



Scottish Policy Forum: Focus on the Future

Consultation Submission

23.01.25

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.

In 2022/23 we were proud to help over 19,500 students study around their professional or personal life at a pace and level that worked for them. The recently published HESA data (2022-23) shows that apart from The University of Glasgow we teach more Scottish students than any other university in Scotland and are by far the largest provider of flexible, part-time study.

Flexible study is core to our offer with 73% of our students working either full-time or part-time in 2022/23.

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. Our students range from school age to 92. 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. The majority of our undergraduates in Scotland are eligible for a part-time fee grant to help towards their tuition fees. In 2022/23 28% of our undergraduates in Scotland declared a disability and 22% live in remote or rural areas. In the same year, 23% of our undergraduate entrants joined with qualifications below standard university entrance level and 21% were resident in the most deprived areas of Scotland.

As part of the UK's only four nations university, we are funded to teach students resident in Scotland by the Scottish Funding Council. Over 150 staff operate from our Edinburgh offices with over 400 associate lecturers working across the country. Our student experience is rated the best in Scotland (National Student Survey 2024).

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. We received a Gold Rating in the Teaching Excellence Framework 2023. Our free platform, OpenLearn, reaches over 300,000 learners in Scotland.

Find out more: open.ac.uk/scotland

Commission 1: Becoming an economic powerhouse to improve lives

SKILLS

1. How can we plan for a Just Transition by delivering improved re-training options for those affected by decarbonisation of the economy?

It is our belief that the landscape isn't clear on what the demand and current provision is or what the future provision needs to be. Like other skills providers, the Open University (the OU) needs to know what roles and sectors people need to transition into to be able to offer upskilling/reskilling opportunities. While there are lots of activity happening amongst organisations across the country there needs to be a more strategic and joined-up approach. There needs to be greater leadership around providing a strategic overview, and an easier way to help organisations achieve their strategic goals in this area. Perhaps something akin to the former Sectoral Skills Investment Plans that Skills Development Scotland used to commission would be helpful in this space?

It would be easy from a high-level reading of strategies and plans to think that Scotland is ready to meet the challenges of being Net Zero by 2045. We don't believe however that people are getting the right sort of qualifications to make the goal of net zero by 2045. Work is required to be able to benchmark the skills and expertise the workforce will need.

We're not seeking to be deliberately controversial or negative, just honest. We recognise that we can be as guilty as anyone else in talking in the abstract 'about the huge shift in the skills needed in the workforce in the coming years to achieve net zero, as people of all ages move from carbon intensive industries to jobs focused on net zero and sustainability'. What is missing, we believe, are the details of exactly what jobs are required and the skills that will be needed to benchmark them against course curricula.

The OU currently offers significant Environmental Management and Sustainability related curriculum at both [undergraduate](#) and postgraduate level, and as free open educational resources on [OpenLearn](#). Careers relating to environment and climate change are promoted to OU graduates on our [careers website](#). Building sustainability into the curriculum is important, so that no matter the subject, students gain an understanding of sustainability and its related issues (as national research shows there is high demand).

Utilising the former [Upskilling Fund](#) and the [National Training Transition Fund](#) we developed a microcredential '[Climate Change: Transforming your Organisation for Sustainability](#)' to help meet the Scottish Government's ambition to support the move to net zero and to renewable energy.

Hosted on our Microcredential Platform this 10-week microcredential equips participants with the knowledge, skills and courage to transform their organisation's response to the climate and ecological crisis, whatever their level, role or sector.

We think that higher education, both the college and university sectors, have a critical role to play as part of a wider collective of organisations; each bringing their own expertise and skills to achieve common goals.

The first barrier to helping organisations achieve net zero goals is funding. A key role of the OU in supporting organisations achieve their Net Zero ambitions is to help them develop and upskill their workforces and residents for green careers and a net-zero future. There can be significant costs and lead in time in developing curriculum, therefore additional investment is going to be required to ensure that the activities that need to happen, once identified, occur.

The second barrier to effective joint working is in the key agencies protecting organisational interests. Our national agencies need to be able to work together at a national and regional level as previously highlighted by Audit Scotland in relation to the skills agenda. We will only achieve our net zero goals if key agencies work together in partnership alongside education and skills providers and the business sector.

2. How can we boost on-the-job training by incentivising employers to invest in workforce development?

We would like to see a system that is designed to support the upskilling and reskilling of people throughout their lives and careers, that supports learners to develop the skills required to support their own work and career aspirations, supports businesses and employers to attract, retain and develop their workforce to support their business ambitions and to respond with agility to opportunities to grow their business and increase innovation and productivity.

The system should be designed and crucially, funded, in a way that supports skills and education providers to develop and offer relevant, timely and responsive manner that provides surety to providers and is transparent and accessible to those seeking to upskill.

We were hugely disappointed by the Scottish Government's decisions to end the Flexible Workforce Development Fund and the Upskilling Fund. We now find (larger) employers in a situation where they have contributed to the Apprenticeship Levy and are not seeing any return for their contribution unlike business in other parts of the UK. Thus, creating a postcode skills lottery that from anecdotal evidence from conversations with employers has the potential to drive national employers away from investing further monies in upskilling/reskilling of their workforce in Scotland and/or moving the workforce out of Scotland altogether. It is not something we say lightly.

There is the added challenge in Scotland where SMEs make up the majority of employers and have regularly reported a strain to upskill staff in current financial climate in our annual [Business Barometer](#) (see Workforce section).

We believe there needs to be a better balance between state, employer and individual funding to support upskilling and reskilling that reflects the need for lifelong learning and moves away from the predominance of the traditional four-year campus based degree. Employers who can afford to invest further in skills and training should do so, enabling what limited funding is available in the system to be directed to those organisations and businesses such as many SMEs that don't have the means, capacity and/or financial capability to invest in upskilling and/or reskilling opportunities.

3. How can we re-train and up-skill people so that they can return to the workplace, such as women returning after maternity leave, or stay in work, such as older people?

Organisations such as [AAI Employability](#) and [Age Scotland](#) respectively already carry out good work in these areas. The Open University in Scotland (OU in Scotland) can open up further opportunities to retraining and/or reskilling through our flexible modular provision such as microcredentials. We continually look to work with trusted partners to collaboratively add value often collaborating on learning portals to meet the employers' needs.

Case Study 1 – National Trust for Scotland

The OU in Scotland is working in partnership with the National Trust for Scotland (NTS) to support skills development and upskilling for the Trust's workforce. As part of the partnership, OU provision was mapped against the Trust's job families, providing a tailored selection of courses to support staff in their careers. In addition, content was mapped against key skills areas such as leadership, communication, creativity and digital skills.

The collaboration between the OU in Scotland and the Trust will provide a wide variety of learning options for the Trust's staff, including free, bitesize courses on the OU's free learning site OpenLearn, to Continuing Professional Development (CPD) short courses, to credit-bearing Microcredentials. This will ensure that all staff can benefit from the learning, no matter where they are in their career or what their educational background might be. The OU's distance learning model means that all NTS staff can access the same learning wherever they are based

which is especially important to NTS given their wide range of properties and locations.

Case Study 2 – Sport Scotland

Sportscotland has worked with the OU in Scotland to further develop its current online learning platform, Brightspace, to include some of our provision.

The OU in Scotland team undertook a mapping exercise of OU provision against Sportscotland's 'Effective Coaching Map' which is used to support coaches across all disciplines. This covered areas such as Knowing yourself – coaching, leadership, communication, interpersonal skills; Knowing others – mental health, psychology, motivation; professional relationships; Knowing coaching – supporting females; training techniques.

The mapped provision was then linked and hosted on the Brightspace platform and promoted to all members, covering 21 sport governing bodies.

The OU in Scotland has also signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Sportscotland to continue working together to develop and deliver further curated training and development resources aimed at strengthening the Scottish sports workforce, aligning closely with Scotland's national strategy for a skilled and active society.

Our positive relationship with trades unions allows us to engage with a diverse workforce across the country with differing needs. We received the following feedback to help inform our submission to the Independent Review of the Skills Landscape:

“The current skills landscape should have scope to adapt to pressures on workers in developing their skills. Workers that undertake complex shift patterns struggle to access learning programmes through traditional access routes to adult learning. Workers in lower paid positions also struggle to access traditionally organised learning programmes as working overtime becomes a necessary activity to increase income. Employer-led programmes seldom provide personal development opportunities, employer-led workplace learning is also subject to internal workplace budgetary pressures. Union-led learner centred models, working in partnership with professional learning providers, provide effective and rounded access to skills across workplaces and workplace roles, allowing workers to develop workplace specific skills, transferable skills and personal development.”

4. Is the architecture of the skills system – including Skills Development

Scotland, the Scottish Funding Council and our colleges and universities – set up to deliver the workforce of the future?

No, we do not believe the architecture of the skills system is set up to deliver the workforce of the future. The pace of reform from the Scottish Government has been too slow and is frustrating employers and skill providers alike. It is still far from clear how the proposed new architecture will work in practice. we need to ensure there is a genuine reduction in the duplication in the skills landscape, particularly in relation to reporting and applications for funding. Too much time

and energy has been spent across the sector reporting the same data to different agencies without any positive impact for learners who must be at the heart of any skills architecture.

In addition, we were disappointed that the responses to the Withers Review to date have not addressed the need to find an agreed definition of skills, including meta skills, which would be understood across the sector. Currently there are too many interchangeable definitions in use across the sector and a holistic understanding is required.

6. How do we reform and strengthen the Modern Apprenticeship system to deliver more apprentices across the economy, both in new innovative sectors and the everyday economy, such as retail?

The tertiary education system – colleges and universities in Scotland have a successful track record in working closely with employers to co-design curriculum, undertake innovation, research and knowledge transfer and to help develop workforces for the jobs of now and the skills required in the future. The Modern Apprenticeship (MA) programmes run by colleges are well regarded, understood and recognised by employers for example.

For example, during the pandemic we supported learners faced by furlough, unemployment and job changes due to covid to upskill and reskill for new roles in sectors such as digital, IT and healthcare. Working in partnership with Partnership Action for Continuing Employment (PACE), Skills Development Scotland (SDS), Scottish Trades Union Congress (STUC) and employers and utilising the OU's unique open access supported entry and our suite of short

modules and microcredentials, we were able to provide skills education to workers in retail, manufacturing, hospitality and healthcare professions most affected by the pandemic.

7. In what ways can we drive growth and uptake of Graduate Apprentices, for those at all stages in their careers? How can we ensure that money available from the Growth and Skills Levy is utilised to deliver effective, relevant and appropriate training to workers, focusing on those in typically disadvantaged groups?

A robust funded system that supported Graduate Apprenticeships (GA) to be further developed by Higher Education Institution (HEIs) where employer demand is seen would support increase employer/provider collaboration greatly. A system that better supported the ability for employers and individuals to support upskilling and reskilling through funding and support would be encouraged.

We believe the current system is not flexible enough to meet the needs of learners, employers, and providers. There is no flexibility for delivery on a part-time or flexible basis which highlights the issue of equity in this model for those who require/choose to work at less than full time hours – precluding caregivers, those with disabilities and those seeking flexible hours from taking part in Apprenticeships. This prohibits widening access – particularly for those who would require to work part-time or need to flex their apprenticeship, for example due to illness, caring responsibilities or financial reasons. This is reliant on the provider having bid and secured funding in subsequent funding rounds. It is at odds with the Scottish Government's Fair Work agenda.

WORKFORCE

2. How do we ensure workers in Scotland are equipped to deal with the challenges and opportunities of AI?

The OU partnered with the British Chambers of Commerce to survey 1,305 organisation leaders to see how the skills gap is impacting employers across the UK in our annual [Business Barometer](#). We found that:

- Over half of (56%) of Scottish organisations continue to struggle with the skills gaps
- Worryingly, organisations in Scotland have reported a lack of confidence in adopting new AI technologies (56%) and new green technologies (47%), skills that employers agree are crucial to growth and sustainability for UK businesses and the wider economy. The majority of employers (77%) have reported an increased workload on their employees, impacting staff morale and wellbeing
- Although some organisations have committed to address the skills shortage, our report uncovered the majority of businesses in Scotland (52%) still do not have the appropriate recruitment, training and retention initiatives in place for underrepresented groups including young people, older workers, those with disabilities and neurodiverse individuals.
- And less than one in four (23%) organisations in Scotland have implemented a written skills plan for their workforce this year, hindering the ability to strategically address these issues and prepare for future demands.

- The survey shows that most employers are not tapping into hidden talent pools to grow their own people. By implementing flexible skills plans and inclusive initiatives, we can bridge the skills gap and build a more resilient workforce.

5. There are significant barriers to disabled people and those from BAME backgrounds. How can we reduce those barriers and close pay gaps for those in employment? How can we ensure employers recognise and support people with disabilities, neurodiverse conditions and hidden disabilities?

We work in partnership with Scottish Council Voluntary Organisations ([SCVO](#)), SUSE (Scottish Union for Supported Employment) 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](#)
- [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

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.

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.

6. Can we better use employability programmes and re-training to get people who are economically inactive back into the workforce?

We have built partnerships and collaboration with rich impacts that benefit society and business. Our work with Scottish Professional Football League clubs in Scotland, including Celtic, Dundee, Hibernian and Rangers piloted a range of innovative employability programmes for delivery in the community. 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 like these are developed from conversations with partners where we understand their needs and develop solutions which work for them.

Commission 2: A modern NHS and social care system that puts people at the centre

SOCIAL CARE

4. How can the training, conditions and support for staff in social care be improved?

In November 2023, The OU in Scotland and NHS Education for Scotland signed a Strategic Collaboration Agreement which looked to draw on the strengths and expertise of each organisation to deliver innovative and inclusive education and training resources to help develop Scotland's health and social care workforce.

The initial primary focus was to:

- Explore opportunities for nursing studies in schools
- Employment and education opportunities for refugees and asylum seekers
- Employment access routes in nursing using the OU Certificate of Higher Education in Healthcare Practice, and looking more broadly at supporting pathways from Higher National Qualifications.
- Social care staff upskilling in learning languages for wellbeing in care settings

Discussions are ongoing to deliver this in practice as NHS NES faces subsequent budgetary pressures. We can supply additional information on the agreement as required.

8. Unpaid carers often end up burnt out and unable to continue – what would better support look like to ensure unpaid care is sustainable and valued?

We previously referenced how we work with third sector organisations to reach people in a variety of settings. One such group is Carers where we have produced the free online resource [Caring Counts](#) – a reflection and planning course for carers, co-created with carers and young adult carers, in partnership with [Carers Trust Scotland](#). We have also developed [Caring Counts in the Workplace](#) with Equal Partners in Care Project and Carers Scotland. Another free resource which has been developed with Carers Trust Scotland is [Carer Aware at University](#) which is a module open to all staff working in higher education.

RURAL

What extra measures can be taken to attract more staff to rural and remote parts of Scotland?

We play a vital role in supporting the upskilling and reskilling of people in rural communities across all 32 local authority regions of the country.

By leveraging access to funding mechanisms and partnerships such as Regional Growth Deals, the UK Government's Levelling Up Fund, and the Shared Prosperity Funds we are able to support local, regional and large-scale skills programs and infrastructure projects,

Collaboration with employers and community organisations is essential in this process, allowing clear alignment of training with local workforce needs. We engage with businesses, local authorities, community councils, third sector

organisations and trade union partners to indefinitely and deliver curated training programs,

Charitable trusts, foundations, and corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs also offer additional funding opportunities for targeted initiatives, such as improving digital literacy or supporting employment in rural areas.

By combining flexible online learning, place-based programs, and funding from public, private, and philanthropic sources, we are able to address skills gaps, promote economic resilience, and empower rural communities to adapt to changing economic landscapes.

These efforts not only support individual learners looking to enter or progress in employment opportunities locally, but also strengthen local industries and contribute to Scotland's broader goals for sustainability and regional development.

However, what we are able to offer both individuals and businesses in a local community/rural setting is only one part of a four-part joined up approach that needs further consideration at a policy level. To prevent rural 'Brain Drain' (people moving away from the region in order to secure education, employment and/or affordable housing elsewhere) then policy makers also need to consider how affordable housing can be increased and provided in rural settings, how you improve the frequency, reliability and cost of local transportation as well as the provision of better and more reliable digital connectivity.

WORKFORCE

2. How do we train, recruit and retain the staff that our NHS and social care requires?

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- Explore opportunities for nursing studies in schools
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COMMISSION 3: From cradle to career to give young people best start in life

SCHOOL CURRICULUM

5. Are there clear pathways and transitions post-school for young people

While we believe that clearer pathways and transitions post-school exist than ever before there is further work to be done to ensure that they meet the needs of all students.

It will be important to embed the approach from the recent Career Review into the wider education and skills system and delivery landscape, recognising the central role of lifelong learning. Therefore, any Careers by Design model needs to align with adult skills and career and development strategy and not just school students.

7. How can we maximise the role of colleges within the senior phase of school?

At this point we would like to talk about our Young Applicants in Schools Scheme ([YASS](#)) rather than the role of colleges as we feel it is appropriate to highlight the potential for YASS. It is designed to bridge the gap between school, college, university or employment. Each [course](#) offered is at SCQF Level 7. Equivalent to first year university level. Students choose one module to study from a wide range of subjects and courses can last from five to nine months. Each is clearly structured with timetables and deadlines.

In 2023–24 schools participated across each of the 32 local authorities. Since 2007 326 schools and over 12,000 S6 students have participated in YASS.

10. What is the role of national government in supporting delivery of the curriculum?

Thanks to pre-existing relationships through YASS we have enquiries from local authorities about supporting school provision to help them meet local challenges.

UNIVERSITIES

1. How can we widen access to university?

First and foremost, there need to be a shift in focus away from 16–18 year old school-leavers attending campus-based universities to complete four year degrees. As an initial step then the hard work must be done to ensure that any new initiative includes part-time education and appropriate metrics are used. If we are serious about lifelong learning then we cannot retain that current focus.

2. What is the role of universities in local areas and communities?

We have students in every parliamentary constituency and region in Scotland. We work in partnership with third sector organisations (large and small) up and down the country and support employers from SMEs to large corporations to upskill their staff.

Our [Annual Review](#) gives a flavour of the breadth and depth of our engagement across the country. Here you will find stories of OU in Scotland students winning national awards, SMEs being supported with our inaugural Business Roadshows and the impact of our Unlocking Potential pilot working with Community Learning and Development staff in South Lanarkshire.

3. How can we create a sustainable funding model for universities?

We are unique among universities in Scotland in respect of our funding. Not only are we the only four-nation university we are also funded on a completion basis rather than the traditional 'attendance model' operated in the rest of the sector. Our students' study on a modular basis regardless of undertaking an individual module or a degree course.

With a post-Withers Review consensus on the need for lifelong learning it is perhaps time for a review of sector-wide funding on modular on completion basis. Any changes could be phased in over time to allow universities to adapt with any financial savings reinvested in the sector to develop upskilling/reskilling opportunities and part-time student financial support.

4. What do universities need to support innovation and economic growth, across all key sectors?

We would like to see a system that is designed to support the upskilling and reskilling of people throughout their lives and careers, that supports learners to develop the skills required to support their own work and career aspirations, supports businesses and employers to attract, retain and develop their workforce to support their business ambitions and to respond with agility to

opportunities to grow their business and increase innovation and productivity. The system should be designed and crucially, funded, in a way that supports skills and education providers to develop and offer relevant, timely and responsive manner that provides surety to providers and is transparent and accessible to those seeking to upskill.

5. Are the support mechanisms for student well-being sufficiently in place at universities?

Universities Scotland would be better placed to talk to sector wide support. Our model of engagement with our students differs from other traditional campus-based universities. What we are seeing, in common with the rest of the sector, is an increase in referrals of students by GPs to our support services on the basis that they are a student. With 73% of our students in either part-time or full-time work in 2022-23 then clearly that approach by GPs is not suited to our students' needs who are rooted in their communities.

6. How can universities be supported to be world leading in their research work?

We are not funded for research at the OU in Scotland. Instead, we receive a small amount of Knowledge Exchange and Innovation Fund money which we make go a long way through our partnerships, innovative approaches and drawing on the strength of being a four-nation university.

Last year for example, we hosted the European Lunar Symposium in Dumfries and Galloway. Over 150 delegates from across the world, including leading figures from NASA and the Japanese Space Mission attended the six-day event.

We welcomed moon experts to give scientific plenary sessions, a schools engagement programme as well as community outreach.

We may not be funded for research in Scotland however our academics are still able to fully participate in our [Open Society Challenge](#) (OSC) themes (Sustainability, Tackling Inequalities and Living Well) where we seek to address twenty-first century global challenges and promote social justice. The first two rounds of OSC funding streams have seen projects in Scotland ([Lingo Flamingo](#) and [The Chrichton Trust](#)) receive funding to support their research.

7. What are the financial barriers to students from Scotland accessing university in Scotland and what can be done to overcome them?

It is regrettable that despite all our engagement when **all** political parties talk about tuition fees and 'free tuition' in Scotland, they're automatically talking about full-time campus based undergraduate students. If we continue to look at higher education through that lens, we will not be able to make the advances we wish to see in society.

In the 25 years of devolution the needs of part-time students have been consistently overlooked. Part-time students are not eligible for many of the allowances, bursaries, grants that full-time students are able to access. The Part-Time Fee Grant (PTFG) had a material positive impact in supporting part-time learners when it was introduced in 2013. The £25K threshold however has never been raised and now far fewer students are eligible than when the PTFG was introduced. A rough calculation is that if raised with inflation then the threshold would be closer to £32K; which would make a tangible difference to

current and potential students. We frequently hear from students whose pay award has put them narrowly above the threshold. By comparison the National Minimum Wage (aged 21 and working a 37 hour week) is approximately £24K and was £14K in 2013.

8. How can we modernise course delivery to widen access? Does support for students and universities reflect modern learning and delivery (for example distance learning)?

The Open University in Scotland has a heritage of offering life changing quality supported distance learning where we have adapted and moved with the times. We shall perhaps leave others to reflect upon this question and its impact on their provision.

We know the flexibility offered by studying with the Open University is both attractive to and valued by our students. Indeed, we teach more Scottish students than any other Scottish university, the University of Glasgow aside. We cannot and will not rest on our laurels but instead continue to fulfil our mission to be open to people, places, methods and ideas.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

5. How can the work of the Scottish Government's education and justice departments work together to tackle attitudes towards women and girls?

Last year The Open University received £7m funding from Research England to open [The Centre for Protecting Women Online](#). It is a vehicle for understanding and addressing challenges posed to women's safety online through a novel, interdisciplinary and ambitious research agenda. While it is primarily England-focused there will be a four nations approach to the learnings from its work which is led by Professor Olga Jurasz.

In June last year we held a Scotland-launch in Edinburgh of the report '[Online violence against women: A Four Nations study](#)' where Professor Jurasz spoke about the research project's findings. The research was the first comprehensive large scale and empirical study examining the phenomenon of online violence against women across the UK.

The report included a series of recommendations for the UK government, the Scottish Government (devolved governments) and the police:

- Improve public awareness of the devolved government's work in preventing and responding to VAWG (both online and offline)
- Carry out a comprehensive review of the existing criminal laws on OVAW to ensure that all forms of OVAW are adequately captured within the law

- Ensure that OVAWG is captured in the devolved government's strategy on violence against women and girls, including specific actions aimed at prevention of and response to such acts
- Allocate appropriate resources to organisations providing specialist support to women and girls who experienced online violence

