



The Open
University

SCOTLAND

THE OPEN UNIVERSITY IN SCOTLAND

PUBLIC SECTOR DUTY REPORT

2021-2025

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Foreword

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted our society, our economy and our workplaces and we are all adapting to an uncertain and changing world. COVID-19 has exposed, and exacerbated, existing inequalities in society with the impact disproportionately affecting people in areas of social deprivation. Universities can, and should, play a key role in supporting the nation's recovery.

The Open University was founded in 1969 to widen access to higher education, and we place social justice and equality of opportunity at the centre of all we do. The University remains committed to extending opportunities for educational success to everyone who wants to achieve their ambitions and fulfil their potential.

A key focus of our work is ensuring that people from Scotland's most disadvantaged groups and communities can access higher education at any stage of their lives to help improve their work and life opportunities. We work in partnership with 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.

The Public Sector Equality Duty (henceforth referred to as the PSED or the general duty) is a duty on public bodies, including universities, which was created by section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, and came into force in April 2011. The Open University in Scotland's *Public Sector Equality Duty Report 2021-2025* determines and evidences how we meet our obligations under the [Equality Act 2010](#). Equality outcomes aim to achieve specific and identifiable improvements in people's life chances, eliminate discrimination and foster good relations. Our *PSED Report 2021-2025* demonstrates how we actively embrace equality and recognises that everyone has their own unique needs, characteristics, skills, and abilities.

This *PSED Report 2021-2025* is informed by other resources and reports, as well as The Open University's new Strategic Plan for 2022-2027 (to be approved by our Council in September 2021). We have built on the foundations of our previous Duty Report and on The Open University's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion strategies – ensuring equality is further embedded into our policies, procedures, working practices, behaviours and attitudes.

We see this as a dynamic document which will be regularly updated as our strategic goals develop and new activities are agreed.

What are protected characteristics?

Throughout this report we refer to protected characteristic groups. It is against the law to discriminate against someone because of a protected characteristic.

The Equality Act 2010 protects the following characteristics:

1. Age
2. Disability
3. Gender reassignment
4. Marriage and civil partnership
5. Pregnancy and maternity
6. Race
7. Religion or belief
8. Sex
9. Sexual orientation

The Public Sector Equality Duty places a general duty on Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), and Colleges throughout Scotland to:

1. Speed up the progress to equality by eliminating discrimination, harassment, and victimisation.
2. Advance equality of opportunity by removing barriers, meeting different needs and encouraging participation.
3. Foster good relations – which means we need to tackle and reduce prejudice, promote understanding of difference, and improve integration.

Our students

The Open University is proud to be the only university operating across England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, as well as operating in the Republic of Ireland out of our OU in Ireland office based in Belfast.

The size and scale of the University, with over 168,000 students across the UK, throughout Europe and worldwide, allows it to offer a broader curriculum and wider access to educational innovation. The teaching of OU students resident in Scotland is funded by the Scottish Funding Council.

Since its establishment in 1969, The Open University has had an open entry policy whereby our students can study with us at undergraduate level with no requirement for previous qualifications. In Scotland, The Open University reaches across the whole country with over 20,000 students from the Shetland Isles to Dumfries and Galloway.

Our supported online learning model means we can operate at scale, working with partners across the country at a national level to meet local needs. Our students are not required to attend a campus and can study with us wherever they might live, with access to our world-class online library and support services. This is of particular benefit to the 22% of our undergraduate entrants who live in remote and rural parts of Scotland, and the 24% of our students who declare a disability.

Our staff

The Open University in Scotland has over 190 staff usually based in our office in Edinburgh. The Open University is an accredited Living Wage Foundation employer.

There are over 450 Associate Lecturers (also known as tutors) living across Scotland, many of whom also work in business and industry, or for other Scottish HEIs or colleges. Associate Lecturers make a vital contribution to supporting students by guiding them through their studies and module materials, marking and providing feedback on assignments, and helping them prepare for an examination or end of module assessments.

Partnerships and collaborations

The Open University works with partners across the whole of Scotland. We collaborate with key stakeholders such as: employers, trade unions, public sector bodies, institutes, private, third sector and community organisations, universities, colleges, and schools. These involve various levels and type of engagement activities.

Through our collaborative partnerships, The OU in Scotland delivers its curriculum flexibly in different contexts and offers particular learning routes for non-traditional learners who might otherwise find it difficult to access higher education.

Engagement process

Our PSED goals for 2021 – 2025 are informed by a range of perspectives from various equality groups, staff teams, and individuals, whom we consulted to ensure a broad spread of protected groups are included during the development of this report.

The engagement process took place between January and April 2021; whereby, outlines of our PSED strategic goals, and presentations/draft versions of the report, were circulated to key working groups and staff members for feedback and commentary. Importantly, OU staff and students, were invited to provide input and feedback on our ambitions.

The responses, advice, and detailed commentary received from across the OU have been invaluable during the engagement process and have positively contributed to shaping our PSED goals and priorities for the next four years.

Objectives

Our mission of being: ‘Open to people, places, methods and ideas’ has been a constant principle since the OU was established over fifty years ago. We exist to provide a different style of university education that is accessible to all who want to learn. We remove barriers to learning through our flexible and supported distance learning approach and sharing of knowledge. The OU vision is to reach more people with life-changing learning that meets their needs and enriches society.

We are committed to focussing our attention on the protected characteristics as determined by the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC). However, given the uniqueness and diversity of our student body, we know from a range of evidence that class discrimination and socio-economic deprivation operate in parallel to other forms of inequality, leading to situations where individuals are experiencing multiple disadvantages and inequalities of outcomes.

Given our ambitions, our PSED strategic goals 2021-2025 are designed to align with the following strategic frameworks in mind:

Scotland’s Socio-Economic Duty (2017)

In addition to the nine protected characteristics set out in the Equality Act, we also have a duty to take account of people’s socio-economic status under the Fairer Scotland Duty.

We considered the views of the Scottish Government in their Socio-Economic Duty Consultation (2017) which advises particular public authorities to do more to tackle the inequalities of outcome caused by socio-economic disadvantage, requiring us to also focus on:

- *“communities within particular disadvantaged places; but also, within particular disadvantaged communities of interest”* and
- *“the specific nature of socio-economic disadvantage for people in rural, remote and island areas”*

The Open University’s Strategic Plan

We have aligned these Scottish Government Socio-Economic Duty priorities with The Open University’s developing strategy for 2022-27 and with particular reference to the five proposed strategic goals:

1. Extending our reach and offer to include even more people from all parts of society in lifelong learning
2. Enabling the success of our students and learners through our expertise in supported online learning

3. Achieving impact in the four UK nations and globally through research and the development of knowledge and skills
4. Enacting our values to increase equality, diversity and inclusion
5. Championing environmental sustainability

Intersectionality

The Open University in Scotland uses the term 'intersectionality' to describe how multiple forms of discrimination, power and privilege intersect in people's lives. We find this is a useful theoretical framework for highlighting the manner in which intersecting forms of inequality - emerging from structural advantages and disadvantages – can shape a person's or a group's experience and impact on their social, economic, and cultural opportunities.

When considering our PSED outcomes we highly value using an intersectional approach as it allows us to see how - and where - multiple categories of identity (gender, race, sexuality, class, and many more) interact with one other. We will be developing our understanding of intersectionality to see how it helps develop our thinking when forming a clearer picture of who someone is and what their particular needs might be.

Our PSED goals for 2021-2025

The Open University in Scotland's Public Sector Equality Duty 2021-2025 incorporates all of these principles and concerns - with the ambition that we continue to evolve and aim to become sector-leading when it comes to equality, diversity, and inclusion. As reflected in our PSED strategic objectives, it is vital this evolution is transparent, visible, and evidenced in our day-to-day practices, attitudes and behaviours, and through structural/ organisational and personal accountability.

Our PSED outcomes are designed to be specific, significant, and achievable. Within this timeframe, we intend focussing on the most pressing inequalities within our institution which are framed via **three strategic goals**, and up to **five priority aims**.

The following three strategic goals indicate the direction we're taking in progressing and embedding EDI across our work at The Open University in Scotland. Our subsequent priority aims, and key enabling activities, underpin and ultimately evidence our commitment to achieving the following outcomes over the next four years:

PSED Strategic Goal 1:

Enabling more people from all parts of society to access and benefit from lifelong learning

PSED Strategic Goal 2:

Enacting our institutional values to increase equality, diversity, and inclusion

PSED Strategic Goal 3:

Enhance our understanding on the importance of Equality Impact Assessment processes and practices

STRATEGIC GOAL

[1]

Enabling more people from all parts of society to access and benefit from lifelong learning

Priority aims:

1. to identify and engage with a wider range of learners in Scottish society
2. to remove barriers learners may face when accessing higher education
3. to develop greater diversity in our curriculum and range of study options

KEY ACTIVITIES:

British Sign Language (BSL) Action Plan

A note on terminology: *wherever we refer to BSL users we mean Deaf and/or Deafblind people (those who receive the language in a tactile form due to sight loss) whose first or preferred language is British Sign Language.*

During the next PSED reporting period, it is our ambition to develop our support and services that recognises and responds to BSL users' particular requirements. We have developed our activities beyond the published BSL action plan to include the following detailed actions:

- Supporting the cross-university BSL Action Plan Working Group which regularly meets to ensure we deliver on the plan by 2024.
- Collaborating across the University, the Scottish HE sector, and with other key stakeholders on how we can effectively implement our BSL Action plan. We will work closely with DeafAction, the Scottish HEIs/FECs BSL Action Plan Peer Network and the Scottish Government BSL Advisory Group.
- By 2022, our School of Languages and Applied Linguistics will expand its curriculum with two short courses on BSL. One course will be focused on teaching basic BSL, the other on raising awareness of BSL and the deaf community and implications of issues around its use. DeafAction are our key collaborators in the production of this curriculum and its delivery.
- Continue promoting the free online BSL resource '[*An informal and friendly introduction to British Sign Language*](#)' created by The OU's Students Association.
- Continue working with our Marketing, Communications and Access, Participation & Success teams, we will engage with awareness raising activities for staff and students, around significant events such as Sign Language Week, and Deaf Awareness Week.
- To direct students to information on the additional support currently available for students with restricted hearing on the OU website: <https://help.open.ac.uk/deaf-or-hard-of-hearing>.
- Following the 10-week BSL and Deaf Awareness training course (provided by Edinburgh College) in 2020, we will continue to look at opportunities for similar training or resources offered by DeafAction or by other relevant bodies such as ContactScotland-BSL, Scotland's national BSL interpreting service.

Care experienced students

A note on terminology: *the term care-experienced refers to anyone who has been or is currently in care or from a looked after background at any stage in their life, no matter how short, including adopted children who were previously looked-after¹*

With support and training from [Who Cares? Scotland](#), The Open University in Scotland has published its [Corporate Parenting Plan](#) which details the actions we will take to improve outcomes for our care-experienced students.

Over the next four years, we will continue to improve outcomes for care experienced students via the following core activities:

- Monitor the experience and success of care experienced students - regularly reviewing student data to improve our understanding of OU students declaring care experience.
- Promote and provide support for care experienced students - ensuring that support is appropriate and timely.
- Engage meaningfully with care-experienced students and representative bodies.
- Identify and compile case studies of care-experienced student journeys with the OU.
- Increase staff awareness and training in relation to care-experienced students for all student support and teaching staff as part of induction and staff development.
- Report on engagement with our online course [Corporate Parenting in Higher Education](#); developed to raise staff awareness of care experience, its impact on access to HE, and encourages staff to reflect on their role in improving outcomes for CE students.
- The OU in Scotland's Corporate Parenting Steering Group will continue to collaborate, plan, review and report on OU-wide activities relating to care experienced students.

Carers

Carers choose to study with The Open University for a variety of reasons: some carers want to build on the knowledge and skills they've gained while caring, some want to resume studies that had to be put on hold, and others are looking for something

¹ Scottish Funding Council, National Ambition for Care-experienced Students, 2020

completely different to their caring role. The OU allows students the flexibility to fit studying around their caring commitments. The Open University in Scotland recognises the challenges carers can face and offers a range of resources and support to help carers get into learning. In addition, for our staff, The Open University has committed resource to apply for the Carer Confident award and, as only 1 of 4 Higher Education Institutions, we are also members of Employers for Carers.

Over the next four years, we will continue to improve outcomes for students who are carers through the following core activities:

- We will continue to place particular emphasis on working with carers in Scotland within our widening access activity. It augments our work in using the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) – particularly the SIMD20 and SIMD40 areas, articulation, partnerships, and work-based learning.
- We will continue to promote and raise awareness of our open educational resource [Caring Counts](#), co-created with carers and carers organisations.
- Capitalise on the knowledge and expertise of The Open University’s institutional Care and Carers Network, set up for knowledge exchange around care and caring. Its four sub-groups are: widening participation and support for student carers, staff who care, carer research and curriculum development.
- Promote the [Carers Scholarships Fund](#), supported by alumni donations, which was launched in March 2020. The Open University’s Carers Scholarship Fund is the very first of its kind in the UK. We have already provided the equivalent of 50 full Open University scholarships to carers so that they get the chance to study, develop their sense of identity outside of caring and retrain towards seeking new employment. We aim to make a further 10 scholarships available in the 2021/2022 academic year.

Domestic Abuse / Gender Based Violence

A note on terminology: *We have adopted the Scottish Government’s definition that Gender Based Violence (GBV) describes a range of behaviours which includes but is not limited to: intimidation, harassment, online abuse, intimate image sharing, domestic abuse, physical and emotional abuse, stalking, violent and sexual assault and murder. The term also includes commercial sexual exploitation and ‘honour based’ violence/abuse. We understand that Domestic Abuse is a term that has meaning for individuals and can also be interpreted within the GBV framework. Therefore, throughout this report we refer to both ‘Domestic Abuse and Gender Based Violence’, and/or abbreviated to ‘DA/GBV’, or a combination of these terms at different times.*

We recognise that 80% of violence, domestic abuse, and sexual violence affects women, and that anyone impacted by this type of harmful behaviour can include those who experience it indirectly such as children, family, and friends. Violence

Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence impacts on all aspects of a person's life, including their learning, wider resilience, well-being, and mental health.

Over the next PSED reporting period, we are committed to:

- Facilitate a safe and supportive educational space for staff and students affected by Domestic Abuse and Gender Based Violence. We will put mechanisms in place on how to identify and report DA/GBV concerns such as: provide signposting to appropriate support, manage allegations confidentiality, and develop new institutional policies and procedures.
- Facilitating a safe and supportive educational space for staff and students affected by Domestic Abuse and Gender Based Violence. We will put mechanisms in place on how to identify and report DA/GBV concerns, providing signposting to appropriate support, managing allegations and confidentiality, and developing new policies and procedures.
- Developing DA/GBV policy and procedures as rapidly as possible. We will ensure resources are being made available to students and staff with an expectation that policies, procedures, guidance, signposting, and staff training will be approved by July 2021, with implementation following thereafter.
- Improving our support and resources in responding appropriately and effectively to all reported incidents and disclosures (without judgement) through key measures such as:
 - ensuring there are more opportunities for effective staff training and development on these subjects for all Open University staff.
 - ensuring there is alignment with Associate Lecturers in recognition of their important role as student-facing staff for students and any potential disclosures of DA/GBV.
 - providing information to staff and students to help inform them on what actions they can take if they experience Domestic Abuse or GBV, enable empower staff/students to report it and provide appropriate support.
 - work with relevant units on data collection/collation to obtain reliable, anonymous monitoring of disclosures of domestic abuse/GBV in our student and staff cohorts.

Young Applicant in Schools Scheme (YASS)

The Open University in Scotland's Young Applicants in Schools Scheme (YASS) allows students in the final year of secondary school to experience higher education level study in school alongside their other subjects. Students can choose from a range of high-quality modules at SCQF Level 7 and give them access to a subject which may not be available in their school. Experience of independent study at degree level and access to all OU student facilities helps to prepare pupils for the transition to university or college and to enhance their career prospects. Pupils can also use the credit they gain towards a qualification with The Open University.

- We will specifically target remote and rural areas, and the two most deprived quintiles of the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD20 and SIMD40). YASS has proved to be a very attractive curriculum addition for many schools, particularly those with a small pupil roll, those with limited numbers staying on to S6 and those in remote areas, which encounter difficulties in providing breadth of choice for their pupils.
- Over the next reporting period, we will explore further opportunities to build on our presence in schools to promote learning in the wider community via the parents and carers of pupils, stimulating learning cultures and supporting wider access – particularly in remote and rural areas, and/or in areas in the most deprived quintiles of SIMD.

Other activities and initiatives

1. To fully promote and utilise The Open University's [Disabled Veterans' Scholarships Fund](#) which was set up to enable disabled veterans to study for free with The Open University and receive wraparound specialist disability support and careers advice. The fund is the first of its kind in the UK dedicated to furthering the education of people who have become disabled due to their time in the forces.
2. The Open University will continue in its commitment to supporting students who are estranged from their families to access higher education. We are a member of the Scottish sector-wide [Stand Alone](#) stakeholder group which offers support services to prevent estranged adults becoming vulnerable, and brings together Scottish HEIs with sector agencies to enhance the entry opportunities and support provision for estranged students in Scotland.

STRATEGIC GOAL

[2]

Enacting our institutional values to increase equality, diversity and inclusion

Priority aims:

1. to reduce the awarding gap and improve employment outcomes for our Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic students
2. to redress subject areas where we have a critical gender imbalance
3. to diversify our staff base; taking positive action to ensure we have greater representation of employees with protected characteristics in prominent and senior roles
4. to have greater visible recognition and support of neurodiversity within the workplace and in our student bodies

KEY ACTIVITIES:

We are adopting the 'Report & Support' software to strengthen our complaint reporting procedures. This is especially important for reporting any form of discrimination and we are increasing staff in this area so that reports are dealt with in a timely and effective manner.

Race Equality

A note on terminology: *wherever we refer to the term BAME we mean Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic. We are aware of the limitations of this term, particularly as BAME singles out specific ethnic groups which can be considered divisive and exclusionary. For now, and for our data and research to be relevant and useful, we adopt 'BAME' as a commonly used term to ensure consistency with other public bodies and to benchmark against their data.*

Race equality is at the forefront of our new and forthcoming institutional strategy and as part of our commitment to making changes inside our own organisation, the University has created a new senior role of Dean of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Steering Group will be adopted as a formal sub-committee of the Senate.

Following the killing of George Floyd in 2020, The Open University issued a public [race equality statement](#) where we acknowledged our responsibility to deliver with actions and not just words. We also recognised that there was no room for complacency, that there is much more we can do and that we need to do that work more quickly. The OU in Scotland also took the decision to sign up to the Anti-Racism Declaration in August 2020.

Almost 5% of our students in Scotland declare their ethnicity as within BAME categories and at an institutional level we are working to address why we are a more popular choice for white people than Black and Asian people what strategies we can implement to close the degree award gap and employment outcomes between our Black and White students.

Over the four years of this PSED we, across The Open University, are committed to:

- Achieving the target agreed in our outcome agreement with the Scottish Funding Council of at least 5% of our undergraduate entrants declaring their ethnicity within BAME categories.
- Improving the retention gap between BAME students and white students, for any cohort, from registration to qualification.
- Improving the degree awarding gap between by BAME students and white students to be lower than the sector average.

- Improving the representation of BAME staff in senior roles.
- Supporting the work of the institutional Self-Assessment Team in applying for the Race Equality Charter Bronze Award in 2023.
- Developing an evidence-based, comprehensive action plan to underpin the agreed priorities of the REC submission and advance race equality over the subsequent three years.
- Through our Race Equality Charter Self-Assessment activities examine ethnicity pay gap analysis, review findings, and take appropriate action to advance equality in this area.
- Utilising the Scottish Funding Council's Anti-Racist Project and Advance HE resources amongst a range of tools to raise awareness of racism and to support staff and students to have conversations about race and racism with greater confidence.
- Supporting and undertaking work as part of the FE/HE sector-wide Anti-Racist Curriculum Working Group in Scotland. We will continue to make contributions on how to embed race equality in curricula to ensure BAME students are valued, supported, and enabled to succeed in Scottish institutions.

Gender Equality

The Open University in Scotland's [Gender Action Plan](#) details the actions that are being undertaken to achieve a greater gender balance in particular subject areas and how we will strategically address any imbalances to achieve a more gender-balanced student population by 2025.

The Open University submitted its Athena SWAN Institutional Bronze renewal application in November 2020. All Faculties are now engaged with Athena SWAN and we aim for all Schools to have applied for awards and current Bronze STEM Schools to have applied for Silver awards by 2023.

As the pan-UK Open University is an organisation who employs over 250 members of staff, we are required to publish our gender pay gap results as part of the Equality Act. The results of our [Gender Pay Gap 2020](#) have recently been published

The gender pay gap for the OU in 2020 is 5.7%, which is a reduction of 2.2% on last year's figure. However, we are mindful that any gender pay gap, no matter how small, is unwelcome and we must continue to work on closing this even further as part of our Equality Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) agenda.

Specifically, we will:

- Implement the comprehensive action plan to underpin the agreed priorities of our Athena SWAN submission and advance gender equality.

- Continue to work with Equate Scotland to support our Gender Action Plan: reviewing our marketing and prospectuses to encourage recruitment to subject areas that are currently gender imbalanced.
- Run marketing campaign to target SIMD20/40 men to help address the overall under-representation of this group.
- Improve managers' capability to recruit, manage and develop diverse teams.

Gender Identity

The University aims to create a trans inclusive environment in all Open University contexts, including all aspects of the workplace, the learning environment, research settings and online activities. In addition, our supportive staff networks is one way The Open University can actively help to deliver an inclusive and social justice minded organisation providing a work environment where being a lesbian, gay man, bisexual or trans member of staff is not a barrier to achievements.

Through the following actions we will build on the work underpinning gender diversity awareness across the University:

- To raise awareness of our trans student and staff policies; ensuring these principles are embedded into our working practices, attitudes and behaviours and, at every level, enable a safe space for calling out discrimination in this area.
- Continue developing practices to support non-binary staff such as:
 - communicating the location of gender-neutral toilets on staff intranet and other channels where appropriate
 - initiating processes to encourage the stating of preferred pronouns in email signatures.
- Continue working with the Trans Staff Network on identifying actions for supporting trans and gender diverse staff
- Continue to celebrate Pride and show solidarity with the LGBTQ+ community as we have done for the past 3 years.
- Continue to raise awareness about:
 - The Open University's **LGBT+ Staff Network**
 - The Open University [LGBTQ Hub - OpenLearn](#)
 - OpenLearn courses exploring identity such as [Identity in question](#) and [Sexual orientation and gender identity](#); and the Future Learn course on '[Understanding Gender Identity](#)' developed in partnership with Gendered Intelligence.

Other activities and initiatives

Neurodiversity

'Neurodiversity' has gained traction as a useful way of understanding a social model of disability. This states that disability is a natural form of diversity and the goal is to accommodate disability, with optimal equitable outcomes for the individuals concerned. Neurodiversity highlights how people naturally think about things differently. The National Symposium on Neurodiversity (2011) describes neurodiversity as "*...a concept where neurological differences are to be recognised and respected as any other human variation. These differences can include those labelled with Dyspraxia, Dyslexia, ADHD, Dyscalculia, Autistic Spectrum, Tourette Syndrome, and others*".

Therefore, we understand neurodiversity as a way of referring to the different ways the brain can work and interpret information. The Open University embraces neurodiversity in all its forms, accepting that all brain differences are normal, rather than deficits.

Over the next reporting period, we will:

- continue to work with the OU's Neurodiversity Network and the Neurodiversity Working Group. These are comprised of staff and students who are neurodivergent and offer valuable feedback and advice.
- continue to raise better understanding and acceptance through various networks and modes of communication about supporting neurodivergence as a whole service concern
- continue to develop innovative services and products to reach our staff and students

Menopause

Under the [Equality Act 2010](#), menopause is largely covered under three protected characteristics: age, sex and disability discrimination.

The menopause is a growing and important area of interest at The Open University in Scotland – particularly as we have an increasing number of staff who will be affected by the menopause at some point in their lives.

We recognise that menopause is an issue which affects a huge part of the OU's workforce, and our EDI Teams are working on a range of gender equality initiatives to improve policy and culture at the OU. Given that there are around 34 symptoms of menopause (physical and psychological) and many people continue working through their menopause, it is essential for us to provide the right support for staff throughout their menopause transition.

We are aiming to bring about strategic and institutional change regarding health issues and addressing inequalities arising from menopause transition. One significant area of development will be in the provision of a menopause policy and guidance. To be impactful, embedding menopause policy in People Services considerations ensures it will be referred to in processes such as flexible working requests and the management of absence, as well as competence, disciplinary and other processes; thereby, effecting institutional, cultural change as a result.

We also recognise that not enough people talk about their menopause transition and how it can be managed; often feeling embarrassed to talk openly about what they're going through and the impact this has on their working lives. By raising awareness and putting the right strategic policies and support in place, we intend to demystify menopause transition in the workplace.

Over the next reporting period, we will:

- Collaborate with key stakeholders across the OU working through the development and inclusion of menopause in all strategic documents and policies.
- Ensure that diversity and inclusion remain part of our considerations when writing menopause support guidance – particularly as not everyone who goes through menopause identifies as a cis woman. Many people who identify as trans men, gender fluid, non-binary, or otherwise gender diverse, can still experience menopause.
- Work with OU colleagues in developing menopause awareness training for managers.
- Utilise University wide communication channels like the 'Menopause Moments' OU Group on Yammer, as well as Wellbeing and Mental Health staff groups, for knowledge sharing and developing an evidence base.
- Promote and raise awareness of the OU 'Menopause cafe' for staff to explore and better understand the many diverse experiences of people going through menopause transition.
- Ensure alignment with wider OU activities such as our new 'Menopause initiative' where members across the OU community will consider what may be useful individually and collectively, building momentum for change across the OU community.

STRATEGIC GOAL

[3]

Enhance our understanding on the importance of Equality Impact Assessment processes and practices

Priority aims:

to bring about changes in completion of our Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs)

to explore utilising EIAs with a view to informing our EDI evidence base

look for opportunities where EIAs can improve future EDI policies, processes, procedures, working practices, data, analysis, and reporting

KEY ACTIVITIES:

Equality Impact Assessment

A central aim of the PSED is to enable us to advance equality, diversity, and inclusion into our day-to-day business. For us to meaningfully meet our PSED requirements for 2021-2025 we need robust evidence on how particular groups are experiencing inequality. A results-oriented approach enables us to be proactive in creating solutions to achieve equity of outcomes for disadvantaged groups. We want to be confident that the impact of our EDI work and strategies are visible, retrievable, informative, and demonstrate how we make a difference. This reflexively ensures our policies, procedures, services, projects, and products are fit for all.

Institutional Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) policies and processes exist at the OU which are designed to ensure that a policy, project, or initiative does not unlawfully discriminate against any protected characteristic. We are aware that EIAs could be used as a more powerful method for informing our evidence base on disadvantaged groups and could act as a measurement of effectiveness for any equality-related activities undertaken.

Thorough EIAs assist us in determining unintentional barriers people with protected characteristics may face. There may be risks to individual students or staff members if it does not assiduously evidence due regard to protected characteristics.

Over the next PSED reporting period, we will

- By 2025, oversee a fundamental change to how current Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) practices are carried out at The Open University in Scotland.
- Work closely with our EDI Team and EDI Compliance Adviser as they undergo a full-scale review of our existing EIA processes, templates, and guidance during 2021.
- By 2025, scope out potential for utilising EIAs for EDI benchmarking and as one way of developing measures and solutions for equality groups as required.
- Networking – via various modes of communication to:
 - engage with staff about the importance and benefits of diligently completing EIAs; how they provide insightful evidence for protected groups policies, projects, and initiatives.
 - raise awareness of risks attached (at the individual and institutional level) by not fully complying; highlighting the disservice this does to those in protected groups.

- utilise the OU’s mission to bolster understanding that EDI is everyone’s responsibility in all their work at all times. As a result, we collectively increase EIA completion rates at the OU in Scotland to enrich our equality evidence base and meet due diligence.

Equality and Diversity Reports on OU Governance

We publish a comprehensive set of Equality and Diversity Monitoring statistics on the University’s governance. We use this information to understand the representation and diversity of staff and students at the University, and to provide evidence to support activities to improve the staff and student experience. The most recent report is currently being updated with a focus on the 2019-2020 academic year and is expected to be published in 2021.

Throughout the next PSED reporting period, a key activity for The OU in Scotland is to ensure we meet compliance with the statutes, ordinances and provisions regulating the institution and its framework of governance, and with the primary elements of governance outlined by the Higher Education (HE) Code of Governance, published by the Committee of University Chairs (CUC) and the main principles of the Scottish Code of Good HE Governance.

The University is undertaking an Academic Governance Review in 2021 with the recommendation that Senate should be supported by an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Committee with power to make recommendations and set and monitor targets relating to OU academic staff and students. Increasing diversity amongst OU staff and students and improving the experience of staff and students with protected characteristics at the OU is an institutional priority. A formal sub-committee of the Senate will facilitate coordinated action to ensure EDI quality and standards remain a part of the continued improvement of our student experience.

Between 2021-2025, we will also continue to pay close attention to any developments arising from *The Open University Council’s Diversity Policy* which may impact upon our day-to-day activities and working practices at The OU in Scotland. *The Open University Council’s Diversity Policy* sets out the approach to diversity on the Council of the OU; seeking to ensure that equality and diversity in its broadest sense is a significant feature of the Council. Notably, the University’s [Equality Scheme 2018-2022](#), includes an equality objective [2(c)] which seeks to build greater diversity on governance bodies.

The key performance indicators (KPIs) agreed for the objective are:

- a) all University committees will always comprise at least 40% women
- b) all University committees with 10 or more members (including co-opted members) will be comprised of at least 20% of people with a declared minority characteristic (disabled, ethnic minority, religious minority or lesbian, gay, bisexual)

- c) at least one third of the Council will always be comprised of members aged 55 or under

Scottish Government Equality Data Research Project

By 2025, the Scottish Government intends to have more robust and comprehensive data gathered on the characteristics of people in Scotland, thereby identifying and filling evidence gaps.ⁱ The Open University in Scotland's Strategy, Planning & Data Team has been selected to work on a *Scottish Government Equality Data Research Project* which recognises the importance of equality data population subgroups in improving the lived experience of staff and students. By 2025 and in alignment with the Scottish Government's ambitions, equality data at the OU in Scotland will be used more frequently to contributing to service delivery, and in advancing equality, diversity, and inclusion across the institution.

Scottish Funding Council 'Persistent Inequality Working Group'

The Scottish Funding Council and Equality Human Rights Commission (EHRC) agree that the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) has not yet been used to its fullest potential to tackle the most significant and persistent inequalities relevant to the university and college sector. Both organisations are committed to maximising the potential of the PSED to improve equality of outcomes for protected groups experiencing discrimination and disadvantage. The Open University in Scotland's Strategy, Data and Planning Team has been selected to work on the Scottish Funding Council *Persistent Inequality Working Group* with other Scottish HEIs.

The group's central purpose focuses on identifying the significant persistent inequalities present in the Scottish FE & HE sector in relation to staff and students. During the first half of this PSED reporting period, the working group will:

- Continue working on establishing definitions that provide sectoral clarity about what is meant by 'persistent', 'significant' and 'inequality'.
- Analyse findings from recent reports such as Advance HE's '*Rapid review of persistent and significant inequalities in UK higher and further education*' (to be published) and EHRC's update of the tertiary education findings within '*Is Scotland Fairer?*'.
- Continue reviewing the quality of the evidence base of protected characteristics from our own institutional evidence base, and that of the FE & HE Scottish sector more broadly. The working group will direct and contribute to the analysis of any relevant evidence and consider its results in a final report.
- Identify any specific data gaps, quantitative or qualitative, which the working group will highlight in their final paper.

Monitoring our PSED goals and progress

As determined by The Open University's [Equality Scheme 2018-2022](#), we understand the commitment required to deliver on meeting our Public Sector Equality Duty responsibilities and strategic goals by 2025. Over this reporting period, we develop a PSED action plan to monitor and report on how our Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) priorities and key activities are progressing. This will inform our EDI evidence base to show whether we are meeting our objectives (or not). In addition, we will@

1. Through structural mechanisms like the OU in Scotland's Unit Business Plan, ensure PSED priorities and key activities are taken forward to achieve results and tangible outputs.
2. From 2022 to 2024, conduct annual internal PSED assessment reports every April to demonstrate how the PSED continues to add value to our equality work; thereby allowing us to better understand how equality is integrated into our work across The OU in Scotland.
3. Keep abreast of external developments that may influence, shape, or impact upon our current or future EDI ambitions.
4. Resources allowing - assess the need for conducting further research to measure the impact of our EDI activities; particularly if this could provide additional insights, or identify any gaps in our evidence base. The expectation is that potential further research could help inform our objectives ambitions for current and future PSED reporting periods.

Further resources:

1. **About us:** [Strategy and policy](#)
2. [Access, Participation and Success Strategy 2020 - 2025](#)
3. [Accessible Information & Services](#)
4. [Anti-Racist Curriculum Project](#)
5. [BSL Action Plan 2018-2024](#)
6. [Equality and Diversity](#)
7. [Equality Scheme and Objectives 2018-2022](#)
8. [Open Learn Hub on Race and Ethnicity](#)
9. OU in Scotland's [Outcome Agreement with the Scottish Funding Council 2020-23](#)
10. [The OU's Student and Staff Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2020-2023](#)
11. [Scotland's BSL National Plan](#)
12. [Student and Staff Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy](#)

13. Widening Participation

14. Working with Equality Organisations

Getting in touch:

If you would like to find out more about this report, or have any comments or feedback you'd like to share, please contact us at The Open University in Scotland:

Ebony Carberry, Strategy Manager (Scotland) ebony.carberry@open.ac.uk

Kate Signorini, Depute Director (Strategy, Planning & Resources) kate.signorini@open.ac.uk

REPORT ENDS

Additional resources used to inform this report

1. The OU Equality Scheme Report 2018-2022, published by *The Open University, 2016*
http://www.open.ac.uk/equality-diversity/sites/www.open.ac.uk/equality-diversity/files/files/Equality%20Scheme-2018-22_accessible_pdf%20version.pdf
2. Equality outcomes and mainstreaming: report 2021
<https://www.gov.scot/publications/equality-outcomes-mainstreaming-report-2021-mainstreaming-report/>
3. Intersectionality – various resources
See: *Crenshaw, 1989, Hankivsky, 2014; Collins & Bilge, 2020; McKinzie & Richards, 2019; Rice et al., 2019*
4. Menopause (with specific thanks and credit given to Catherine Pestano, Jo Brewis, Alex Atkins at The Open University for their work and wording)
 - a. Menopause transition: effects on women's economic participation (2017)
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/menopause-transition-effects-on-womens-economic-participation>

- b. <https://menopauseintheworkplace.co.uk/articles/why-diversity-and-inclusion-matter-in-menopause-support/>
5. Responding to Gender Based Violence
<https://www.rapecrisisscotland.org.uk/publications/responding-to-gender-based-violence-in-scotland-report.pdf>
 6. Public Sector Equality Duty in Scotland: Guidance for Scottish public authorities, published by the *Equality and Human Rights Commission*, June 2020
<https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/advice-and-guidance/guidance-scottish-public-authorities>
 7. Public sector equality duty: specific duties for Scotland (revised), published by *Advanced HE*, July 2017
<https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/public-sector-equality-duty-specific-duties-scotland-revised>
 8. Promoting good relations: published by *Advanced HE*, July 2013
<https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/guidance/equality-diversity-and-inclusion/creating-inclusive-environment/promoting-good-relations>
 9. The Socio-Economic Duty (A Consultation), published by *The Scottish Government*, 2017 <https://consult.gov.scot/social-justice/the-socio-economic-duty/>
 10. University Strategy: Outline Framework – internal use only document / C-2020-07-10 (NOV) Author: *Anna Barber, Director of Strategy, The Open University*
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