

**Submission by  
The Open University in Scotland**

**Finance and Public  
Administration  
Committee**

**Inquiry into National  
Performance Framework**

April 2022

## **Finance and Public Administration Committee National Performance Framework Inquiry**

### **1. To what extent do the National Outcomes shape how your organisation works?**

The National Outcomes indirectly shape the work of the Open University as much as they flow down from the Scottish Government's strategic priorities and funding via the Scottish Funding Council (SFC). The National Outcomes are not explicitly referenced within our Outcome Agreement with SFC.

### **2. How do you know which National Outcomes your organisation contributes towards? How do you demonstrate this to your organisation and more widely to others?**

In Spring 2021 we mapped our work against the National Performance Framework as we developed our prospectus Skills+ Scotland for the 2021-26 session of the Scottish Parliament. We used this to produce our four key themes:

- The Open University in Scotland can support the Scottish Government in delivering targeted skills support at scale, rolled out nationally
- We want to see a fair deal for part-time students removing financial barriers to accessing learning and achieving their potential
- Digital access and connectivity are vital to open up higher education to the most disadvantaged across Scotland
- A lifelong learning skills commitment would ensure higher education is open to everyone, at any stage of their life.

We are currently in our strategic and business planning cycle for the next academic year. Within our discussions as a senior staff group in Scotland we have started to think about how we could better relate the work that we do as an institution and our external partnerships to the National Outcomes and the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals. We are keen to learn from best practice in other organisations to demonstrate our contribution not only internally to staff and students but more widely to others.

### **3. How empowered is your organisation to do something different (should it wish) to achieve the National Outcomes relevant to you?**

Within the Outcome Agreement with the SFC we have limited flexibility to do something different to achieve our targets. Where we believe that a different approach needs to be taken, we would have a proactive discussion with the SFC to ensure there is a common understanding of why this is required and how it will be achieved.

### **4. How is your organisation held to account for how your actions and decisions impact on the National Outcomes?**

The Outcome Agreement with the SFC is our guiding document and as such the Open University is indirectly held accountable for our actions and decisions impacting on the National Outcomes via the [Outcome Agreement](#) with the SFC. The document sets out how the Open University will meet the priority areas of work within the core funding that we receive. The Outcome Agreement does not make explicit reference to the National Outcomes, instead citing Scottish Government and SFC priorities.

### **5. How are the National Outcomes reflected in everyday decision taking?**

The Outcome Agreement with the SFC is our guiding document and as such the National Outcomes are not an explicit part of our everyday decision taking. The work of the Open University does however cover all the National Outcomes as we deliver upon the Outcome Agreement.

## **6. When it comes to spending priorities or providing funding to others, what role do the National Outcomes play?**

The Outcome Agreement with the SFC is our guiding document and as such the National Outcomes are not an explicit part of our spending priorities. The work of the Open University does however cover all the National Outcomes as we deliver upon the Outcome Agreement.

## **7. To what extent is any public sector funding you receive contingent upon demonstrating your contribution to delivery of the National Outcomes?**

Our core funding is not currently directly contingent upon demonstrating our contribution to the delivery of the National Outcomes as we report using the Outcome Agreement with the SFC which is our guiding document. None of the additional funding we receive through the National Training Transition Fund, Upskilling Fund, Universities Innovation Fund and Workforce Development Fund is contingent upon demonstrating a contribution to the delivery of the National Outcomes.

Within their report 'Coherence and Sustainability: A Review of Tertiary Education and Research' the SFC has committed to working collaboratively with the sector and key stakeholders to develop a new overarching National Impact Framework (NIF) to ensure greater alignment with Scotland's National Performance Framework and the UN Sustainable Development Goals. We welcome this and are keen to support this work as soon and as fully as possible.

The teaching grant received by the Open University in Scotland is based on our funded student numbers at completion rather than, as other higher education institutions are, at registration. As a result, the teaching grant received from SFC is directly linked to the number of students successfully completing OU modules up to the number of funded places allocated. For those students who do not complete in the year, the university receives only the module fee.

Since the introduction of the Part-time Fee Grant, we have seen increasing student registrations year on year, and improved completion rates. This has resulted in sustained growth in full-time equivalent (FTE) numbers and this demand has increased significantly over the pandemic. In 2020-21, as well as our full funding for 4,400 FTEs student places, we are supporting over 3,000 FTEs in Scotland where we will receive only module fees and no teaching grant. This results in an **equivalent funding gap of £16 million**.

Due to our scale and financial prudence, we have been able to support these module-only funded places to-date. However, meeting this level of student demand without the associated teaching grant is unsustainable in the longer term.

We have welcomed additional covid-related funding made available to the University which have been deployed to provide vital targeted skills support to employees, organisations and businesses impacted by the pandemic. But these separate funding streams have not directly offset the lack of teaching grant for our core numbers.

## **8. Where do the National Outcomes sit within the range of priorities and demands on your organisation?**

The National Outcomes are currently not an explicit part of our priorities and/or demands on the Open University. We believe however that through our refreshed five-year strategy, the Outcome Agreement with the Scottish Funding Council and our internal business planning that we contribute to each of the 11 National Outcomes in a range of different ways:

### Children and Young People

Our Young Applicants in School Scheme delivers across all 32 Scottish local authority areas. Supporting students making the transition from school to university. Pupils are offered a range of open modules to choose from in subjects such as accounting, economics, engineering and law. They were able to study at home during the periods of remote learning which provided an important contribution to the school curriculum during this challenging time.

The Scottish Government commissioned us to produce a funded badged open course on early years and additional needs. The content of the module reflects Scottish Government policy and is aimed to enhance the quality of practice for supporting children who have additional needs. This has been hugely successful with over 4000 early years practitioners enrolled to-date and the contract extended to deliver more modules.

### Communities

A new OU in Scotland pilot is developing a new workforce offer for the community learning and development sector in partnership with Education Scotland and the CLD Standards Council for Scotland. The project is funded by Scottish Government to address skills gaps identified during the pandemic. The three deliverables are an online skills development portal, the provision of up to 200 funded microcredentials supporting CLD practitioners, and the development of a network of regional champions to deliver workshops and learning clubs.

In partnership with Voluntary Health Scotland (VHS) we held a series of seven online talks on the theme of Ageing Well, with 366 registered participants across the series, providing guidance and input in this area. In addition, during 2021 we worked with VHS and some of their partners on two round tables related to mental health and the over 65's (it was felt that this group had not been well supported during the pandemic). The seminars explored some of the key issues that emerged during the last two years, with the intention of trying to inform future policy in this area.

We are also key partners with the Glasgow based social enterprise, Lingo Flamingo, who primarily support older people in residential care with language learning as part of a cognitive stimulation strategy. We provide training and support to help Lingo Flamingo develop their programmes, and to add value to the overall experience for learners.

### Culture

'Gaelic in Modern Scotland' has been developed as a free online learning resource in both English and Gaelic to raise awareness of Gaelic and to encourage interest in learning the language

A free online course in Scots language and culture was launched in partnership with Education Scotland. The only course of its kind, it teaches Scots through the context in which it's spoken, highlighting the role of Scots in Scottish culture and society, past and present.

Our knowledge exchange programme supports a number of lectures and events at book festivals, arts festivals and science festivals across Scotland and we contribute to research into Scottish culture and society.

For example, academics, archivists, museum curators, research students, and public historians came together to explore aspects of Glasgow's cultural history through three themes: engagement; wellbeing; international. The Cultural History of Glasgow Research Network project was delivered in partnership with Glasgow Life and funded by the Royal Society of Edinburgh. With almost 40 active members, the project delivered a variety of events and outputs for range of audiences.

Intergenerational family audiences enjoyed a series of events on maths as part of the Glasgow and Edinburgh science festivals. Audiences participated in popular code-breaking tasks to discover the names of trees in the Glasgow Botanic Gardens as part of a week-long event in the Glasgow Science Festival. An online activity for Edinburgh Science Festival called Out for the Count: The Mathematics of Voting Systems engaged audiences in an interactive and fun introduction to a number of real-life voting systems.

We brought together indigenous artists and speakers from The Open University and Glasgow Museums to discuss the connections between citizens, culture and climate at an event in the prestigious Green Zone at COP26. A dynamic cultural collaboration, Ancient Knowledge and Modern Thinking: Climate Perspectives in Folk Art was positively received by the live audience and had over 1,600 views online.

### Economy

The coronavirus pandemic has seen a strengthening and deepening of our relationships with employers and industry at what has been a challenging time for everyone. We have worked in an agile way to ensure that we provided targeted skills support where it is needed most. Drawing on our unique distance learning model, we have collaborated with partners to roll out support at scale across Scotland.

Through several Scottish Government skills-focussed funding streams we have been able to rapidly respond in supporting businesses, workers, families and communities during the pandemic through our online platforms and flexible learning opportunities. To help support employees who were furloughed and facing redundancy because of COVID-19, we offered free places through the Scottish Funding Council Upskilling Fund on a new Coding Skills course to upskill and reskill people for digital roles and careers. We also saw significant demand for the suite of microcredential courses that we were able to offer, thanks to being able to access the Scottish Government's Flexible Workforce Development Fund which previously had been restricted to colleges only.

As Scotland recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic, the Open University's ethos of being open to people, places, methods and ideas is as relevant today as it was when the University was founded over 50 years ago. We support our students and learners to achieve their goals with outcomes that open-up new opportunities in life and work.

### Education

With 22,000 students and almost half a million informal learners via our [OpenLearn](#) platform, we connect with people in every parliamentary constituency, and in every corner of the country from Dumfries and Galloway to the Shetland Islands. We are the fourth largest university in Scotland and, with around three quarters of our students combining work and study, the largest provider of part-time higher education. In addition, 24% of OU students in Scotland declare a disability and 23% live in remote or rural areas.

Many learners choose to go to college first or pursue higher education at a later stage, perhaps due to work or family commitments, or financial reasons. This will be even more applicable in the post-pandemic environment as people return to study to gain new skills and improve their prospects of new employment opportunities, and in supporting the future economy.

We are continually seeking new ways to match our core curriculum, microcredentials and free [OpenLearn](#) content to the learning needs of people across Scotland. We continue to partner with all 15 regional colleges in Scotland, outside of UHI network, to provide college students with

progression routes to flexible degree level study. With Ayrshire, City of Glasgow, and Fife Colleges we have collaborated on campus-based delivery providing students with the opportunity to transition to an OU degree within the familiar environment of their local college. Dundee and Angus College have successfully integrated OU Access modules into their wider access programme, OU Options, at the college.

### Fair Work and Business

New partnerships and collaboration are building rich impacts that benefit society and business. Our work with Scottish Professional Football League clubs in Scotland, including Celtic, Dundee, Hibernian and Rangers, has piloted a range of innovative employability programmes for delivery in the community. Already young people, those re-entering the jobs market and refugees have benefited by achieving new skills and confidence. These bespoke delivery partnerships are tailored to the needs of the community associated with the individual football clubs. Programmes are developed from conversations with partners where we understand their needs and develop solutions which work for them.

Charlie Bennett, then Chief Executive Officer, Hibernian Community Foundation described the work as the perfect coming together of the football club and its community foundation with 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.”

We are working with businesses to solve industry challenges, identify opportunities for further collaboration and develop lasting partnerships. Our work with the Scotch Whisky Research Institute collaboration is a strong example of this approach. A research collaboration, supported by a Knowledge Transfer Voucher scheme, is exploring Innovative biosensor technology, which could significantly improve the whisky industry production process and offer a competitive advantage.

We celebrated small business rural enterprise in partnership with the Scottish Council for Development and Industry through sponsorship of a new Highlands & Islands Business of the Year Award. The award was made to Mesamorphic, a Shetland based IT company who are also one of our leading Graduate Apprenticeship providers.

In April 2021 we re-affirmed our Memorandum of Understanding with the STUC setting out a range of collaborative activity which will open up training opportunities for the 540,000 Scottish workers who are trade unionists, the members of 39 affiliated trade unions and 20 Trades Union Councils. Shared goals include applying learning in the workplace through upskilling or reskilling; enhancing career development; and providing opportunities to those who have previously benefited least from education and training.

### Health

We offer routes into nursing and support those looking to transition into, or advance in, the health and social care sectors. Our funded programme, delivered in partnership with health boards across Scotland, includes routes for those already working in healthcare support worker roles to become registered nurses. This develops the NHS workforce and supports people to achieve degree level education while continuing to work.

The pandemic has had a significant impact on health and social care education pathways particularly in relation to practice learning which in turn can lead to graduates entering the workforce later than expected. The Open University has worked closely with education partners to ensure that students have been able to progress as normally as possible in their chosen fields through practice learning solutions and study options. Nursing students have experienced a challenging two years experiencing distressing situations in practice that they have never previously encountered. The unique online learning and tuition model has responded very well to increased student need for human contact from associate lecturers, practice tutors and central OU staff including adapting library practices to include telephone support.

We strive to provide the best support to our students encouraging them to achieve their goals across the whole student journey. Initiatives to support students included enhanced mental health counselling with Scottish Government support, free access to period products with Scottish Government support and providing digital grants via the Scottish Funding Council Digital Inclusion strand. We focused the latter at student carers and our care-experienced students and helped them to buy hardware or software; valued support to many of these students who only have their phones or shared equipment to study with.

#### Human Rights

Research, from The Open University (OU) and [published in the Journal of Medicine, Science and Law](#) brought fresh input into the ongoing debate over reforms to the historic jury system in Scotland. It revealed that the majority of legal professionals in Scotland would consider getting rid of the current three-verdict system in criminal trials, guilty, not guilty and not proven, and moving to a new binary verdict system, proven and not proven. The research was the first published study focused exclusively on the opinions of the legal practitioners in Scotland on whether to overhaul the current jury system.

#### International

African teachers can access a new school-based continuing professional development programme on OpenLearnCreate which was produced by The Open University. Our Zambian Education School-based Training (ZEST) project developed the programme in Zambia in collaboration with the Ministry of General Education, with the input of 600 teachers and District Officials from Central Province. It is supported by World Vision Zambia and funded by The Scottish Government. The programme is designed to support a learner-centred approach to active teaching and learning with six courses for teachers or those who support teachers.

Four secondary schools from across the Scottish Highlands took part in a Mock COP26 to raise awareness and increase understanding of the landmark global political conference. Organised in partnership with the Highland One World Development Education Centre and Developing the Young Workforce, the event involved Culloden Academy, Millburn Academy, Speyside High School and Dingwall Academy. Held virtually, the event brought together fifth-year and sixth-year students across the four schools. They negotiated in groups for the best results for their chosen country, while trying to make a difference in the battle against climate change. We are now developing this concept as another way of engaging with schools across Scotland.

The COVID-19 pandemic has helped to spotlight the position of migrant workers, refugees and asylum seekers, with growing calls for new approaches to policy in this area at national and local level to promote the benefits these citizens can bring to the Scottish economy. We have collaborated with partners in the Universities of Parma, Edinburgh and Glasgow to collect the narratives of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers and explored the barriers and enablers to their life in UK. Based on findings, the collaborative project teams have produced a list of recommendations for the Scottish Government and local authorities.

## Poverty

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 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.

"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

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.

**In the 2020-21 academic year we recruited as many students from the most deprived areas as the least deprived areas.** Yet we know from our students that there is more to be done to break the barriers to education. We would like to see a review of support for part-time study to ensure that it is treated on an equitable basis with full-time and that barriers to study such as maintenance support are given urgent consideration. Evidence indicates the most deprived and rural areas will be hardest hit economically by the pandemic<sup>1</sup> and in turn that will have a disproportionate impact on those with protected characteristics such as age, race, gender and disability.

## **9. To what extent do you work collaboratively with other organisations in delivering the National Outcomes relevant to you?**

We work in partnership with Scottish Council Voluntary Organisations ([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 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](#)

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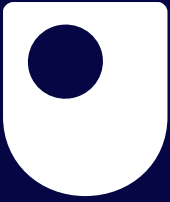
<sup>1</sup> Skills Development Scotland COVID-19 Labour Market Insights



- [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

**10. Please share any examples of good practice, areas for improvement or practices that have not worked so well**

A clear linking between the SFC's objectives and the National Outcomes would help better demonstrate how the Open University successfully contributes to them. While it is not beyond us as an organisation to do so it would also help show more clearly how the sector contributes. What we would want to avoid however are significant additional reporting burdens at a time that our core funding is failing to match rising costs; and the Scottish Government seeking to embed previously additionally funded work into our core funding without the additional monies.



The Open  
University

SCOTLAND