovation activities.
46. A summary review on the use of UIF and outcomes in 2022-23 is included in our Outcome Agreement self-evaluation report. Case studies will be submitted to Scottish Funding Council in March 2024 as requested.
47. Over AY 2023-24, we will engage fully with Scottish Funding Council and the sector, on the introduction of the KEIF, including being willing to pilot aspects of the new funding model in its first iteration. Colleagues in The Open University in Wales, who have considerable experience of the RWIF (that the KEIF will be modelled on), will also be able to offer insights to the HE sector in Scotland based on their experience. We believe that the KEIF has considerable potential and may afford other opportunities for The Open University in Scotland e.g. being incentivised through its civic mission activities.
48. We will continue to meet routinely with the UIF collaboration manager to explore collaborative opportunities where appropriate and will contribute fully to sector wide groups including RCDG.
49. **OUTCOME 1 Demand Stimulation: Increase the demand and quality of engagement from businesses and the public sector for university services.**
- In 2023-24, we will continue to promote our KE and innovation offer to SME's and local authorities, building on opportunities within our Open Societal Challenges programme.
 - We will encourage our academic community to engage with funding opportunities provided by Interface, including Innovation Vouchers, the Inward Investment Catalyst Fund, and other relevant strategic opportunities where appropriate.
 - We will develop programmes that dovetail with Scottish Government national priorities including an ageing well challenge programme, accessible to a large section of the Scottish population and programmes to help to inform the public on contemporary topical issues including the abolition of the not proven verdict in our criminal justice system, where we will develop resources to support prospective jurors in Scotland working collaboratively with the legal profession.

- We will engage with the Innovation Centres (as “infrastructure investments”) to better match opportunities for collaboration with The Open University.
- We will engage with Interface as they refine and develop their delivery model. Opportunities exist for a more strategic and pro-active relationship with Interface and The Open University going forward.
- We will further promote our offer of Microcredentials across the business and public sector to enable tailored skills development throughout the workforce.

50. OUTCOME 2 Simplification/Commercialisation: Simplify business access to the knowledge and expertise in Scottish universities

- We will refresh and revise our KE and innovation web presence at the OU in Scotland, featuring recent examples of our work.
- Scotland’s National Innovation Strategy published in June 2023 states: ‘We will design a new Research Commercialisation Framework for Scotland.’ At The Open University in Scotland, we will inform the implementation of this strategy and will work closely with our colleagues via RCDG to help to take this forward.
- We will work closely with academic colleagues, to help them align their interests and expertise to better fit the needs of businesses in Scotland.
- We will work pro-actively to engage new businesses in Scotland in the services of The Open University.

51. OUTCOME 3 Simplification/Greater Innovation in the economy: Make strategic use of their sectoral knowledge to promote greater innovation in the economy.

- Working with the University Innovation Fund Collaboration Manager, we will continue to engage with Innovate UK in Scotland, to influence policy and increase opportunity for Scottish businesses to innovate.
- Across our UIF portfolio, we will also engage with the HE sector to collaborate on sector wide initiatives where the OU can bring specific expertise. For example, in contributing to entrepreneurial education through distance learning, and the development of new collaborative programmes. We have pro-actively engaged with one of the key architects of the entrepreneurial campus model, and are exploring a number of ways that the OU could usefully contribute.
- We are engaging with colleagues in SRUC to explore a number of potential collaborations, related to the economic ambitions of the Scottish Government e.g., supporting entrepreneurs in rural localities.

- In 2023–24, we will work with other Scottish HEIs to explore opportunities through mission-led funding via the Challenge Fund Network.

52. OUTCOME 4. Entrepreneurialism: Make a significant and positive change in the way entrepreneurial opportunities are promoted and delivered to students, HEI staff, and businesses.

- We will continue to contribute to the sector wide Enterprise Support Group (ESG), involving staff responsible for start-up support and development in our HEIs.
- We will continue to play a lead role in the development of our Open Business Creators programme, targeting business start-ups and new entrepreneurs.
- We will contribute to the sector wide Entrepreneurial Campus model, exploring opportunities where the OU can make a distinct and unique difference. The OU in Scotland received an uplift of only £1k for 2023/24 so is limited in being able to undertake additional activity in this area.
- We will explore external funding opportunities, in Scotland and with our OU colleagues across the UK to explore gaps in learning provision.

53. OUTCOME 5. International: Pool knowledge and networks and share good practice to promote and engage Scotland internationally.

- As in previous years, we will continue to promote Scotland in a global context. Our continuing broadcast media partnership with the BBC, will result in a number of new programmes being released in 2024, across all of the BBC's broadcast platforms, and will be available globally to a mass audience.
- April 2024 will see the end and evaluation of The Open University's Zambian Education School based Training (ZEST) project which is funded by The Scottish Government. The OU has worked with World Vision Zambia to develop and roll out a high quality, school-based, professional development programme which will reach up to 4,000 primary school teachers and leaders across Zambia's Central Province.

54. OUTCOME 6 Inclusive Growth and Social Impact: Scale up support of the Scottish Government's ambitions for inclusive growth.

- In 2023–24, we will major in our Open Societal Challenges project, developing new research and innovation projects in Scotland focused on equalities, living well and climate change.
- We have successfully secured the European Lunar Symposium (ELS) for Dumfries and Galloway in June 2024. It is envisaged this project will bring considerable economic benefits and wider social impact to Dumfries and

Galloway. Additionally, we will work with key partners including the South of Scotland Enterprise Agency to maximise opportunities and future impact. Over 8 partners will support this programme from regional place-based partners to international collaborators including the European Space Agency.

- We will help to drive the Scottish Government's ambitions for a green recovery, a well-being economy and a just transition to net zero. For example, we will promote our world leading public engagement collaboration with the BBC to support Scotland's ambitions to realise net zero by 2045, through engaging broadcasts with a focus on climate change and climate action e.g., the Planet Earth 3 series. In addition, we will engage with some of our key partners including the Royal Scottish Geographical Society to further drive the net zero agenda in Scotland through publications and events. Our aspirations in the green recovery arena are aligned to priority area 5 in the outcome agreement (net zero and environmental sustainability).
- The OU's social justice mission ensures that equalities are at the heart of everything we do and inclusiveness permeates our approach to knowledge exchange and innovation e.g., reaching out to underrepresented groups to enable them to be involved in our public engagement activities.

55. OUTCOME 7 Equality and Diversity: Ensure positive promotion of equality and diversity in staff and all who are affected by the use of the UIF

- We will continue to promote EDI training, including the OU and Santander co-developed anti-racism course, Union Black, to our staff and partners.
- We have developed a new year-long programme called "Black Leadership Empowerment Programme" that we are currently promoting to employers in Scotland and aim to launch the first cohort in October 2024.
- Equalities are an integral theme in our Open Societal Challenges programme, and we will ensure there are more research examples from Scotland linked to that programme.

Outcome Agreement between The Open University in Scotland and the Scottish Funding Council for AY 2023-24

On behalf of The Open University in Scotland

Signed:



Print name: Susan Stewart

Position: Director

Date: 05/12/23

Signed:



Print name: Malcolm Sweeting

Position: Chair

Date: 05/12/23

On behalf of the Scottish Funding Council:

Signed:



Print name: Karen Watt

Position: Chief Executive

Date: 15 January 2024