



Praxis Impact Report

2024–2025

Faculty of Wellbeing, Education
and Language Studies



Praxis
Centre for Scholarship and Innovation
Wellbeing, Education and Language Studies

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1. Foreword

The power and place of practice led inquiry

This is the first Annual Impact Report published by Praxis. As such, it covers a number of years rather than – as is usual – the past 12 months. There are several pages for you to delve into. I will keep this foreword mercifully short and to the point.

Praxis indicates the unity of theory and practice. After all, there are few things more useful than a good theory. If practice asks the question ‘*what?*’ (as in ‘*what works?*’), then theory explores ‘*when?*’ and ‘*why do things work in this way?*’ In the absence of teacher-proof pedagogies, knowing when and why something works (or doesn’t) is essential if teachers are to moderate and modulate their actions in response to student learning.

Pedagogic research and scholarship improve practice not only by generating evidence and facts, but by opening up new interpretations and understandings of practice. Knowledge production undoubtedly offers a technical or instrumental contribution, providing insights that can refine methods and inform decision-making. Yet its impact is equally cultural: it reshapes how we see, value and engage with the work of education itself.



For example, we may examine student outcomes through the lens of behavioural objectives, but what happens when we explore the same territory guided by principles of legitimate peripheral participation? Not only will we see different things we will also open new, innovative and informed opportunities for radically different modes of action.

I invite you to read the report and follow any line of flight that appeals to you. What opportunities for radically different modes of action do they open up?

Professor Carol Azumah Dennis

2. Introduction and background

Praxis, the Centre for Scholarship and Innovation within the Faculty of Wellbeing, Education and Language Studies (WELS), was established in 2018 to enhance the quality of online, distance and digital learning at The Open University through practitioner-led enquiry. It is one of four University-wide scholarship centres, alongside eSTeEM, FASSTEST and SciLab, and is supported by a dedicated team consisting of a Director, a Manager and an Administrative Job Share.

Meet the Praxis Team



Praxis Director

Professor Carol Azumah Dennis



Praxis Manager

Shahnaz Hussain



Praxis Centre Support Assistant (Job Share)

Katie Pauley



Praxis Centre Support Assistant (Job Share)

Suzie Jarvis

This report outlines key Praxis activities, focussing on the past 24 months. The review of module and programme metrics includes projects delivered between 2021–22 and 2022–23, allowing time for impact and evaluation.

During 2024–2025, Praxis worked closely with a wide range of stakeholders. Through active engagement with the Scholarship Steering Group (led by the PVC-Research), Praxis strengthened networks, built communities of excellence and supported a culture of innovation in teaching and learning.

3. Praxis project engagement

Praxis 2024–25 in numbers:



24 newly funded projects



82 project members including: 13 ALs, 3 students



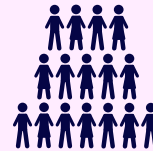
4 impact and research projects



13 new projects videos produced



12 Open University Praxis Hub podcasts



6 Scholarship Matters events, 160 attendees



Praxis Festival of Scholarship: 130 attendees, 1 keynote speaker, 20 project presentations



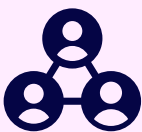
Annual Praxis Open Seminar: 150 attendees, 1 keynote, project presentations



14 Scholarship Hub events



16 peer-reviewed project related publications



3 project impact events covering 15 presentations



15 Writing Retreat participants

Since its establishment in 2018, the Praxis Centre has expanded its annual programme of activities. In 2024–25, the Centre extended its external reach through the launch of the annual Open Seminar and delivered its highest number of events to date, including the new *Scholarship Matters* series. An overview of 2024–25 activities is provided below.

3.1 Developmental Series

Praxis supports an inclusive scholarship community, through, a developmental programme of workshops from pre-funding guidance, induction and mid-project support.

3.2 Pre-funding workshops

These workshops provide a structured space for participants to share early project ideas.

3.3 Project induction workshop

The induction workshop introduces the Praxis team and available support, outlining next steps, key touchpoints and reporting requirements.

3.4 Interim support meetings

Mid-project group meetings enable teams to share progress, discuss challenges and learn from one another, while allowing Praxis to monitor project development and provide targeted support.

3.5 Project workshops

These workshops have been delivered flexibly in response to emerging needs and interests within the scholarship community, and have included a range of specialised sessions:

- [Connecting and belonging](#)
- [We're in this together: the role of collegiality in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Seminar](#) – Katarina Martensson, October 2022
- HREC Workshop Group
- [Access, Participation and Success Seminar](#) – Paulette Johnson and Susan Musgrave, March 2023
- [Theory of Change Workshop](#) – Alison Brown and Gareth Davies, March 2023
- Researchers' Journey Symposium

Collectively, these events have provided focused opportunities for researchers to develop skills, strengthen methodological understanding and engage with colleagues across the research lifecycle.

3.6 Praxis writing retreats

Praxis hosts three writing events each year. These activities provide dedicated time and support for project teams to convert scholarship activity into published, REFable outputs.

The July retreat offers structured time and space to develop publishable work, combining extended writing sessions with targeted support on argument, structure, style and sustaining momentum. As a result, 20 academics have progressed publications, with 78% of 2025 respondents rating the retreat as 'outstanding'.

3.7 School impact meetings

School-based impact meetings enable project teams to present their work, explore implications for teaching, learning and assessment, and create clear pathways to change.



4. Praxis events

4.1 Scholarship Matters

These one-hour sessions provide in-depth discussion of individual Praxis-led projects. The series encourages focused dialogue on impact and longer-term implications. 96% of respondents found these meetings helpful.

4.2 Annual Praxis Open Seminar

The Annual Open Seminar addresses timely themes in higher education and, in 2025, was opened to the wider HE sectors.

- 2023 – [Creative Methods for Scholarship Seminar](#)

This seminar examined how creative and inclusive research methods can support challenging inquiry and amplify diverse voices in Pedagogic Research and Scholarship.

- 2024 – [Connecting and Belonging: Building relationships in online synchronous learning space](#)

This session explored the meaning of 'connection' in distance learning and the ways students form online relationships.

- 2025 – [Inspiring Digital Futures: Higher Education with the TikTok Generation – Praxis External Conference](#)

This seminar examined how changing Open University student demographics, particularly the growth in full-time 18–25-year-olds, are reshaping expectations in online higher education.

4.3 Festival of Scholarship

The festival showcases Praxis work. Central to the festival is a shared commitment to research-rich teaching, enhancing student learning, and ongoing professional growth. Details of the past three years' festivals are provided below.

- 2023 – [From alienation to engagement in assessment and feedback](#), Professor Tansy Jassop, University of Bristol.
- 2024 – [Generative AI and Educational Practice](#), Dr Felix Kwihangana, University of Manchester.
- 2025 – [From the Race Equality Charter to Building an Anti-Racist University: Mechanisms for Change](#), Syra Shakir, Associate Professor, Leeds Trinity University.



5. Praxis Scholarship Hubs

In 2024, Praxis introduced Scholarship Hubs to bring together colleagues with shared scholarship interests. These Hubs provide space to explore ideas and develop projects arising from informal conversations, connections made through Praxis activities or identified Faculty needs. Hubs may be commissioned by Praxis or created organically by colleagues who submit a proposal. Each Hub has a named contact who serves as the liaison between members and Praxis.

5.1 Social Media Hub

As an open and distance education provider, The Open University recognises the importance of strong scholarship to inform the use of social media by staff and students. Led by Dr Olivia Kelly, the Social Media Hub brings together 47 academics, Associate Lecturers (ALs) and professional services colleagues from ECYS, WELS and across the University to advance understanding of social media in teaching and learning.

The Hub provides a University-wide space for scholarship and knowledge exchange, supporting both institutional practice and sector-wide discussion. During the year, it delivered two public seminars with expert speakers, completed literature review of social media in HE, and held four internal meetings, with total attendance exceeding 100. Members are currently developing two publications, alongside OU wide student guidance and clearer tutor guidelines on social media use. The Social Media Hub also produces a podcast series which is written about in section 5.5.

5.2 Immersive Technology Hub

Led by Lisa Bowers, the Immersive Technology Hub was established to position the university as a leader in educational technology and support scalable, engaging digital learning. The Hub uses virtual, augmented and extended reality (XR) to create immersive simulations that enhance knowledge retention and support the development of key human skills, including empathy and inclusive leadership.

With up to 14 academics, ALs and professional services colleagues from ECYS, WELS and across the University, the Hub is developing Immersive Open Pedagogies that promote equitable access, inclusivity and ethical use of technology. Members are delivering XR projects across diverse contexts and building a research network to adapt immersive technologies to varied learning needs, with plans to develop and disseminate resources that strengthen OU leadership in this field.

5.3 Anti-Racist and Inclusion Assessment (ARIA) Hub

Led by Mel Green, the ARIA Hub has had an active and productive period. Its Speaker Seminar Series attracted over 100 attendees across three events, most recently featuring Professor Quinlan and Dr Dave Thomas on culturally sensitive assessment in the age of AI. ARIA brings together up to 50 academics, ALs and professional services colleagues from ECYS, WELS and across the University.

During the period, two ARIA-related podcasts were released on Spotify, both achieving strong listener engagement. October 2025 saw the launch of two new Praxis projects in collaboration with a Level 2 module team, LDS, APS and student partners, reinforcing the Hub's commitment to anti-racist and inclusive assessment. In November, ARIA hosted its first Community of Practice event, with Fiona Henry and Philippa Waterhouse sharing work on effective OU assessment practices.

5.4 Into Practice Hub

Led by Leigh Worrall and Professor Ursula Stickler, the Into Practice Scholarship Hub was established in 2025, drawing on The Open University's extensive expertise in online, distance and digital education. Based within WELS, the Hub provides a collaborative space for connecting diverse strands of scholarship, including teacher education research, international projects, staff development and Praxis initiatives, aligned with the University's Teaching and Learning Plan.

The Hub supports members to explore and share approaches to teaching and learning, foster collaboration, and build confidence and expertise among higher education practitioners in their roles as mediators of knowledge and understanding. Its inaugural event took place in September 2025 as part of the Gothenburg seminar series.

5.5 Open University Praxis Podcast

Over the past 12 months Dr Olivia Kelly who leads the Social Media Hub has developed a podcast series, hosted on Spotify featuring OU and external colleagues, with a listenership of 180 – the most popular sessions have included:

- Episode 1: [Sociolinguistics of social media with Dr Philip Seargeant](#)
- Episode 5: [Exploring anti-racist design in online distance education with Mel Green, Anna Judd-Yelland and Mark Williams](#)
- Episode 6: [Reciprocal Mentoring as a racial equity intervention with Gruff Madrigal, Paulette Johnson and Mel Green](#)

With two further public seminars planned for 2026, the Hub continues to influence social media scholarship at the OU and across the wider HE sectors.



6. Students as partners

We continue to promote teaching and learning as a collaborative endeavour with students. Participating students are awarded a digital badge recognising their contribution and learning. Examples of projects with student partners are listed below.

Project – [Understanding changes in study intensity among Q94 students](#)

Project Lead – Lore Gallestegi

Student Partners – Chole Scott and Claire Mogridge

[Festival of Scholarship Presentation](#)

Project – [Evaluating the 22J pilot 'OU Sport Black Students Network'](#)

Project Lead – Jim Lusted

Student Partners – Shannon Martin, Calum Kennedy, Denis Hamilton-Mace and Oladayo Omotosho

[Festival of Scholarship Presentation](#)

Project – [Designing effective interventions for improving completion and outcomes on R55 and R56 joint degrees](#)

Project Leads – Olwyn O'Malley, Joanna Mireck-Tooth and Lluisa Alstruc

Student Partners – Valentina Lorenzon and Vince Latras

Project – [Initial Teacher Education and the use of video technology in Open University Partnership](#)

Project Lead – Alison Glover

Student Partner – Trudi Rees-Davies

7. Associate Lecturers (ALs)

Associate Lecturers (ALs) play a vital role in Praxis Projects as leads or partners, contributing specialist expertise from their professional and research backgrounds. Although research is not contractually required, Praxis engages ALs as consultants on funded projects where their expertise adds clear value, strengthening our research culture and project outcomes. Examples of AL-led projects are listed below.

Project – [‘Study With Me’: exploring social approaches to engagement and academic progress in a distance learning environment](#)

AL Project Lead – Kate Oakley

Project – [Eye-tracking the impact of webcams in online learning events](#)

AL Project Lead – Elke St. John

Project – [Creating harmony from Discord™: Using innovative technology to create a sense of community in distance education \(AL Perspectives\) – Continuation project](#)

AL Project Lead – Olivia Kelly

Project – [Investigating the effectiveness of ISSS in E232](#)

AL Project Leads – Dorothy Barcroft and Claire Richardson

Project – [Creating an online environment that enables undergraduate distance learners to think for themselves](#)

AL Project Lead – Sarah Lightfoot

8. Communications

Our vision for Praxis is to build a community committed to pedagogic research and scholarship that extends beyond the Faculty to the University and national and international communities. Effective communication is central to this vision.

8.1 Website

In 2025, the website underwent a full refresh to improve engagement, accessibility, and navigation, introducing project videos, dedicated AL and Student Partner pages, an updated Projects section linked to the scholarship exchange, and new areas for Praxis Hubs, podcasts, news, and blogs.

The website recorded 3,939 visits (see appendices 01 and 02), with steady growth since the Drupal 10 upgrade nine months ago, rising from around 35 to 80 visits per month—more than doubling traffic.

This increase aligns with key institutional activities such as funding rounds, the Festival of Scholarship, writing retreats, newsletters, and Scholarship Matters events, indicating the website's effectiveness in supporting strategic academic communications.

Engagement from nine countries across three continents, including the UK, Europe, the United States, and Africa, demonstrates growing international reach. Overall, the data shows sustained growth, strong alignment with academic activity, and increasing global visibility.

8.2 BlueSky

In 2025, we decided to leave the social media platform X (formerly Twitter). While we have established a small following of 85 users on BlueSky, the platform is still in its early stages, limiting audience growth and engagement. We continue to post regularly about projects, events, hub podcasts, blogs, and news, and use these posts to drive traffic to the website.

Bluesky handle: [@welspraxis.bsky.social](https://welspraxis.bsky.social)

8.3 Newsletters

We publish three newsletters a year, three internal and three external – readership includes all WELS Staff, ALs, Students and other Scholarship Centres and all individuals who have attended our public events or engaged with us through our website and social media. The external mailing list includes contacts from global universities such as Mount Royal, Lund, Gothenburg and Georgetown.

8.4 Scholarship Exchange

The Scholarship Exchange is the institutional repository for outputs related to the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning conducted at The Open University. It also includes information about ongoing scholarship projects that are currently being undertaken at the University. Where appropriate, the materials included on the Scholarship Exchange are made publicly available to an external audience. A total of 120 Praxis Projects have been uploaded to the Scholarship Exchange. Over the past five years, these projects have been viewed 14,857 times and downloaded 2,877 times, reflecting strong engagement and interest from users.

Praxis 2024–25 projects with most views:

Project lead – Jane Cook

Project title – [Web-based simulation for Undergraduate Student Nurses – a pilot study](#)

Number of views – 297

Project lead – Christine Pleines and Qian Kan

Project title – [Exploring the use of tutorial recordings to support retention and best practice in tutorial design for beginner learners of Chinese](#)

Number of views – 292

Project lead – Olivia Kelly

Project title – [Creating harmony from Discord™: Using innovative technology to create a sense of community in distance education](#)

Number of views – 247

9. Relationships

9.1 Praxis Steering Group (PSG)

The Praxis Steering Group provides strategic leadership and oversight for scholarship activity across WELS. It advises on priorities for bi-annual project calls to ensure alignment with School, Faculty, and University strategies, and reviews scholarship to enhance impact and contribute to frameworks such as REF and TEF. The group strengthens the external profile of WELS scholarship through knowledge exchange and engagement opportunities, promotes research-informed teaching, and fosters collaboration between Praxis, project leads, and teaching teams to embed innovative practice.

10. Development of our institutional presence

10.1 Examples of dissemination

10.1.1 Publications

Peer-reviewed journal papers arising from Praxis projects (see appendix 03) exemplify a strong tradition of close-to-practice educational research. These outputs make a significant contribution to the Faculty's REF submission by advancing knowledge and strengthening its people, culture, and environment profile, underpinned by a research culture committed to equity, diversity, and inclusion. Articles were published by 45 academics across four schools, enhancing both Faculty prestige and individual academic profiles.

Praxis outputs also included blogs (appendix 04), book chapters (appendix 05), and deposits in ORO and ORDO (appendices 06 and 07). Beyond generating abstract knowledge, Praxis research produces innovative, practice-focused insights that engage audiences beyond individual modules or programmes.

Overall, Praxis-led research is of institutional, national, and international significance, with outputs recognised as internationally excellent (3*) for their significance, originality, and methodological rigour within the C23 Unit of Assessment.

10.1.2 Conferences

Aligned with our mission to contribute to practice-based educational knowledge in HE, Praxis actively encourages project teams to present at national and international conferences. By sharing their work beyond the OU, teams contribute to wider discussions on teaching, learning, and community engagement while gaining feedback, new perspectives, and professional connections.

17 academics from ECYS, HWSC, LAL, and IET/PVCS/AOCcI presented papers (see appendix 08), raising the profile of Praxis and enhancing both faculty and individual academic standing.

11. Reporting beyond outputs – impact for students

Impact can be considered along multiple dimensions: the countable and the uncountable. At Praxis, we value both.

The section below draws on an external evaluation commissioned to assess the impact of scholarship activity over the academic years 2021–2023, focusing on the data-driven, countable aspects of impact.

We thank Jonathan Evans for collating the data and authoring this section of the report.

12. Praxis impact assessment

The following is brief extract from a comprehensive report provided by Jonathan Evans. He offers a detailed analysis of key performance indicators for Praxis projects.

12.1 What worked?

To understand when, how, and why impact appeared in module outcomes, we analysed selected modules showing improvement between 2018 and 2023, focusing on retention, achievement, and progression. While not claiming sole credit, we recognise scholarship's significant role in fostering pedagogic insight and quality enhancement.

Quality enhancement is complex and shaped by interdependent factors, making direct causal links impossible. However, patterns emerge that suggest what has worked—and what might succeed elsewhere under the right conditions.

Praxis projects vary in approach: some involve direct interventions, such as changes to delivery, with immediate effects; others take an exploratory stance, aiming to inform future practice beyond the project's duration. Even indirect scholarship influences students' learning experiences and holds substantial potential for impact.

12.2 Notable improvements

The key metrics analysed include completion, return, and module pass rates, retention at fee liability points (25%, 50%, 100%), TMA submission rates and averages, and overall module completion.

The modules examined are E109, E209, E235, E236, E309, E314, K117/104, and L116, selected for having two or more scholarship projects in 2021/22 or 2022/23. Encouragingly, several modules have improved across one or more metrics since 2018. Many peaked in 2019/20 – likely influenced by the Covid lockdown – before dipping, but strong recovery is now evident, with many metrics returning to or exceeding pre-pandemic levels.

A standout example is E109 in presentation 2023J, showing significant gains in retention, completion, return rate, and pass rate compared to 2022J, with the module pass rate rising by 7%. Three projects are associated with this module:

- 2021/22 – [Creating an online environment that enables undergraduate distance learners to think for themselves](#), Sarah Lightfoot
- 2022/23 – [Preparing for success: understanding the impact of Y032 on WELS students](#), Renu Bhandari and Karen Foley
- 2022/23 – [Exploring the emotional impact of online course discussion forums: insights from personal affective responses](#), Lucy Rodriguez-Leon

While it's too early to claim direct causality – especially with projects still in progress – the improvement in retention may reflect the positive influence of pedagogic research and scholarship. The headline figure of 1%–7% improvement in retention equates to between 250–2,000 students across the modules in view.

13. Conclusion

Had this report been written in 2019, just a year after Praxis was established, it would have been significantly shorter.

Our core purpose remains unchanged: to support practitioner-led pedagogic research and scholarship in alignment with University and Faculty strategy. However, over the past seven years, Praxis has grown in scope, reach, and ambition. New dimensions have been added that now define our work. The Hubs, led by colleagues across the Faculty; the School Impact Meetings that map clear pathways from scholarship to practice; and the inclusion of external audiences at our annual events are now integral to what Praxis offers. Our international partnership has evolved from Gothenburg to Nord University, and our Social Media Hub Lead, Dr Olivia Kelly, now extends our reach further through a monthly podcast available on Spotify. The Scholarship exchange features our work to an internal and external audience with a readership exceeding 21,000. Several projects have an OpenLearn platform. Alongside this, we are currently developing our 2025–26 annual report, where we will explore a broader, less constrained understanding of impact-led pedagogic research and scholarship in alignment with University and Faculty strategy.

For now, I hope you will agree that we can – if we prefer – view Praxis through a technical lens: what we do. If bounded by the KPIs of student retention, progression, and achievement there is a quantifiable contribution. But we might also view this work through a wider lens – one which incorporates ‘when’ and ‘why’. From this perspective strategy, people, and research environment come more sharply into view.

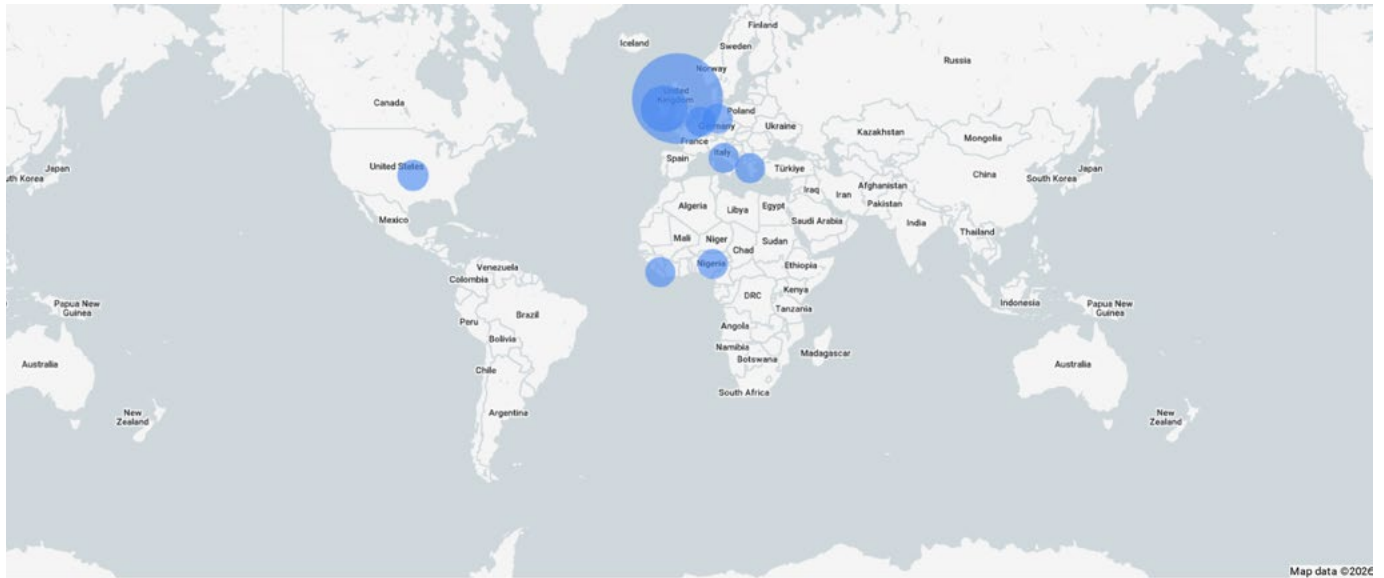
So let’s raise a glass and say cheers to Shahnaz Hussain, who was there right at the beginning – the heart and driving force behind setting up the centre, building the processes and procedures, and giving it such a strong and steady foundation – and to her fantastic team, Suzie Jarvis and Katie Pauley, who joined her later along the way and helped shape it into what it is today.

Authored by Shahnaz Hussain and Professor Carol Azumah Dennis

Data provided in section 12 researched by Jonathan Evans



Appendix 01: Global locations of website visitors for 2025

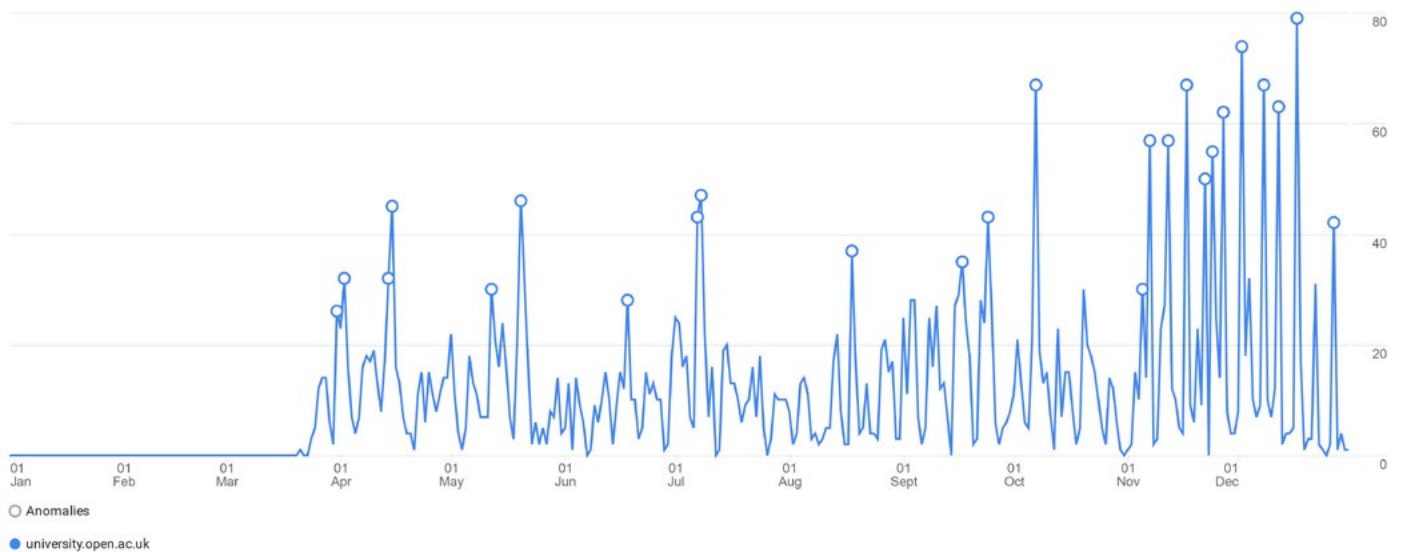


Appendix 02: Monthly website visitors in 2025

All Users

Sessions

100



Appendix 03: Peer-reviewed journal articles

Álvarez, I., Horáčková, C., and Vseteckova, J. (2025) 'Early career mobility and health and wellbeing of female doctorate holders: A narrative review of the international literature', *Gender, Work and Organization*, 32(1), pp. 202–242. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.13138>

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Appendix 07: ORDO

Open Research Data Online (ORDO) is The Open University's research data repository.

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Appendix 08: Conferences

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