SUBMISSION BY THE OPEN UNIVERSITY IN SCOTLAND

Draft Adult Learning Strategy

July 2021

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The Open University in Scotland Submission June 2021

Please provide any high-level comments on the content (pages 7 - 15), for example, are there any key pieces of information or important considerations missing?

The Open University in Scotland (OUiS) is the leading provider of non-accredited online learning, with our free OpenLearn platform accessed by more than 600,000 people in Scotland in 2019/20 and available to every community in Scotland.

We are also Scotland's widening access university, with an open entry policy that means most of our undergraduate modules do not require prior educational qualifications (such as Highers) to study with us. We have over 21,000 part-time students.

We offer a dedicated suite of Microcredentials developed for schools, local authorities, unions and education providers in the FE, HE and Community Education sectors enabling them to benefit from the OUs expertise in online learning delivery and pedagogy. Created by The Open University (OU), delivered through FutureLearn and endorsed by industry partners Microcredentials take just ten to twelve weeks of online study.

We have worked in partnership with third sector, community providers, the public sector and others to develop bespoke, learner-centred resources to help plan learner pathways and build skills and confidence for accredited study.

We understand the adult learner journey and the barriers they may have in accessing higher education.

We are totally committed to the vision for adult learning in Scotland, *'Adult learning in Scotland will develop better skilled, educated, confident and empowered people contributing to connected and inclusive communities',* and look forward to contributing to its delivery.

Theme 1: Expanding and Extending Adult Learning
Do you have any comments on the recommendations within this theme?

OUiS has a key role to play in these recommendations as demonstrated by our experience outlined in the introductory section.

We are keen to be involved in discussions around how we support the expansion and extension of adult learning building on, and learning from, existing models and partnerships.

Does your organisation/network currently have any planned or ongoing work that would contribute to the implementation of these recommendations?

1. Open Learning Champions

We have a Scotland-wide network of Open Learning Champions, drawn from community and third sector organisations, who have undertaken a workshop with us to develop the skills and confidence to support people to access online learning, with a particular focus on non-accredited learning on OpenLearn and other free OU platforms.

"The Open University has hundreds of free courses across all areas of study and are a great place to begin studying. As the minimum age is 13, my son has also picked up a few courses." Learner, 2020

"I am privileged to be doing a course called Succeeding in a Digital World. I am now building my confidence back, no longer the weakest link in my family." Learner, 2021

We recognise that some adult learners may need support to get online, to navigate the options and to plan their learning journeys and this is where our Champions come in.

The network of nearly 400 champions across Scotland covering twenty-seven local authority areas. From our most recent survey, 11% of champions are community / adult educators, 17% are support / development workers, 11% learning facilitators, 17% are volunteers, and 5% volunteer coordinators

"My role as a champion involves a discussion around what courses are available and what might be of interest to them through to how to actually access the courses and choosing the course that is pitched at the right level for them." Open Learning Champion, 2021

2. Open Pathways: supporting the adult learner journey

Our Open Pathways resource is designed for learners to plan their pathways into accredited learning from informal and online learning, including a specific pathway for those undertaking the Adult Achievement Award (SCQF6). We also have a module called Making Your Learning Count (SCQF7) which allows learners to convert 150 hours of informal, online and community-based learning into credit through reflection and group activities while developing skills for formal study. We have three Access modules (SCQF6) to prepare people for undergraduate study.

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5. Bespoke Open Educational Resources developed in partnership

We have worked in partnership with community, third sector organisations and local authorities to co-create bespoke, open educational resources with learners on our OpenLearn Create platform and curated collections and portals on OpenLearn.

We make many of our open educational resources available with a creative commons licence so practitioners can use, share and adapt them to their learners' needs and contexts. We also make them available, as standard, in a range of formats (Word, PDF, Kindle) for accessibility and offline use.

Examples include:

- Everyday computer skills – a beginner level digital skills course co-created with disabled people, in partnership with Lead Scotland
- Caring Counts – a reflection and planning course for carers, co-created with carers and young adult carers, in partnership with Carers Trust Scotland
- Reflecting on Transitions – a reflection and planning course for refugees, migrants and other New Scots, in partnership with Bridges Programmes, Glasgow
- Volunteer Scotland have used the platform to develop a range of resources for volunteers and volunteer managers in collaboration with the OU's Centre for Voluntary Sector Leadership
- Skills Portal for Community Councils - a curated portal of free courses to upskill Scotland's community councillors

- [Skills for Work](#) - portal developed in partnership with all of Scotland's thirty-two local authorities and [SCVO](#). Supporting both the [Kickstart](#) and [Young Person's Guarantee](#) schemes and endorsed by [Young Enterprise Scotland](#) it provides those young people we know are most affected by the pandemic with employability and personal skills through a dedicated [portal](#).
- Working in partnership with the [Improvement Service](#), we are currently scoping out developing a new course on the [Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015](#) for community councillors.

"Scotland's Local Authorities are excited by this new partnership with The Open University and believe these new tools will help us tackle inequality in our communities" Pamela Smith SLAED

"I'm a relatively new Community Councillor in the South Cardonald & Crookston CC. I've begun working my way through the OU courses and am finding them excellent - the legal skills is the one I am currently doing. The courses are concise and easy to use, I'm hoping to complete all of them. I have to add, they're inspiring me to go back to university too!" Chris Queen, Cardonald & Crookston Community Council.

What specific actions could your organisation/network make, or contribute, to implement these recommendations?

1. We can share our recent evaluation of the [Open Learning Champions](#) project to contribute to evidence of current delivery of adult learning. Tracking learner journeys and outcomes can be a challenge and some methods for doing this are suggested in the evaluation report.

3. We are currently scoping a project to develop online ESOL resources for our [OpenLearn](#) platform, co-created with minority communities in Glasgow.

4.We provide many free online resources (outlined above) to support pathways into accredited learning and build study skills and confidence so learners are ready to succeed when they start formal study.

5. We can provide workshops for community and adult learning practitioners to become open learning champions, with the skills and confidence to support people to access online learning. We can also signpost practitioners to resources to support their practice.

6. In receipt of the [National Transition Training Fund](#), we are able to offer funded learning to adults who are unemployed and have been impacted by COVID-19.

7. We are scoping out [ExpertTracks](#) which is subscription based adult learning programme on partner site Future Learn. Learners can mix and match their learning, earn digital badge and learn from multiple providers including OUiS.

Case Study

We are working with the [Hibernian Football Club Community Foundation](#) to develop a range of innovative employability programmes for delivery cross Edinburgh and the Lothians. The project is inspired by work by European Football clubs in Sweden and Spain who provide employability programmes for refugees.

Charlie Bennett, Chief Executive Officer, Hibernian Community Foundation said,

"The new partnership will marry the experience of the Foundation together with the reach of Hibernian Football Club and the commitment of the Open University to support upskilling across local communities through exciting employability programmes that will support people in their journey back into employment."

With additional resource, we could:

- Radically scale our Open Learning Champions model with its evidenced impact, working in partnership with CLD practitioners and others.

- Build on four pilots with Rangers, Celtic, Dundee and Hibernian community football trusts to provide learning to people on community programmes and roll this out to all major clubs and their community fan bases.

From your organisation's/network's point of view, who would the key partners be to ensure the success of these recommendations?

Local authorities and third sector organisations providing community-based adult learning, Improvement Service or Community Council Liaison Officers (CCLOs), unions, football clubs, SCDI, CBI, FSB Scotland

Theme 2 - Connecting the Adult Learning Journey
Do you have any comments on the recommendations within this theme?

We acknowledge, as stated in the consultation, that systems for Recognition of Prior Learning and progression underpinned by the SCQF do not always support learner journeys into and through accredited study across the sector.

The OU offers accredited modules that recognise prior learning and a generous credit transfer system into our open qualifications.

We are keen to be involved in discussions around a structured national partnership to support seamless journeys.

Does your organisation/network currently have any planned or ongoing work that would contribute to the implementation of these recommendations?

We provide digital badges on many of our free OpenLearn courses to recognise non-accredited learning.

Our Open Pathways resource includes a specific pathway for those undertaking the Adult Achievement Award (SCQF6) to plan their journeys into formal study.

We also have a module called Making Your Learning Count (SCQF7) which allows learners to convert 150 hours of informal, online and community-based learning into credit through reflection and group activities while developing skills for formal study.

"The flexibility of OpenLearn and achieving badges is a good start point for learners. So much content - can see a lot of potential for young people work with + CPD opportunities for myself" Open Learning Champion, 2019

We support seamless progression into our OU study. Our credit transfer system is more generous than many higher education institutions. Previous study is mapped using the SCQF to determine the best point for the learner to begin OU study and reduce the amount of time it will take them to gain a qualification. Our Open qualifications offer the most flexible path to a degree as you can tailor it to your requirements and transfer credit from previous study in any subject.

We have formal partnerships with the 15 regional colleges across Scotland that promote progression routes and credit transfer opportunities for students who wish to go on to university-level study with the OU. The OU Choices programme with Dundee and Angus College uses a blended approach to integrate online OU access modules into a wider programme of study skills.

What specific actions could your organisation/network make, or contribute, to implement these recommendations?

8. We are keen to be involved in discussions for a national RPL process and to explore how digital badges, Open Pathways and Making Your Learning Count can be part of this.

9. We will continue to use SCQF to map previous study and award credit to ensure the adult learning journey into OU study, particularly our Open qualifications, is as seamless as possible.

From your organisation's/network's point of view, who would the key partners be to ensure the success of these recommendations?

SCQF, FE and HE sector partners

Theme 3 – Communication

Do you have any comments on the recommendations within this theme?

As a university with an open entry policy, our marketing and communications activities seek to raise awareness of adult learning opportunities for undergraduate study. Through our social media channels, our partners and our network of Open Learning Champions, we raise awareness of free learning on OpenLearn and FutureLearn.

A key focus of our work is ensuring that people from Scotland's most disadvantaged groups and communities can all access higher education at any stage of their lives to help improve their work and life opportunities.

We work in partnership with SCVO and many third sector organisations to reach people from the most deprived areas, people with disabilities and chronic health conditions, carers, ethnic minority groups, and people with care experience. We embed support into our curriculum design and delivery at every stage of the student's learning journey, including mental health support.

We understand the difficulty of measuring the impact of adult learning as learning journeys may take place over years, with different providers and sources of support.

We are keen to be involved in discussions on how this could be measured more effectively.

What specific actions could your organisation/network make, or contribute, to implement these recommendations?

10. Our marketing and communications channels will continue to target adult learners to raise awareness of accredited and non-accredited learning opportunities. We will work with partners to ensure these are cascaded to practitioners and learners. We will increase the reach of our open learning champions network so practitioners are aware of the free online learning opportunities on OpenLearn and other platforms.

12. We can share our recent evaluation of the Open Learning Champions which identifies some of the challenges in measuring adult learning and some methods for doing this.

From your organisation's/network's point of view, who would the key partners be to ensure the success of these recommendations?

Marketing and communications colleagues, open learning champions and other partnership networks.

Theme 4 – Access and Inclusion

Do you have any comments on the recommendations within this theme?

Having provided opportunities for adult learners for more than 50 years, we have an understanding of the barriers that impact them. The OU provides accessible routes into higher education, starting with free online learning at the level the learner is ready to start at. We work in partnership with community and third sector organisations, employers, unions, local authorities, colleges and schools to reach the most disadvantaged communities.

In our experience, the most significant barriers to HE that our adult learners face are:

- Confidence
- Funding
- Time and competing responsibilities – work, parenting, caring
- Disability
- Secondary education qualifications
- Digital skills and poverty

We have developed resources and support to address these barriers to make higher education accessible for the widest possible range of learners.

Does your organisation/network currently have any planned or ongoing work that would contribute to the implementation of these recommendations?

We actively work to reduce barriers for adult learners in the following ways:

Confidence – our Open Pathways resource is designed for learners to build their confidence by starting slowly with short chunks of learning on OpenLearn and working their way up to longer, badged courses and then planning their next steps into accredited learning. Our Open Learning Champions provide support for learners within trusted relationships.

"This is university but it's not terrifying." Open Learning Champion, 2019

Funding – our OpenLearn resources are free to all so learners can access the resources they need to build their study skills. Once they are ready to start accredited learning, we offer funded Access modules and all our undergraduate modules are covered by the Part-time Fee Grant for learners resident in Scotland with a personal income of up to £25k per year.

Time and competing responsibilities – most of our learners balance their study with work, parenting or caring (or sometimes all three) and they choose the OU because we offer maximum flexibility to learn where and when works best for you. We offer specific support and funding for student carers.

"Excellent support available, particularly for care-experienced and carers. The OU has a track record of supporting learners from all backgrounds to achieve their educational (and employment) potential." Open Learning Champion, 2021

Disability - 25% of our students declare a disability and we provide specific support for disabled students with dedicated advisors. All our online resources are available in a range of formats as standard, and we provide additional accommodations as required.

Secondary education qualifications – our open entry policy means that there are no minimum entry requirements for most of our undergraduate modules.

Digital skills and poverty – we have worked in partnership with [Lead Scotland](#) to develop [Everyday Computer Skills](#), a beginner-level digital skills course co-designed with disabled people. We have also worked with the Connecting Scotland initiative to curate free resources to support digital literacy.

"When I first met you I couldn't even send an email! Now on Saturday nights instead of sitting down in front of the telly I'm sat on the computer and learning stuff." Learner, 2020

For our students, we have offered Digital Inclusion grants and other discretionary funding to disadvantaged students to ensure they have the equipment and broadband they need to access OU study. We particularly welcome the funding from the Scottish Government which enabled us to respond to these challenges during the Covid-19 pandemic.

What specific actions could your organisation/network make, or contribute, to implement these recommendations?

13. We will continue to engage with our network of [Open Learning Champions](#) and their learners to identify and address barriers for adult learners. We will continue to offer free workshops to practitioners so they can provide accessible pathways from informal into formal study using [OpenLearn](#), [Open Pathways](#) and [Access](#) routes.

We will promote the availability of the Part-time free grant so potential students are aware that they can study with us for free – from their first dip into [OpenLearn](#) to their graduation with a degree.

With additional resource, we could radically scale our [Open Learning Champions](#) model with its evidenced impact.

From your organisation's/network's point of view, who would the key partners be to ensure the success of these recommendations?

Marketing and communications, adult learning providers, third sector partners

Theme 5 – Workforce Development

Do you have any comments on the recommendations within this theme?

OUiS supports workforce development for adult learning practitioners through existing partnerships, our Open Learning Champions project and ongoing Upskilling and Reskilling opportunities, such as funded places on microcredential courses and the Flexible Workforce Fund.

We have a wide range of free and funded learning and development opportunities for practitioners, from short OpenLearn courses to postgraduate qualifications.

As outlined in Theme 2, we also offer credit transfer mapped to the SCQF framework.

Does your organisation/network currently have any planned or ongoing work that would contribute to the implementation of these recommendations?

We have a collection of free resources on OpenLearn on Take your Teaching Online to support practitioners who have had to change the way they deliver learning during the pandemic.

We also have resources for digital skills development including our badged course Succeeding in a Digital World. Our FutureLearn platform has free (non-accredited) courses to support adult learning practitioners, such as The Online Educator, as well as microcredential courses at postgraduate level.

We have been able to make funded places available on our microcredentials in 2020/21 with support from the Scottish Funding Council's Upskilling Fund. These include courses particularly relevant to adult learning:

- Online Teaching: Accessibility and Inclusive Learning
- Online Teaching: Creating Courses for Adult Learners
- Online Teaching: Embedding Social, Race and Gender-Related Equity
- Online Teaching: Evaluating and Improving Courses

Feedback from our most recent funded microcredential programme suggests a demand for courses on delivering Online Training rather than teaching from local authorities and CLD practitioners. This was evidenced by 250 out of 700 applications asking for online training. This has been fed back to the micro-credentials team for consideration of future provision.

We know, from our annual survey of Open Learning Champions, that CLD practitioners and volunteers were among those who accessed Take your Teaching Online resources on OpenLearn, and some champions got funded places on the above micro-credentials during the pandemic.

We use digital badges to recognise non-accredited learning on OpenLearn and have also produced a badge for Open Learning Champions. We offer pathways into accredited via Open Pathways, Making Your Learning Count (30 credits SCQF7) and our Open qualifications.

We have previously collated OpenLearn resources for the CLD Standards Council Scotland to share with their members and we could explore the possibility of a dedicated collection or portal for the sector on OpenLearn.

We are working with colleagues in the OU's Centre for Voluntary Sector Leadership to pilot a series of Leadership Learning Clubs with third sectorWe have a collection of free resources on OpenLearn on Take your Teaching Online to support practitioners who have had to change the way they deliver learning during the pandemic.

We also have resources for digital skills development including our badged course [Succeeding in a Digital World](#). Our [FutureLearn](#) platform has free (non-accredited) courses to support adult learning practitioners, such as [The Online Educator](#), as well as [microcredential](#) courses at postgraduate level.

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We are working with colleagues in the OU's [Centre for Voluntary Sector Leadership](#) to pilot a series of Leadership Learning Clubs with third sector organisations to strengthen leadership learning within the voluntary sector and support recovery from COVID-19.

We have worked in partnership with [Volunteer Scotland](#) to support their volunteers during the pandemic, delivering workshops on [OpenLearn](#) for their Team V project to support mental health. [Volunteer Scotland](#) have also used the [OpenLearn Create platform](#) to produce resources for volunteer development and volunteer management in partnership with our Centre for Voluntary Sector Leadership. During the pandemic, they also produced a Covid-specific resource on [Keeping Volunteers Safe](#). OpenLearn Create offers adult learning organisations the flexibility to produce timely and tailored resources for their networks.

We are currently in receipt of [Flexible Workforce Development Funding](#), which enables us to offer Scotland's SMEs volunteers and staff up to £5K worth of workforce learning opportunities across our range of accredited and non-accredited provision. In receipt of the [National Transition Training Fund](#), we are able to offer funded learning to adults who are unemployed and have been impacted by COVID-19.

We do not currently offer a CLD qualification but we offer some postgraduate modules that would be of relevance to the sector:

[Addressing inequality and difference in educational practice](#)

[Understanding literacy: social justice and inclusive practice](#)

[Language, literacy and learning](#)

[Applied linguistics and English language](#) (for those teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL))

[Technology-enhanced learning: foundations and futures](#) (online pedagogy)

What specific actions could your organisation/network make, or contribute, to implement these recommendations?

15 and 16. We can offer practitioners the opportunity to obtain credits for non-accredited learning via our [Making Your Learning Count](#) modules and our [Open qualifications](#).

18. We are keen to build on our partnership with [Volunteer Scotland](#) and other volunteer-based organisations to explore a framework of support for adult learning volunteers.

20. During the pandemic we supported workforce resilience and developed digital skills through tailored collections on [OpenLearn](#) as funding allows.

With additional resource we could:

- Provide workshops in '[Take Your Teaching Online](#)' for practitioners and signpost them to our free and funded resources (outlined above) to support their practice
- Explore a dedicated [OpenLearn](#) collection or the further development of OU microcredentials for the CLD sector.
- Provide funded access to our existing portfolio of [microcredentials](#)

We are particularly keen to explore how we might support the development of Scotland's CLD workforce. We believe we have existing experience, products and potential for development which would meet their needs although additional resource is likely to be required.

From your organisation's/network's point of view, who would the key partners be to ensure the success of these recommendations?

[CLD Standards Council](#), [Volunteer Scotland](#), [SCVO](#), [FutureLearn](#)

SCOTLAND

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