



Disability Employment Gap

Economy and Fair Work
Committee Call for views

16.02.23

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 benefits 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 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 study for free with a part-time fee grant.

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. Our student experience is rated the best in Scotland alongside the University of St Andrews (National Student Survey).

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

The Open University Careers and Employability Service (CES)

We help a wide range of students and alumni up to 3 years after study, at all stages of their working lives achieve personal, study and career goals – all with differing needs and representing all ethnicities and backgrounds, abilities and disabilities, identities, differences and intersectionalities. We also work with faculties to embed employability and careers support into the curriculum and engage with employers to create opportunities for OU students such as panel events, internships and career insight visits.



96% of Open University (OU) in Scotland students using CES would recommend this quality-certified, award-winning service.

“It has increased my confidence and self-belief and I now have a positive outlook about my future career development,”

Abubakari Yakubu, OU in Scotland student mentee following the OU’s Elevate Career Mentoring programme.

Our artificial intelligence-powered 'career readiness' diagnostic directs students to a tailored range of tools and support to build their confidence and help them navigate their future. 85% of OU in Scotland alumni agreed that their OU study has helped them achieve their career goals three years after qualifying (Employability of Qualifiers Survey 2021).

The OU's team of experienced careers professionals was Highly Commended in the National Undergraduate Employability Awards 2021. Situated across the UK, our team includes dedicated careers consultants and employer engagement specialists based in Edinburgh, ensuring that our advice and guidance reflects Scotland's priorities and opportunities.

Call for views

What progress has been made to reduce and remove barriers faced by disabled people to access Scotland's labour market?

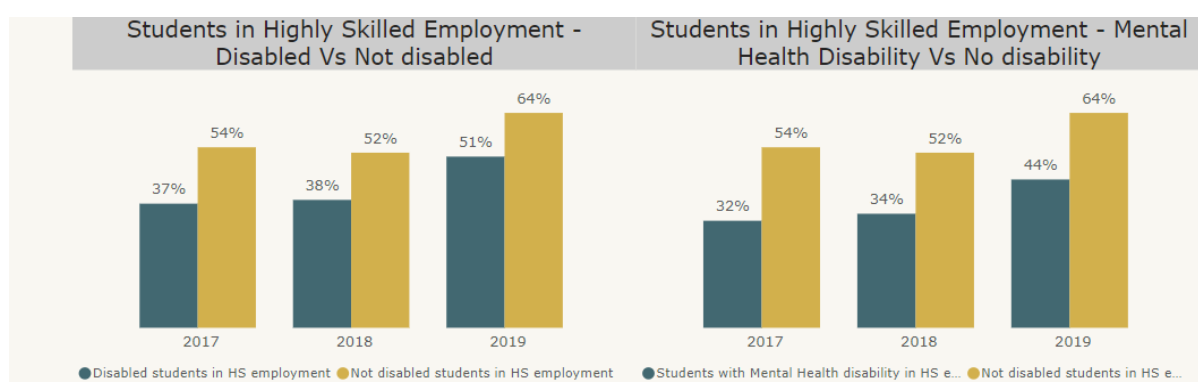
We provide a range of tailored support and resources for students with a disability to help increase confidence and overcome perceived barriers.

Common issues raised during careers consultations include challenges in terms of awareness of benefit entitlements, flexibility in the workplace, awareness of and access to support available.

In 2021/22 support for disabled students included collaborative partnership work in Scotland with [EmployAbility](#) to provide a series of webinars to support students and alumni with disabilities or health conditions to overcome hidden barriers in the recruitment process. EmployAbility have recently published further information on the challenges of ongoing hidden barriers in the recruitment process.

What are the remaining challenges, and why has progress been difficult?

Recent Graduate Outcomes Data, collated for all four nations across the OU, has consistently indicated that graduates with a disability are less likely to be in highly skilled employment. The 2019/20 data is based on a lower population of survey respondents so caution should be taken in drawing any comparisons between the annual data sets.



Responses to our career readiness survey by students in Scotland enrolled with the OU in October 2022 also indicate perceived barriers by our students with disabilities and mental health conditions:

- 36% of OU in Scotland disabled students who responded to our career readiness survey reported that their disability was a barrier to achieving their goals
- 62% of OU in Scotland students who had declared a mental health condition and responded to our career readiness survey reported that mental health was a barrier to achieving their goals

- 9% of students with a disability and 10% of students with a declared mental health condition reported discrimination as a barrier to achieving their goals
- A higher proportion of students with a declared disability (45%) and those with a declared mental health condition (56%) than those without a disability (37%) reported confidence as a barrier to achieving their goals

Our research corresponds with that of [The Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services](#) (AGCAS) report '[What Happens Next? – A Report on the Employment Outcomes of Disabled Graduates](#)' Their 2021 report on the 2018 cohort provides very useful insights and evidence of employment outcomes of disabled graduates, including detail specifically in Scotland:

- 8.5% of first-degree graduates without a disability are employed in Scotland, and slightly lower 7.8% of first-degree disabled graduates are employed in Scotland
- A consistent finding in 'What Happens Next?' reports over several years has been the particular disadvantage experienced by graduates with autism. They are the least likely graduates to be employed on any basis
- At all qualification levels, graduates with autism were least likely to be employed on a permanent contract, most likely to be employed on a fixed term, temporary or voluntary basis. They are also least likely to indicate that their qualification level and subject had been required for their job role

What policy measures would you like to see support disabled people and employers to increase participation rates?

Specific long-term funding to continue to support internships and to encourage more flexible work experience opportunities could be developed. The Open University would advocate encouraging innovation around the use of virtual reality to provide experiences to support the development of confidence, working with employers to generate scenarios within the workplace or virtual micro placements, to address potential location and accessibility barriers people with disabilities may face.

Increased joining up of support from agencies, including the HE sector, to jointly support individuals with disabilities. Supporting people to access flexible employment opportunities, without negative impact on benefit entitlement, streamlining and increasing the transparency of options and opportunities. Extension of funding to support individuals travelling to/accessing employment-related opportunities.

What has been the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on disabled people's experience of the labour market?

We are not able to offer an assessment of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on disabled people's experience of the labour market.

