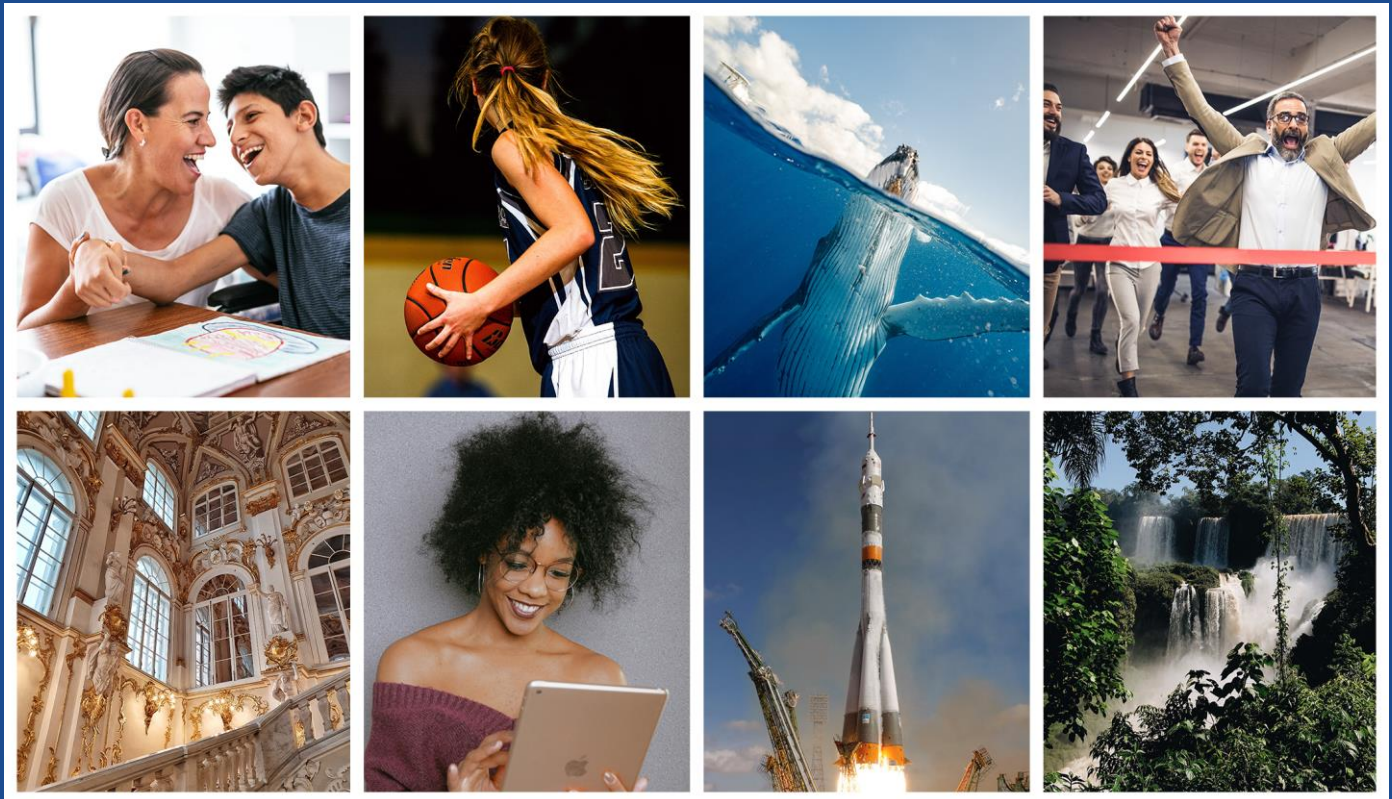


# OPENLEARN ANNUAL REPORT

2019/20



## WELCOME: JANE ROBERTS, HEAD OF OPENLEARN



I don't think I can start this year's report without mentioning the impact COVID-19 has had on all of us. None of us could have foreseen at the beginning of the year such a dramatic change to all our personal and working lives.

The situation led to a surge in interest in OpenLearn, with an overnight five-fold increase in visitor numbers (see [page 8](#)). We are delighted to have supported so many people with home learning, personal and professional development, academic and general interest content.

In a rapid response to the coronavirus lockdown, the OpenLearn team produced new collections and content including coronavirus information, support for educators pivoting to online learning and resources for school students, nursing staff and furloughed workers among others. Find out more on [pages 8–9](#).

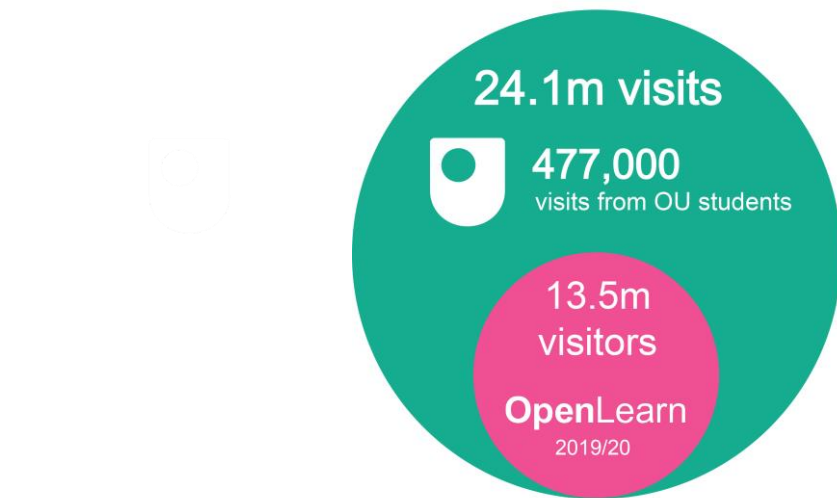
Other 2019/20 highlights include a brand new personal finance course in collaboration with Money Saving Expert ([page 6](#)), launching OpenLearn Wales ([page 10](#)), working with Job Centre Plus to promote OpenLearn courses to job seekers ([page 11](#)), and continuing to support our existing and potential students with our growing collection of employability badged courses ([pages 7](#) and [11](#)).

I have been especially proud to be leading the OpenLearn team this year. Despite the challenges we have all faced, every single member of our small team stepped up to support each other and to make a difference. I hope that you enjoy reading about it in this report.

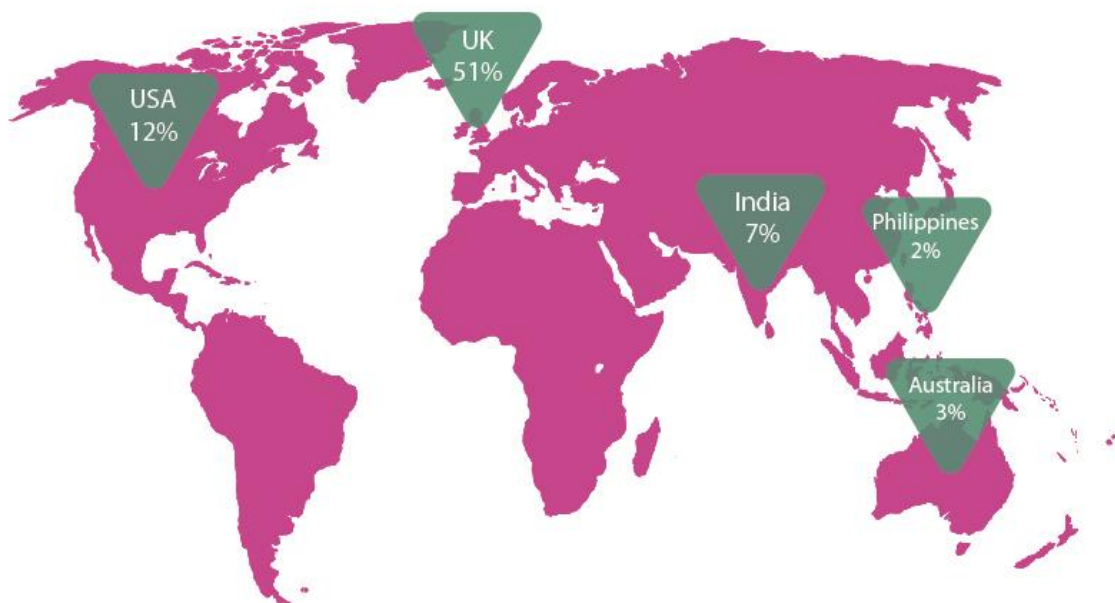
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# 1. 2019/20 HEADLINES



## TOP 5 LOCATIONS OF LEARNERS



## OPENLEARN CONTENT SYNDICATED TO OTHER PLATFORMS



YouTube	4.4 million visitors
Amazon Kindle	580,000 downloads
iTunes	330,000 downloads/streams
Google Play	10,000 downloads

## 2. OPENLEARN: DID YOU KNOW?

OpenLearn has been the home of free learning from The Open University since 2006 and has attracted over 80 million visitors worldwide to date – that’s roughly the same as the population of Germany!

### Did you know that...

18% of OpenLearn users consider themselves to have a disability; 53% do not have a degree; for 28% English is not their first spoken language.<sup>1</sup>

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



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.

Content is written by academics and subject specialists, spanning the breadth of the OU curriculum as well as cross-curricular content like study skills, careers and employability. Content is commissioned in support of faculty priorities, as a result of OU research, for student support, or meeting topical demand.

Our [1,000+ courses](#) include those extracted from OU modules – up to 5% of the content of each module is released on OpenLearn in support of the OU’s social mission.

All learners studying a free course can earn a free Statement of Participation, or a digital badge if studying a BOC (Badged Open Course). 927,000 statements and 76,000 badges were awarded in 2019/20.

It’s not just about courses! OpenLearn also hosts over 15,000 articles, interactive activities, audio and video items covering just about everything from [bullying and manipulation](#) to [the birth of the solar system](#). Content hubs such as [Start your career with OpenLearn](#) bring together topical content for particular audiences or events.

We increasingly work with external partners to produce or endorse content, such as the [Risk Management](#) course produced in collaboration with Rolls-Royce PLC.

The [OpenLearn YouTube channel](#) hosts over 1,700 bite-sized videos on a wide range of subjects including our globally popular ‘60 second adventures’ in subjects such as philosophy, economics, history of English, astronomy and religion. The channel has more than 245,000 subscribers.

eBook versions of OpenLearn courses are syndicated to [Amazon Kindle](#) and [Google Play](#).

**Find out more  
about our content:**

[Courses](#)  
[Subjects](#)  
[For study](#)  
[For life](#)

[YouTube](#)  
[Amazon Kindle](#)  
[iTunes](#)  
[Google Play](#)

[Facebook](#)  
[Twitter](#)  
[Instagram](#)

<sup>1</sup> 2019 responses to OL platform survey.

### 3. OPENLEARN'S TOP CONTENT

#### TOP 10 COURSES:

	Course	Type
1	<a href="#">Understanding autism</a>	Level 1 Badged Open Course
2	<a href="#">Attachment in the early years</a>	Level 2 module-derived
3	<a href="#">Introduction to child psychology</a>	Level 1 module-derived
4	<a href="#">MSE's Academy of Money</a>	Level 1 Badged Open Course
5	<a href="#">The science of nutrition and healthy eating</a>	Level 1 Badged Open Course
6	<a href="#">Introduction to bookkeeping and accounting</a>	Level 1 module-derived
7	<a href="#">Forensic psychology</a>	Level 1 Badged Open Course
8	<a href="#">Understanding dyslexia</a>	Level 2 module-derived
9	<a href="#">Learn to code for data analysis</a>	Level 1 Badged Open Course
10	<a href="#">Everyday maths 1 (Bringing learning to life)</a>	Level 0 bespoke

#### TOP 10 NON-COURSE ENGAGEMENT ITEMS:

	Item	Type
1	<a href="#">Do you have a photographic memory?</a>	Interactive - activity
2	<a href="#">Hitler's rise and fall: timeline</a>	Article - timeline
3	<a href="#">Riches &amp; misery: the consequences of the Atlantic slave trade</a>	Article
4	<a href="#">What do you really know about autism?</a>	Interactive - quiz
5	<a href="#">DIY: generate your own electricity</a>	Article
6	<a href="#">What are the benefits of interdisciplinary study?</a>	Article
7	<a href="#">Sperm counts</a>	Article
8	<a href="#">Five tort law cases you should know</a>	Videos
9	<a href="#">From Old English to modern English</a>	Article
10	<a href="#">12 famous Confucius quotes on education and learning</a>	Article - poll

#### TOP 10 OPENLEARN YOUTUBE VIDEOS:

	Item
1	<a href="#">The Silver Bridge disaster</a>
2	<a href="#">Shakespeare: original pronunciation</a>
3	<a href="#">History of English (combined)</a>
4	<a href="#">Troy Story: The Iliad (1/2)</a>
5	<a href="#">The invisible hand: 60 second adventures in economics (1/6)</a>
6	<a href="#">What is shell shock? – Understanding shell shock (2/4)</a>
7	<a href="#">Alexander Fleming and the accidental mould juice – The serendipity of science (2/3)</a>
8	<a href="#">Structural realism – International relations (1/7)</a>
9	<a href="#">Bauhaus: Design in a nutshell (3/6)</a>
10	<a href="#">Yeast experiment: measuring respiration in yeast – Think like a scientist (8/10)</a>

## 4. MSE'S ACADEMY OF MONEY



One of the most exciting projects OpenLearn was involved with this year was the creation of a new badged course with MoneySavingExpert.com (MSE).

Launched in May 2020, the [MSE's Academy of Money](#) includes six sessions, each on a different aspect of personal finance, and follows the successful pilot of a single session course on mortgages created in partnership with MSE last year.



**Martin Lewis, founder of MSE**, and who features in videos on each of the six topics, said: “Companies continually spend billions of pounds on advertising, marketing and teaching their staff to sell. Yet consumers don’t get any training. We need to redress that balance. That’s why we’ve chosen to fund this new project and partner with The Open University. Our aim is to provide a more formal learning environment for those who want to dedicate their time to improving their financial knowledge.”

With MSE promoting the course to its own huge audience (13m newsletter subscribers and counting!), we were prepared for a big initial take-up, and it didn’t disappoint. With several thousand course enrolments in the first few days alone, MSE’s Academy of Money can boldly claim to be OpenLearn’s fastest growing course.

**Martin Upton, Senior Lecturer in finance** at the OU and lead academic on the course, working with MSE and the OpenLearn team, said of the initial success: “The huge audience the course is already attracting highlights the appetite there is for personal financial education. It’s great news that The Open University has teamed up with Martin Lewis and his MSE team to provide this free online course.”

With 200,000 page views, 25,000 enrolments and 2,500 digital badges awarded in just 73 days, the course was the 4<sup>th</sup> most popular on OpenLearn in 2019/20. We continue to work with MSE by sharing updates on the course and continuing promotion, and have provided the digital badge image for use by learners on their MSE forum profiles to proudly share their accomplishment.

**MoneySavingExpert**  
Cutting your costs, fighting your corner



## 5. SUPPORTING OU STUDENTS

Supporting Open University students has always been an important part of OpenLearn's remit, through offering a number of courses, content and site sections created specifically to support new, existing and potential students.

### NEW STUDENT INDUCTION

The hugely successful course, [Being an OU student](#), is an integral part of the new undergraduate student induction, as well as giving a great insight into studying with the OU for those looking into HE options. It had almost 16,000 total enrolments in 2019/20, with at least a third of new students engaging. Students who engaged were more likely to continue studying their OU module than those who didn't engage, and more likely to continue to a further module(s).

### SKILLS AND SUPPORT

New this year, [All my own work](#) is an interactive film designed to help students avoid the pitfalls of plagiarism in higher education and get to grips with this tricky topic.

The curated skills areas of OpenLearn continue to be popular with student users. [For study](#) supports learners to develop study skills such as essay writing, note-taking and digital literacy while [For life](#) supports skills outside of study, including health and wellbeing, finance, relationships, skills for work and preparing for employment.

### MODULE CHOICE AND PREPARATION

OpenLearn offers an unparalleled chance to 'test the water', try subjects and help students to make the right module choices with confidence. Up to 5% of the module content of almost all OU modules is available as a standalone free course on OpenLearn. Our courses are always popular with students between modules, but particularly so this year, with cancelled exams and EMAs giving some students a longer break during which they have used OpenLearn to keep learning, get ahead with their next module, refresh skills and prepare for October.

### OPENLEARN EMBEDDED IN FORMAL STUDY

OpenLearn courses are increasingly becoming part of formal learning. For example, learners on E235 'Sports Coaching and Fitness' move from the VLE to study either of OpenLearn's 'Learning from sport burnout and overtraining' or 'Exploring the psychological aspects of sports injury' in a managed way with additional materials to lift to degree level. Similarly, 'Looking globally: the future of education' forms part of EE830 formal study. This trend is set to continue in 2020/21, for example E312 students will complete a BOC on athlete transitions.



## 6. CORONAVIRUS RESPONSE

It is impossible to review OpenLearn's 2019/20 without looking at the impact of COVID-19. In the period March – July 2020, as the UK experienced lockdown, the number of visitors to OpenLearn, the number of enrolments on our free courses and the numbers earning their statements of participation and/or digital badge, reached an all-time high as the world turned to online learning.

Prior to March 2020, the typical number of daily visitors to OpenLearn was 40,000. In the third week of March, daily visitor numbers rose steadily into the 50,000s and then, overnight, to 90,000; and 24 hours later to more than 200,000 visitors in a day. These high visitor numbers were sustained throughout the Spring and Summer, enabling the site to soar past the 80 million all-time visitors mark.

Even better was the fact that visitors didn't just come to look at OpenLearn – they came to learn. Since lockdown, there have been more than 1.7 million course enrolments, while almost 1 in 2 enrolments led to course completion!

The message was 'let's come out of this period of social distancing and isolation with more knowledge than ever!'

### FIGURES AT A GLANCE



### CORONAVIRUS CONTENT

One of the reasons for such unprecedented numbers over these last few months was how quickly the OpenLearn team was able to respond to this changing demand. In addition to the regular choice of courses and content, new learning hubs focused on [mental health](#), discovering new [hobbies and skills](#) and [family learning](#) (among others) were created, as well as a collection of courses suitable to support those studying GCSE and A-Levels, as they found teaching and exams cancelled.

Also created was a dedicated collection of exclusive articles and content from OU academics on the [coronavirus](#) itself, to keep learners up to date with the latest news and research. This has been added to and updated regularly throughout the pandemic. In April, we further added to the COVID-19 support offered on OpenLearn by creating a nursing and healthcare hub, designed to support those healthcare workers returning to work to support the NHS, NHS in Scotland, NHS Wales or Health and Social Care in Northern Ireland.

The most popular of the newly created hubs was [How can you take your teaching online?](#). Leading with the 'Take your teaching online' course, the hub also includes a variety of other courses, interactives, academic insights and animations on a range of subjects designed to help educators pivot from the classroom to online learning.



### The hubs created include:

[How can you take your teaching online?](#)

[New free courses and hobbies to try while in isolation](#)

[FREE Mental Health Tips and Resources](#)

[Business support for small and medium-sized enterprises](#)

[Free courses for teachers and student teachers and those interested in teaching](#)

[FREE courses and content for school study](#)

[Covid-19 nursing and healthcare: learning to help you in practice](#)

## SKILLS FOR FURLOUGHED WORKERS

Five OpenLearn courses were selected as part of the Department for Education's [National Careers Service Skills Toolkit](#) – a collection of tools and resources to help those in England affected by coronavirus (particularly furloughed workers) improve their digital and numeracy skills. This accounted directly for more than 15,000 enrolments across the five courses. 12 more OpenLearn courses were added in phase 2, in September 2020.

Similar schemes were also very successful in the Nations: [My World of Work](#) in Scotland; [Working Wales](#) in Wales; and [NIDirect](#) in Northern Ireland. Over 100,000 visitors have accessed OpenLearn via these schemes.

## LOCKDOWN LEARNING

Learners of all ages have been supported by OpenLearn over the last few months, from secondary school pupils to undergraduates, those on furlough to those brushing up on skills or hobbies.

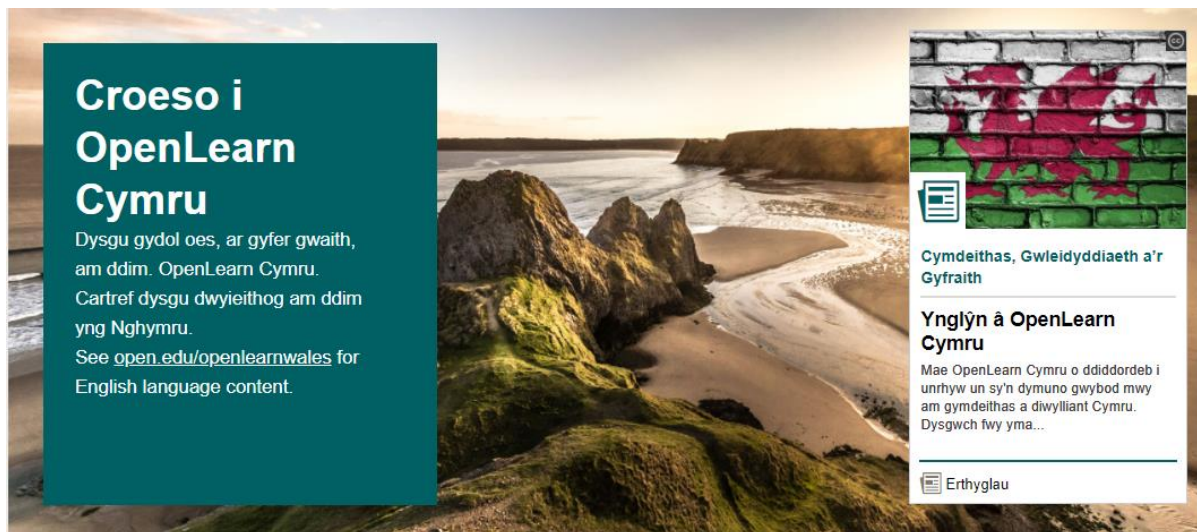
Social media has brought us posts from many new learners who have made good use of the resources on offer, and none more so than 11-year-old Tiernán Evison from County Meath. [Tiernán completed 11 OpenLearn courses during lockdown](#), ranging from 'An introduction to sustainable energy' to 'Square roots and powers'.



As **Susan Stewart, Director of The Open University in Scotland**, said: "This is a challenging time and we know people may feel isolated. Visit the OpenLearn website and I guarantee there will be something that interests and engages you."



## 7. OPENLEARN WALES



The [OpenLearn Wales](#) hub brings together a collection of free educational resources relevant to Wales, learners in Wales, and anyone interested in learning more about Welsh society and culture.

Previously hosted on OpenLearn Create, OpenLearn Wales has been revamped and expanded, and now features a wider range of resources and courses. Working in partnership with the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol, the body with responsibility for ensuring more study opportunities for Welsh-medium students, the Welsh language hub [OpenLearn Cymru](#) provides learners with an improved Welsh-medium experience.

Content on the hubs includes everyday maths and English skills, courses on studying bilingually, resources for school governors in Wales, Hafan – an interactive experience about Welsh language and culture, audio on the place of rugby in Welsh culture, materials on learning the Welsh language, and much more!

**Amy James, 28 from Cardiff**, had never done any distance learning before using OpenLearn. “There’s so much choice on there,” she says. “I’ve been thinking about one of the management courses next, but for now I’m focusing on improving my personal finance knowledge. Everyone will find something that they’re interested in. I’ve only been doing this for two weeks now, and I’ve already got one of my friends doing a course on there.”

“The OpenLearn Wales and OpenLearn Cymru hubs are a significant development in how we offer free learning. Now we have a place where bilingual content developed by the OU in Wales can sit alongside courses and materials with a Welsh focus that have been produced by our academics across the UK. It’s a one stop shop for learners based in Wales for anything from Welsh history to Essential skills in English and maths. It will also have a global appeal for people who want to understand more about Wales.

“The coronavirus pandemic has led to a surge of interest in free learning in Wales, and the number of OpenLearn visitors shot up to over 60,000 in April compared to an average of 17,000 at the start of 2020. I hope that for many of these users, this will mark the beginning of a long-term relationship and learner journey with the OU in Wales, as they see the increased benefits of free, flexible distance learning.

“Diolch i bawb sydd wedi gweithio'n ddi-baid i sefyldu'r plattform digidol arbennig hwn.”

**Lynnette Thomas, Deputy Director, The Open University in Wales**

## 8. EMPLOYABILITY

Employability is a key part of OpenLearn’s remit, fulfilled through the creation of relevant content on OpenLearn, and through working with partners to signpost content and reach those who would benefit from it.

Numerous courses have been designed to help develop ‘soft skills’, digital skills and those key to career development. Those launched in the last year include [Effective communication in the workplace](#), [Digital thinking tools for better decision making](#), [Collective leadership](#) and [Understanding organisational value](#), and they can be found in one place – under the ‘[Skills for work](#)’ heading of the site’s ‘[For Life](#)’ section.

One of the biggest initiatives of 2019/20 in this area was [the partnership with the Department for Work & Pensions](#) (DWP) and Job Centre Plus (JCP), which is helping to tackle the skills gap in jobseekers. JCP career coaches were trained to support jobseekers undertake the courses, and after a successful pilot programme the scheme is due to be rolled out nationally to all 750 JCP offices across England, Scotland and Wales, beginning in 2020/21.

The programme has also had wider impact on the local community, gaining support from other local businesses and partners including Unilever and Fulham Football Club.

**Cameron King, Employer Adviser, Department for Work and Pensions**, explained: “The OpenLearn programme has proved very successful with customers and partners and it is exciting to be able to offer a range and breadth of free courses to support our customers at whatever stage of their learning journey and whatever stage of their employability. The insight shared from The Open University has been invaluable in helping us to



better understand the needs of industry in terms of skills and continuous learning and has also informed the nature and scope of how we offer some of our digital learning opportunities to customers.”

You can learn more and watch a round table discussion on OpenLearn’s role in supporting employability, including DWP’s Cameron King, [here on the Apprenticeships blog](#).

## 9. OUR PARTNERS

We are proud to work with a range of partners:



**“As a self-employed online fitness instructor, these free learning opportunities at the OU have been great for my professional development and I love getting a badge to put on my website.” – Alison**

**“I started on these while waiting to start my course – so I picked out the ones that I thought would be relevant. This worked out well as it prepared me for the course.”  
– Trish**

**“Already done it. Brilliant. It’s what got me started doing an OU degree.” –  
Lorraine, learner on Forensic Psychology**

**“I have been using the OpenLearn courses during lockdown as they help me focus and count towards my CPD.” – Diane**

**[www.openlearn.com](http://www.openlearn.com)**