GTCS Review of Memorandum of Entry Requirements to ITE Programmes in Scotland

Consultation Submission

17.11.23

The Open University
Scotland

About the Open University in Scotland

The Open University in Scotland supports people across Scotland to develop their knowledge, acquire new skills and achieve life-changing qualifications. With over 21,000 students*, we are the fourth largest university in Scotland and the largest provider of flexible, part-time study. Our students range from school age to 92, with an average age of 28. Most of our graduates (85%) remain in the location where their study is undertaken, which means their talent and skills benefit local communities.

We offer high-quality distance learning to students, lifelong learners, communities, employees and businesses. We have formal partnerships with 16 regional colleges and collaborate with local authorities, the NHS, social care, the third sector and employers across Scotland. Our innovative national schools programme, Young Applicants in Schools Scheme, helps S6 pupils access a broader curriculum and bridge school to university level study.

We are committed to widening access to higher education building on our founding principle of being open to everyone, regardless of age, income, geography and background. More than 20% of our undergraduates in Scotland join with qualifications below standard university entrance level, almost 19% are resident in the most deprived areas of Scotland, 26% declare a disability and 23% live in remote or rural areas. The majority of our students in Scotland are eligible for a part-time fee grant to help towards their tuition fees.

Flexible study is core to our offer with 74% of our students working either full-time or part-time fitting study around their professional or personal life at a pace and level that works for them.

As part of the UK's only four nations university, we are funded to teach students resident in Scotland by the Scottish Funding Council. Almost 200 staff operate from our Edinburgh offices with almost 500 associate lecturers working across the country.

OU research ranks in the top third of UK universities according to the Research Excellence Framework and we are a trusted partner of many leading organisations for teaching and research including the BBC, NASA, and the United Nations. Our free platform, OpenLearn, reaches over 300,000 learners in Scotland.

Find out more: open.ac.uk/scotland

Which aspects of the entry requirements do you wish to be kept and why?

We believe the commitment, in the introductory section, relating to mitigation of institutional barriers, should be maintained.

"The application processes must meet all Equalities Legislation requirements. ITE providers should mitigate institutional barriers, and conscious and unconscious bias throughout the recruitment and selection procedures to ensure all applicants are given equal opportunity to be selected on to an ITE programme"

However, the detail in Appendix B of the Memorandum should be expanded on to support this aspiration and provide a more expansive and accessible list of options for qualifications accepted as equivalent to the English and Mathematics requirements. Work also needs to be undertaken with ITE providers to ensure a fair and consistent approach is taken to accepting a wider range of equivalent qualifications.

Which aspects of the entry requirements do you wish to be added and why?

We would like to see "Modular University study" added to the list of "Qualifications Accepted as Equivalent to the English and Mathematics" in Appendix B.

Appendix B of the Memorandum currently presents a very limited range of options for qualifications accepted as equivalent to the English (at SCQF level 6) and Mathematics (at SCQF Level 5) requirements, which we believe limits opportunities, particularly for mature learners. This Appendix outlines a range of acceptable equivalent qualifications, including National Units, Higher Education Access Courses and "Equivalent qualifications from other countries", but crucially does not include non-access (mainstream) University modular study such as that provided by The Open University, which would be at a higher SCQF level (7+) than the stated requirements. This is significant as most options presented would require mature students to attend a physical college or University campus to obtain these qualifications, often difficult or impractical for mature learners aiming to achieve entry requirements for ITE while maintaining employment and managing family commitments.

There is also a related issue of availability of funding for students seeking to obtain "equivalent" qualifications on a part time basis, as some accepted "equivalent" courses do not meet the credit eligibility requirements for SAAS Part Time Fee Grant funding. Open University modules (30 or 60 credits at SCQF

Level) do meet PTFG eligibility criteria, meaning they can be studied on a fully funded basis by individuals earning £25k or less.

Acceptance of University modules studied on a flexible, distance learning basis would provide more flexibility for meeting entry requirements to ITE and support people who are facing multiple barriers to entering the profession.

We would also be keen to see 'SCQF Level 5' and 'SCQF Level 6' in the English and Mathematics requirements headings changed to 'SCQF Level 5 or above' and 'SCQF Level 6 or above' to make it explicit that higher level qualifications are acceptable.

Which aspects of the entry requirements do you wish to be removed and why?

We would ask GTCS to consider whether the following statement in Section 2 is still sound or whether the 30 credit maximum top should be reduced or removed to encourage a more diverse range of applicants and graduates from other disciplines.

"Graduates will be allowed to top-up the number of SQCF credits by a maximum of 30 credits which must be obtained before entering a Professional/Post Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE)* programme"

What are your views about the initial considerations gathered so far?

We would be generally supportive of Theme IV (use of 'SCQF Level 5, 6 or 7' instead of 'Higher', 'Advanced Higher' etc). We agree this could help achieve more consistency and clarity when describing expectations for applicants.