Provider name: The Open University
UKPRN: 10007773

The Open University TEF Provider Submission

1. Provider context

The Open University (the 'OU') was created in 1969 and from the outset its mission was to be both conventional in its standards of education and qualifications, yet radical in its accessibility and openness to all. The 1966 White Paper that led to its foundation, and the subsequent Royal Charter, made clear that the OU was to deliver the standards of teaching and research expected of any other university. There was to be a clear public service provision of education beyond the student body and an intention that access to study should be open to everyone, "irrespective of educational qualifications, and no formal entrance requirement should be imposed". Courses should be offered "by a diversity of means such as broadcasting and technological devices appropriate to higher education", making flexible and lifelong learning available to all.

We fulfil our wider social mission by providing free education via our OpenLearn platform and in our partnership with the BBC and other broadcasters. In pursuit of our mission, we continue to innovate and respond to Government priorities for the development of flexible, lifelong and life-changing learning which delivers the skills the UK needs. Our apprenticeship provision is the largest in the sector and we were selected by the Department for Education and the Office for Students to lead a £10m scheme to help FE colleges to deliver new higher technical education.

Since its creation, the OU has fulfilled its mission by providing higher education to over 2.2m students worldwide, becoming by far the largest university in the UK with over 160,000 students in 2020-21 (equating to 44% of the UK's part-time undergraduate provision) and a further 45,000 studying with validated partners. Students study with us from wherever they are based across the four nations of the UK and internationally, enabling many students to study at university who would not otherwise be able to do so. We provide opportunities to over 36,400 students with a disability and we are the largest provider of HE study for students in prisons and other secure environments. We teach students living in rural areas (25% of our students), from deprived communities (26%), carers (5%), students who have no or low levels of previous educational qualifications (34%) and those already in work (70%). Our passion for ensuring that these students are offered the highest quality of university study is informed by our research and deep experience of distance learning pedagogy.

We support our students with the flexibility they need which allows them more time to complete their studies than many part-time students at other providers. Students have up to 16 years to complete a qualification, with options to take study breaks, to learn whilst they earn at a pace that suits them or to flex their intensity of study. Approximately 63% of students take more than 5 years to complete a degree, compared to 15% for the rest of the sector. Nevertheless, seven years after starting to study with us, over 70% of our students have achieved HE credits, certificates, diplomas, degrees or are still studying. They are also often applying their learning in the workplace and gaining recognition for that while studying.

One of the five goals in our newly approved institutional strategy is 'Equity'. Our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Institutional Plan has been developed to implement the goal of greater diversity and inclusion at the OU in all areas, at all levels and in every aspect of how we work. EDI is a key driver for all our individual, collective and institutional achievements, helping to further our contributions to social and environmental justice.

Coming from a wide range of backgrounds and academic attainment levels, our students' goals embrace a variety of personal and career aspirations, which change and grow throughout study and beyond. Most students study for degrees, but not all. In Scotland, students can receive financial support for module-only study. Those of our students who leave with higher education credits have overall satisfaction rates of 83.5% in our end of module surveys and many are already established in work, using their credit to progress their careers. For most of our students, their path through study is personal to them, and we aim to support them to achieve their individual goals. Our annual Employability of Qualifiers Survey (EQS) shows that, three years after study, 91% of students would recommend us to others and 94% were satisfied with their study experience.

Our teaching is research-informed and supported by an institutional commitment to fund scholarship in learning and teaching. Students access course materials produced with extensive testing and

informed by our research, 82% of which was assessed as 'world-leading' (4*) or 'internationally excellent' (3*) in the REF 2021.

We describe our teaching model as 'supported distance learning'. With so many of our students in full-time work, or with additional responsibilities and needs, flexibility in when, where and how to study is key to their success and is reflected in our learning design. Students engage with their materials in our Virtual Learning Environment, supported by online or face-to-face tutorial groups and individual support from our Associate Lecturers and Student Support advisors. For students with additional needs, we provide materials in a very wide range of alternative formats. In 2021, we responded to 28,000 requests from students with a disability for these formats.

We use regular formative and summative assessment with individual and in-depth feedback to enable students to develop their knowledge and skills. Our NSS satisfaction ratings (2023 NSS sample size: 30,000 students) have consistently been in the 86-88% range, including during the pandemic when ratings across the sector declined. This demonstrates the robustness of our model in times of crisis.

Our study materials are produced to a rigorous standard by academic authors supported by large teams of editors and designers. During the pandemic, we adapted our model to provide remote and open book exams, provided additional financial support to students and offered greater flexibility for submission deadlines, while maintaining our academic standards. We also shared our expertise in online learning to provide free training to the sector which received significant engagement. We have created materials to enable Ukrainian refugees to study whilst in the UK and for their hosts to learn more about Ukrainian society. We also held a webinar in collaboration with the Ukrainian Ministry of Education to help Ukrainian universities develop online content, which attracted over 800 attendees.

We teach 27 of the 34 subject areas assessed in the TEF, with over 500 modules on offer, at predominantly 30 or 60 credits in size. A feature of our education model is that students can study modules from across the curriculum, at a time that suits them, wherever they may be. Study is highly flexible, enabling students to move from a subject-specific degree to our unique Open degree or vice versa during their studies as their interests or careers develop. The Open Degree is the largest degree in the UK with 9,190 students registered in 2021/22 and a further 2,254 taking the combined STEM degree. This suite of flexible qualifications (including CertHE, DipHE and degree awards) gives students the ability to create their own multidisciplinary pathway and is particularly popular with students with protected characteristics who join the University with HE credit. In 2021, 48% of students who completed a BA/BSc (Honours) Open degree had credit transfer in their profile.

There is no typical OU student and the data provided in the TEF workbook alongside our submission shows only some of that rich context. This limits the usefulness of the workbook, and the benchmarking of our performance against the whole sector is largely self-benchmarking against our own students because our provision represents such a large part of the workbook. We will address this with our own data where possible to demonstrate how we continually work to improve the outcomes and experiences of our students whilst maintaining high standards over time. We will bring in additional data to demonstrate how we meet our mission to be 'Open to people, places, methods and ideas'.

2. Student experience

SE1 Teaching, Feedback and Assessment Practices

Teaching

Our teaching approach is built around research informed content created by expert academics working in teams with educational developers. Learning is facilitated by Associate Lecturers enabling a personal level of academic and pastoral support via synchronous and asynchronous tuition and feedback, with further support provided by advisors in our student support teams. Associate Lecturers were employed on temporary contracts for each module or other duties until last year, but all 5,000 staff were successfully moved from casual contracts to permanent employees in 2022, including full integration into Faculties and more time and opportunity for staff development.

We provide high-quality distance teaching at scale for a range of different learners. Our model enables teaching to be immersive and bespoke according to the learning objective. For example,

our innovative and award-winning OpenSTEM Laboratories challenge the traditional pedagogical model of students and teachers being co-located in the laboratory for practical work. We connect students via the internet to real instruments, data and equipment, meaning that students can carry out operations and experiments wherever they are in the world with a broadband connection. This approach has been commended by the Royal Society of Biology, the Institution of Engineering and Technology, the Institute of Materials, Minerals and Mining and the Institution of Engineering Designers, who have recognised the innovative nature of this provision and its value to students.

Most of our teaching is offered asynchronously through materials created by our module teams so that students can access it at times that suit their needs. Students also have opportunities to engage with teaching and other students in both virtual and face-to-face environments. Both synchronous and asynchronous teaching are structured and supported through our learning design.

The rolling action plans developed in our institutional Quality Monitoring and Enhancement (QME) processes contribute substantially towards assuring excellence in teaching, where our overall indicator and 29 out of 46 split indicators are above benchmark, by driving forward identified teaching-related improvements. Staff have shared over 2300 evaluations of teaching practice on the University's internal Scholarship Exchange repository creating a community of practice supporting quality enhancement.

Each Faculty has a centre for the scholarship of teaching and learning, and we have a 50-strong team of student data analytics staff, along with ongoing support for innovations such as the OpenSTEM Labs and the OpenLearn platform. These examples are indicative of the breadth of the University's commitment to understanding and supporting its learners and demonstrate what we believe to be sector-leading performance in the coordination and dissemination of scholarship insight that enables us to provide consistently high standards of teaching.

Teaching is designed to develop employability skills as well as subject knowledge, and to help students make connections between theory and practice. We have developed a large provision of occupation-based apprenticeships and many of our programmes include practical elements. For example, in business and law students have a range of opportunities from case-based learning through to third-year law students developing practical legal skills in online clinic projects with the Law School's Open Justice Centre. The School also participates in an innovative virtual internship programme, which provides paid virtual internships for students from underrepresented groups to build employability and workplace skills.

Our institutional *Teaching and Learning Plan* has 'enabling student success' as the overarching focus and articulates how our teaching practice supports our students to achieve their goals. Successful teaching and learning practice is supported and developed as part of a whole system of activities, which include induction, learner diagnostics, bridging materials, and peer and individualised support. Evaluation is important to the quality of what we do. For example, show and tell activities used in induction by the School of Education, Childhood, Youth and Sport (ECYS) have significantly contributed to reducing awarding gaps (see table below).

Reduction in awarding gaps		
(base 927 students)	2020	2021
Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds	-14%	-3%
Declared disabilities	-27%	-7%

Our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Plan, embedded in the principles of teaching and learning plan, includes the important principles that learning is designed and delivered as anti-racist, anti-discriminatory, accessible, inclusive and that diverse student voice is integrated into the planning of our teaching.

Tutorials

Students are well supported by tutorials and individual contact with Associate Lecturers. Most study questions can be resolved through regular tutorials, peer discussion, email or telephone conversations with Associate Lecturers. However, there is also the flexibility to arrange additional tuition customised to the individual student's needs, for example on particular topics, specialist study

skills or revision support. The support provided by Associate Lecturers is both in and outside tutorials, with 85.5% in the 2022 NSS reporting they have been able to contact staff when they needed to (compared to 80.3% for the whole sector). Support is often adjusted based on feedback from students. For example, in 2020, consultations with students in the School of Mathematics and Statistics indicated that they often worry about their approaching TMAs (Tutor Marked Assessments) and wanted more support especially around assessment cut-off dates. Quick response forums on three key modules were created, giving students a response to their query within 24 hours (though often within much shorter periods such as an hour or two). The forums also helped to reduce anxiety. Examples of the positive feedback received from students:

> "*Great support! Excellent and timely help.*"
>
> "*I found that forum so helpful due to the speedy answers which are really helpful in the stressful last few days before handing in a TMA.*"
>
> "*I did use these forums (not every time) and found them great. It meant I wasn't worried about bothering my tutor at short notice to the deadline when they might not have been available, and also knew I would get back a timely answer that helped, even at the weekend. It's also an option which feels available to all regardless of study pattern, time zones etc.*"

Assessment

We have always been highly rated in the NSS for Assessment. In the 2022 NSS survey we were rated substantially higher than the average for the sector across all aspects of Assessment.

NSS 2022 (14,000+ responses)	% Agreement	Comparison to the sector
Overall assessment/feedback	82.6%	+14.0%
Clarity of assessment criteria	78.7%	+9.0%
Fair marking/assessment	81%	+11.5%
Timely feedback	83.3%	+17.4%
Helpful feedback comments	87.4%	+18.3%

Personalised feedback on interim assessments is a crucial tool for helping students to realise their full potential. Regular assessment points provide opportunities to give personalised feedback and feedforward, provided to students by their allocated Associate Lecturer. This ensures a consistent experience throughout a module as the Associate Lecturer builds up a detailed picture of each student's understanding and skills, and serves to facilitate dialogue, which is actively encouraged. The maximum turnaround time for feedback on assignments is 10 working days, meaning that students can use the feedback for their next assignment.

Assessment is designed to enable students to demonstrate their achievement of all learning outcomes, not just those concerned with academic subject knowledge and understanding. Particular emphasis is placed on using varied modes of assessment to allow students to develop and demonstrate skills useful in contexts beyond academia. For example, the *Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences: Assessment and Tuition Framework* sets out that modules and qualifications will include 'authentic' assessments that develop communication skills relevant to many careers and workplaces. This includes assessment of contributions to collaborative discussion on module forums, audio-visual presentations, blog posts and reviews, policy reports, essays and projects.

As well as measuring academic achievements, assessment is an essential teaching tool for providing individualised feedback as well as strengthening the relationship between Associate Lecturer and student. Assessment strategies for qualifications and modules are designed according to the University's *Principles of Assessment Practice*. Ongoing review of the effectiveness of practice and policy is led by the pan-university Assessment Programme located within the Office of the Pro-Vice Chancellor (Students). The programme prioritises focus on quality enhancement, improving student outcomes and reducing inequalities. The University also has an Assessment Hub providing a repository of material on assessment from across the university to support sharing of good practice.

Feedback on assessment is a central teaching tool for our approach to supported distance learning, and as such significant effort is invested in ensuring that the quality of feedback is consistently excellent. Feedback is given to each student on every assignment and includes an individual summary, extensively annotated script and model answers where appropriate. Students are encouraged to contact the Associate Lecturer who marked their script with any queries. This can be followed up with dedicated one-to-one sessions, to ensure learning progresses. Staff tutors provide training for all new Associate Lecturers on good practice in providing feedback, supplemented by faculty-specific support. A sample of all marking and feedback on every module is monitored each year to provide an additional focus on consistent marking for each student. Monitoring of the quality of the feedback and suitability of the grading is undertaken by an academic member of the module team or a peer, which is then shared with the Associate Lecturer via their Staff Tutor, who is responsible for identifying and implementing any training needs. Monitors are also provided with training. For example, within the Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences, all monitors are required to attend an annual workshop focused on developing good practice. This ensures that staff provide the highest quality of feedback to their students, and its effectiveness is evidenced by the feedback we receive from students, through the NSS and our own internal feedback surveys.

Whole institutional change to our assessment approach in 2018 adopted Single Component Assessment (SCA) as the default strategy on all modules. SCA removed a barrier to student achievement by taking away the requirement for students to meet separate thresholds for continuous assessments and the final summative assessment on a module. This change tackled barriers to student progression and promoted clarity and consistency. Our "Degree Outcomes Statement" attributes the gradual increases in 'good degree' outcomes since 2018 to 'reviews and improvements to assessment strategies', of which the move to SCA had the most impact. Work on the use of weightings and thresholds in assessment strategies has also strengthened our use of assessment as an opportunity to recognise student attainment.

We are committed to ensuring that assessment is accessible to all students. Module teams are required to evaluate the accessibility of proposed assessments for students with different types of disability and to provide alternative assessments where required to enable those students to demonstrate they have achieved the learning outcomes. Associate Lecturers are provided with research-based guidance on good practice in marking the work of students with disabilities such as dyslexia, while students are provided with extensive information on how to request reasonable adjustments for summative assessments, including exams.

We ensure we examine how we can work with our students to promote the development of good academic conduct during the production of modules and during teaching. We develop assessment that is authentic, accessible and where possible provides optionality for students. Students are supported to develop their academic skills, especially in relation to referencing and paraphrasing. We also develop student skills to write in English for Academic Purposes (EAP), see section S05.

SE2 Course Content and Delivery

Each module has a tuition strategy setting a schedule of synchronous Learning Events (LEs), supported by forum-based asynchronous tuition and one-to-one support. LEs are typically offered to clusters of tutor groups but may also be scheduled at tutor group level where the subject matter or stage of study makes this more appropriate. While some LEs take place face-to-face in venues around the country, since 2018, at least one iteration of every LE takes place online, presented through Adobe Connect. Staff are supported to make use of the functionality of Adobe Connect (see SE4 Staff Development) so that online events enable and encourage student participation and interaction. Recognising that however flexibly LEs are scheduled, some students will be unable to attend, the "Policy for the recording of online tutorials" makes clear that one iteration of each online LE will be recorded and, wherever practical, one will also be unrecorded. The recording of tutorials is also helpful for students studying more than one module concurrently and for those who require learning adjustments.

Student satisfaction with tuition is consistently high, and our longstanding expertise in live online tuition helped ensure that disruption for students during the COVID-19 pandemic was minimised. This is evidenced in the NSS data where scaled scores remained consistent despite a period of unprecedented changes and against a background of unexpected increased demand for study.

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NSS Agreement, by Year	2019	2021	2022
S1 The Teaching on my course	85%	86%	84%
S2 Learning Opportunities	83%	83%	82%

Study time throughout a module is divided between directed learning (typically guided by OU-created content on the VLE or in printed textbooks) and independent study. Independent study is crucial to developing and stretching students, encouraging them to extend, apply and relate their learning in different contexts. To equip students for this, our *Digital and Information Literacy Framework* (DIL) has specific strands on 'find information' and 'critically evaluate' so that students develop the ability to 'independently devise and carry out a strategy for finding information needed, using a range of sources' and 'use quality criteria to critically evaluate information from any source'.

NSS Agreement, by Year	2019	2021	2022
Q3 The course is intellectually stimulating	91%	91%	89%
Q5 Opportunities to explore ideas or concepts in depth	87%	87%	85%

External assessors, examiners and external bodies consistently confirm the intellectual rigour and excellent design and delivery of our modules and qualifications, amply evidenced by the *External Examiner Report Summaries* document for 2022. External quality assurance is fully embedded into the design and delivery of our curriculum. Each module team appoints an external assessor with subject expertise to review drafts of teaching materials and to provide feedback on the appropriateness of learning outcomes and assessment in relation to the wider sector. Boards of Studies, who provide programme level governance, have external assessors who scrutinise curriculum proposals and contribute to quality monitoring and enhancement, while external examiners monitor the quality of student work and the appropriateness of marking and feedback.

Qualifications across all four faculties are subject to relevant Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body (PSRB) accreditation. Recent commendations include 'The robust nature of the method of agreeing content and material for modules, including the critical reader process' (Northern Ireland Social Care Council); 'the quality and detail of course materials (both for teaching and assessment) is consistently impressive and thorough, and the online environment and facilities through which teaching is delivered is at the leading edge of higher education provision' (Institute of Engineering and Technology); and 'The programmes have an innovative curriculum design. The programmes have been planned and designed realistically and inclusively, consulting a range of stakeholders and specialists' (British Psychological Society). We are the only provider offering counselling via distance learning with essential practitioner training elements provided through partnership with the Counselling and Psychotherapy Central Awarding Body.

SE3 Research & Scholarship

Our current *Teaching and Learning Plan 2022–2027* lists five principles, including that teaching and learning is designed and delivered as a research-informed process. Research is valued as core to our identity and teaching materials are produced by teams that include research active academics and postgraduate researchers. The development and design of teaching methods are informed by pedagogical research and scholarship. Each of our faculties hosts a dedicated Centre for Scholarship and Innovation to inform continuous improvement and innovation to enrich the student experience and contribute to the evidence base that underpins our teaching methods.

An example from our *Annual Quality Report for 2021/22* is a scholarship project conducted in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences focussed on improving weekly communications between Associate Lecturers and Level 1 students to aid retention and achievement.

	Completion of the module
Students receiving an additional weekly email on top of their regular support (412 students)	80.8%
Control group not receiving the additional weekly email (510 students)	73.2%

Overall module results (6821 students)	78.2%

Another example in our STEM Faculty is a project that set out to investigate whether tutor feedback via video screencasts could help novice computing students develop skills in programming and in problem-solving, and whether creating such screencasts was feasible as part of the normal Associate Lecturer workload. On one module tutors provided short screencasts giving feedback on students' assignment answers, tailored to each individual student.

Over the last four years, the Centres for Scholarship and Innovation have supported 383 scholarship projects. Students are involved as participants, helping to set priorities for scholarship activities and projects, and as co-researchers. The University's Scholarship Plan 2018-23 identifies four institutional priorities for scholarship, which have been adopted by all four Centres for Scholarship and Innovation. These are:

- To enable more students to achieve their study goals
- To enhance employability and career progression
- To improve and enhance the learning experience of students
- To promote equality, diversity and inclusion including reduction of degree awarding gaps

Scholarship project findings are disseminated via a central repository, the Scholarship Exchange, and in pan-university and faculty-based events attended by students and staff. They feed into the production, design and enhancement of our modules as well as the development of policies at faculty and university level, including policies on mental health and wellbeing, assessment, tuition and academic conduct.

SE4 Staff Professional Development

We place a strong emphasis on the quality of teaching in career development and progression for academic staff. There is a specific teaching-focused promotion profile designed to recognise achievement in teaching and innovations in pedagogy.

Academic promotions in past 3 years	Total	Based on Teaching or Teaching/Research profiles
Lecturer (AC3/Gr.8) to Senior Lecturer (AC4/Gr.9)	142	129 (91%)
Senior Lecturer to Professor	51	29 (57%)

The criteria for teaching promotion and for reward recognition include leadership of initiatives that enhance knowledge of effective teaching and learning approaches, and that address pedagogical challenges in distance learning.

The OU's annual reward scheme also recognises excellent teaching contributions, with up to 20% of staff rewarded in any one year. Additional increments and discretionary points within the Lecturer, Senior Lecturer and Professorial scales are awarded on the basis of excellence over a sustained period. Outstanding contribution in the short term or on a focused teaching project is recognised through one-off merit awards. Our Equality Diversity and Inclusion Statement emphasises the importance of the Reward Scheme being inclusive and implemented fairly with all employees' contributions considered objectively. Staff are encouraged to share good practice, for example within the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences' "Talking Teaching" and "Lunchbites" seminar series.

Staff are supported to enter national teaching award schemes, such as the *Times Higher Education* Awards, *The Guardian* University Awards, the AdvanceHE National Teaching Fellowship Scheme and the AdvanceHE Collaborative Award for Teaching Excellence scheme. Since 2014, we have won four THE awards and four Guardian University awards, including for our OpenSTEM laboratories (digital innovation and teaching excellence), our English in Action project (international impact), and our Secure Virtual Learning Environment project for students in prisons (widening access and outreach).

New academic appointees with teaching and learning roles undertake the OU Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice, a taught route for staff to obtain AdvanceHE Fellow (FHEA) status in addition to the qualification. Institutional investment has been made for 450 places for academic staff between Oct 2021 and Oct 2025. For more experienced staff who have been with us for at least

12 months, Applaud, one of the largest AdvanceHE accredited schemes in the UK, provides an experiential route for staff to obtain Associate Fellow (AFHEA), Fellow or Senior Fellow (SFHEA) status. Between 2020 and 2022, 372 staff, including 168 Associate Lecturers, successfully completed the programme: 174 at FHEA, and 171 at SFHEA level. Highly experienced senior staff are also supported to make direct application to AdvanceHE for Principal Fellowship; between 2020 and 2022,   . Applaud is not only a recognition scheme but also a professional development process for supporting staff to reflect on teaching practice. To support this, an AdvanceHE accredited pan-university mentoring scheme provides a training programme for over 100 mentors. Many candidates share their studies via our internal Scholarship Exchange and a significant number are submitted for publication in refereed journals. To date there are more than 1000 fellows at the University. We have established a Principal Fellows network which supports unified approaches to teaching excellence across all the academic units and where members act as champions for others to join the scheme and share best practice.

Our targeted *Quality Enhancement Conversations* series enables colleagues to share effective and innovative practice in teaching, learning and improving the student experience. Recent topics include artificial intelligence supported practice and how to support students who had missed an assignment deadline early in their studies. This pan-university programme is supplemented by more discipline-specific sessions run in Faculties. Associate Lecturers have further Faculty, regional and national development opportunities, provided by the Associate Lecturer Support and Professional Development Unit, which attract around 1,000 participants across each academic year, as well as the very active Peer Associate Lecturer Support (PALS) team, which runs monthly training events on best practice for online pedagogy. Some 600-900 Associate Lecturer complete training modules each year and specialist training is provided to help Associate Lecturers support students with specific needs. The University-wide Learning Design team also works closely with all module production teams on pedagogic practice, providing a means of sharing good practice across faculties.

SE5 Supportive Learning Environment

The VLE is at the heart of the University's learning systems, which comprise a mature and highly integrated ecosystem of platforms, tools and services. In keeping with our open ethos we use an open source VLE and are one of the biggest contributors of VLE code back to the Moodle community. A holistic design approach to our VLE module websites is taken based on research into the student experience including of course student feedback. This ensures that student needs are designed into the VLE's overall architecture.

All modules in development go through a process of workshop design, using student profiles/personas and focusing on learning activities rather than just content. This ensures that we keep the student in mind throughout production so that activities support students with assessment and meeting learning outcomes through manageable student workload. There are norms for student workload for the number of hours per week and word counts so that students are not overloaded. Each module website is designed, and all materials produced to include a sense of community by building in activities and online tools to connect students to one another. Interaction with and support from Associate Lecturers and module teams can be accessed via forums, online tutorials, email and phone. The material is highly regarded by students, with the NSS 2022 survey showing that 86% of students were able to access course specific resources (compared to 82.5% for the sector).

Content is designed using the most effective media for the pedagogic approaches, and interactive and active learning approaches are embedded as a method for delivery. The expertise of over 250 media specialists ensures stimulating blended learning combining text, video, audio, interactive experiences and graphics, creating an engaging student experience. Many of the module activities are tested with a representative student panel prior to modules going live to students. This panel of over 2000 students typically participates in 30+ activities each year.

Our OpenSTEM labs provide a growing number of STEM practical activities giving students real-time online access to a wide range of user-controlled laboratories, observatories, machines, high-end and state-of-the-art instruments, robots and streamed data. The activities use real and virtual reality spaces together with high-quality interfaces and some experiments relate to the practice of using remote control in traditional face-to-face environments. As it is all online, distance is no object

with 24/7 access provided in many cases, allowing personalised learning that suits the student. The OpenSTEM labs also allow a realistic 21st century co-working experience, greater accessibility and higher efficiency than is possible in a conventional co-location of students, educators and equipment. Online practical activities are closely integrated into our learning materials, allowing students to put theory into practice at the most appropriate points in the learning journey.

Library resources are also incorporated into the VLE, as are targeted training sessions aimed at embedding academic practice and skills for students from day one of study. The module teams, learning designers and specialist Learning and Teaching librarians work in partnership to create and embed library eBook and eJournals, along with Digital and Information Literacy (DIL) skills and library tutorials tailored to the subject and level of study. This close collaboration between academics and the library ensures students develop their digital literacy skills throughout their qualification and have access to a wide range of information resources. In addition to bespoke targeted training sessions within modules, Library Services present a generic programme of training sessions open to all staff and students which cover a range of library skills. DIL is also an element of the institutional Employability Framework (see section SO4).

Across the University, for modules in presentation from October 2021, 37% of students who attended a live session and 34% who watched a recording of a generic library training session gained a distinction at the end of their module. On average, students accessing 20 or more library resources during the presentation of their module were more likely to obtain a Distinction than a Pass or Fail. Engagement with the library is externally recognised with 83.2% of students in the 2022 NSS survey agreeing the library resources have supported their learning well.

Along with all the resources for learning, each module website provides a calendar outlining the week by week study the students need to undertake. This ensures even pacing with clear signposting to the activities and resources and indication of time needed to complete each activity. However, there is flexibility for students to study ahead if they have the capacity, either to allow themselves a buffer or to prepare for a planned break. Many modules offer joint study calendars to assist with study through common module combinations, and some module websites open early to allow students to get ahead before the formal start date.

Rich data are captured regarding student behaviour on the VLE, which is used both to provide academics and designers with insight into how students have reacted to different learning designs, and crucially to identify and provide students with tailored teaching and learning support, including delivering interventions to students who are identified as not progressing satisfactorily with their studies.

To provide students with academic advice on module choice, 'study sites' provide information on qualification structures within a particular discipline area. These sites complement individual module websites and provide a home for students throughout their qualification. The Mathematics and Statistics (M&S) Study Site and The Open Programme Study Site were two of the first to go live in 2017, with over 3000 students accessing the M&S site on a monthly basis. All discipline areas now have a live Study Site providing induction, preparation, diagnostics and bridging material together with module choice information. As the Study Site is accessible before module start, students are assured of timely and appropriate study skills support. To ensure students are supported in progression to their individual career goals the sites also host employability content fully connected to the range of support provided by Careers and Employability Services. The qualification level forums on these Study Sites provide a space for students to meet outside of their module forums and ask qualification related questions.

Collaborative working between Faculty and Student Support Teams (SSTs)

Comprehensive and personalised student support services are focused on enabling all students to make a good start to, and successfully progress with, their studies and towards their personal and career goals. Students are assigned to a dedicated Student Support Team (SST) which provides advice and guidance relating to the student's academic area of study. The SSTs are aligned to each Faculty and work collaboratively with academic colleagues. There is a close working relationship between Module Teams and SSTs which is built on mutual recognition of each other's skills and knowledge. For example, Student Support Staff have contributed to module design, drawing on knowledge from regularly speaking with students. Module Chairs and Associate Lecturers regularly

deliver briefings and updates to ensure our SST staff understand potential points of difficulty and can refer any of our students they support to additional advice and information.

Module choice questions are often directed towards the Student Support Teams. Each SST supports a particular discipline area and has dedicated advisors. Advisors work closely with the academics in their partner schools to ensure the correct information, advice and guidance is given to students, with academics giving regular module briefings to the advisors. The study sites are an invaluable source of knowledge for these staff, with feedback including, *"It is so valuable to us to have a resource like this to refer to and to steer students towards/provide a link. Student 'self-serve' is a big help and the more information they have helps to assist in their own decision–making process. That in turn can cut down any confusion and unnecessary information exchanges"*. Staff in the SST provide customised study planning advice for students. This can take a variety of forms, such as students needing to take a break from study or needing specialist support due to a disability, in addition to help with module and qualification planning. Support is also tailored according to the pace at which students wish to study. As already stated, students can plan to take longer to complete their studies due to other commitments, responsibilities and personal circumstances (including health and disability issues). For part-time who are working or caring or have a disability, this flexibility is extremely valuable.

Comments in the 2022 Graduate Outcome survey highlight how important students with a disability find the dedicated support from the OU:

"I loved studying with the OU. It gave me the opportunity to gain a qualification I should have got years ago. The amazing support I received from the OU as a disabled student was invaluable"

and

"I have absolutely loved the whole study. I was concerned about self-motivating with my mental health issues, but I have done really well and proven myself capable. But this was due in part to the materials provided and amazing tutor support. The support has been second to none. The OU faculty and student support have been really accommodating. They have made my erratic time of study work for me. I have made good friendships over WhatsApp and meet ups, so from a social aspect as well I have loved it."

Our range of accessibility initiatives and a dedicated Director of Accessibility ensure that all curriculum is accessible for students with a disability. An expert team works with the course production teams to test software, material and websites via an in-house usability and accessibility lab. We provide support with module materials in alternative formats, special arrangements for tutorials and examinations. Some subjects, such as mathematics and statistics, pose particular accessibility challenges for visually impaired students. We are sector-leading in supporting such students, by providing XML/VLE versions of all core teaching materials, users can navigate mathematical content with two different choices: either the ALT text which is generated automatically for them, or they can interrogate the mathematical content at different levels. In addition, figure descriptions, both in the module material and for all assessments, are produced by a team of Associate Lecturers for our *Figure Descriptions in Mathematics and Statistics* guide. The majority of modules are also available as DAISY talking books. In Arts and Humanities there is the provision of image descriptions for students with visual impairments.

Our Student Accessibility Policy defines our approach to enhancing accessibility which is built into the learning design at the outset, drawing on Universal Design for Learning principles and practices. Faculty and Module Accessibility Coordinators work with learning designers and module teams to create curricula and flexible learning environments that accommodate individual learning differences. Despite endeavours to embed accessibility by design, there will be some barriers that cannot be anticipated, particularly where student needs are complex. In these cases, we ensure that individual adjustments are put in place. We have structures in place to facilitate collaboration across the University in making curricula inclusive and accessible to students, including:

- A SeGA (Securing Greater Accessibility) community of practice which brings together expertise from all the relevant units, coordinates activities to enhance the learning experience for students with a disability and responds to changes and issues that arise
- Accessibility Champions who promote accessibility throughout the university, answering questions, signposting to resources, and disseminating information.

- An Accessibility and Usability Evaluation Team who are a centre of expertise for digital accessibility and usability, offering evaluation of websites, systems, and content, as well as creating and providing training and guidance to staff.

We have also worked with students and advisor staff to create an advanced, accessible chatbot. Key innovative features include the chatbot's ability to ask questions of the student (as an alternative to the Disability Support Form) and be interrupted to allow the student to ask questions about their study, assistive technologies and disability support. It can be interacted with via speech or text and has been subject to extensive accessibility testing. It is also now available for students to use to disclose disabilities and ask questions about support.

SE6 Physical & Virtual Learning Resources

The resources available to students via the VLE include:
- Online activities
- Forums for both pastoral and course-related discussions with their fellow students and their Associate Lecturer. These may also be used for formal collaborative activities
- Online eLearning via a blend of text, interactives, video and audio resources
- Online quizzes to enable students to test their understanding and to support reflection via formative quizzes alongside summative assessments
- Printed books containing self-assessment questions to ensure students continue to apply their learning as they read

Additionally, all our modules are designed on a set of key principles based around the OU's Learning Design framework, with all new modules going through our design process. This process also receives input from a student curriculum design panel which was Highly Commended in the Learning Technologist of the Year team award category at the ALT 2019 conference. All our learning design resources are openly available under Copyright Cleared Licence and were widely used during the pandemic. We build the student journey around the student and ensure effective scaffolding throughout the module/s. A particular focus is to treat everything the student does as an activity, enabling a tight focus on the sequencing of learning for students.

Secondly, our Digital and Information Literacy Framework (DIL) sets out how students will be supported to gain skills in 'using digital technologies to achieve personal, study, and work-related goals'. It was created by the OU Library in 2010 and refreshed, using JISC's Digital Capabilities Framework, in 2020 and covers five key areas: (i) Understand and engage in digital practices, (ii) Find information, (iii) Critically evaluate, (iv) Manage, create and communicate information and (v) Collaborate and share. The Framework defines skills appropriate to different levels of study. The Library maintains an extensive list of examples across all areas and levels, drawn from modules in each Faculty and from its own generic training resources, to enable module and qualification teams to draw on good practice in embedding these skills in our curriculum.

Thirdly, we invest in multimedia to support students with the key topics and concepts on their module. There is always a clear purpose for our use of multimedia, and we link this tightly to the learning outcomes and ensure it is clear to students why the resources have been provided. We can support students to understand and engage with challenging concepts in a way that words alone can struggle to achieve. A specific example is the use of interactive module maps to highlight the structure of the module, visualising the way the module is designed to support learning by highlighting key themes. This approach is embedded for level four and level five modules where the support can have the biggest impact. Recent testing with students on the Curriculum Design Student Panel and their feedback has enabled student-led improvement to these designs (see also section SO2 for reference to our Inclusive Curriculum Tool). Module teams are supported to use a variety of media in the VLE to encourage student engagement and to reflect different learning preferences. Diverse examples from across the University include using a photo essay on 'bad habits' in the module DD206 *The Uses of Social Science*, and the use of storytelling through an audio drama to illustrate key concepts in practice on module W112 *Civil Justice and Tort Law*.

Similarly, modules employ many VLE-based tools to make the learning process participative and engaging for students. OpenStudio is an online social learning environment, widely used to enable students to share and interact with graphical material in a collaborative environment. In modules

where the subject involves extensive engagement with visual sources, such as U101 *Design Thinking*, the tool is embedded throughout for peer sharing and feedback. In other modules, it is used for specific tasks, for example in DB125 *You and Your Money*, it is used for a small-group activity involving analysis of financial advertisements. A scholarship project on embedding OpenStudio across a qualification discovered particular benefits for students at level four, for whom this way of engaging and collaborating was linked to the gaining of confidence, skills development and student success even among those students who only observed others using the tool.

Students have access to over 600,000 ebooks and over 138,000 journal titles through the Library to support both guided and independent study, alongside other types of learning resources, such as online interactive 3D images and models of human anatomy, music scores, and subject specialist film collections. Accessible versions are available for students whose disabilities necessitate material in alternative formats. Some resources are recommended through the 'resources' section of module websites in the VLE while others are reached through collections accessed via the library website.

A fourth principle is to ensure accessibility of the curriculum for all students, reflecting the significant proportion of our students with declared disabilities and our substantial investment in this area. We provide advice and guidance to module teams to ensure that actions to make curriculum accessible go beyond our legal obligations. VLE materials are available in a range of different formats, including those compatible with a wide range of assistive technologies. Where modules include non-standard elements, accessible alternatives are built into the production process. For example, module A234 *Understanding Music* provides all materials for use with commercial music notation software in a format compatible with screen readers used by visually impaired students.

We have a university-level programme to deliver anticipatory learning adjustments for students who have registered a disability with us or who are unable to access the VLE (including students in secure environments (SiSE) and military personnel on deployment). Demand for alternative formats grew rapidly in 2018 and 2019 which presented us with some challenge but with the effort of a multi-disciplinary team we were able to quickly scale up from custom built packs for SiSE to a mass production service, enabling stability in the service delivery of printed packs. We also provide DAISY talking books, comb-bound books, accessible PDF/Word documents, e-PUB and ebook options, and files converted using the SensusAccess tool.

The fifth principle is to embed an approach to student feedback that informs the ongoing development and deployment of learning tools and resources and enhances quality on the modules. We collect data on VLE usage and give expert support to module teams interpreting and responding to the data. Monitoring of assignment submission data, for example, resulted in adjustments to the tuition timetable for module A232 *Music, Sound and Technology*, helping to close the gap in submission rates between the penultimate and final continuous assessment tasks. In another example, listening to student feedback in the end of module survey for TM254 *Managing IT: the who, what and how* led to reducing student workload for the next presentation. Responses to the changes saw a 40% increase in satisfaction with workload and a 30% increase in overall satisfaction.

SE7 Engagement with Students

We strive to ensure that all students are engaged in their learning. We are committed to ensuring all students have meaningful engagement opportunities recognising that part time students are often time poor and juggling lots of commitments beyond their studies. Our approach to student engagement is embedded in our Student Charter including a commitment to 'actively support authentic student engagement in University decision-making, closing the feedback loop; and committing to building partnership between staff and students.' We foster a strong relationship with The Open University Students Association (OUSA) through engagement with representatives at every level, and our approach to partnership is detailed in our Relationship Agreement, which sets out a series of priorities on which the OU and the Association agree to work together. The introduction of Eduroam access for our students is just one example of how we have improved the student experience by listening to students.

Over the last four years, we have invested in and developed our approach to how we work with students as well as how we listen to and respond to their voice. We are working towards meaningfully embedding the student voice in every aspect of our work and at every step of the students' learning journey and experience. We specify reasons for engaging students as being:

- To continually improve the student experience for ALL students, adopting principles of inclusivity and equity.
- To encourage and support students to become and feel valued members of our OU community and reap the benefits.
- To develop and improve skills, confidence and experience, particularly to aid career prospects

Our *Annual Quality Report* for 2022 reported that a wealth of pan-university student engagement activities continued to take place, becoming increasingly embedded in our processes, and facilitating opportunities to target students with protected characteristics to ensure engagement is representative of our diverse student body. These opportunities include student consultation online forums and meetings; focus groups; students as critical readers; user-testing; co-researcher opportunities in scholarship projects; student panels for Curriculum Design, Library Services and Careers and Employability Services; Real Time Student Feedback (a mechanism for students to provide instant feedback to Associate Lecturers with timely responses from staff); social media; consultant and intern opportunities; and Student Hub Live support activities in our annual Student Voice Week where we shine the spotlight on all our work in this area.

Work we undertook as part of the Student Voice Action Plan for 2021/22 included:

- Increasing the diversity of students engaged in quality enhancement
- Supporting staff to close the feedback loop in an impactful way, through published 'you said, we did' statements
- Supporting the development of a new internal early, mid and end of module student survey
- Developing new resources to support students and staff in getting the best out of student representation on governance committees, including a new code of practice for student representation. This work also included revisions to the governance code and the volunteer confidentiality agreement.
- Communicating the value and impact of Student Voice activities to both students and staff, including via the student-facing Student Voice website

Our success in engaging students and hearing their voices is evidenced by over 12,000 students responding to the NSS in 2022; more than 3,000 students registering for our annual Student Voice Week in November 2022; and over 7,000 students signing up to our Engage with Students Consultation.

Curriculum Design

Students are involved in curriculum design (see section SE6), and a curriculum design student panel (CDSP) was created in 2017. In 2022 we now have over 3,000 students taking part in the panel. In the evaluation of the CDSP (2021/22 p 25) a student stated that:

"*This has been a valuable experience, which has really benefitted me in my student voice and wellbeing ambassador duties, as I felt I have really been able to engage with students by understanding their studies better, through understanding how the curriculum has been designed for their study pathway. I have also been able to look at my modules and look at why they were designed in the way they were put together.*"

Student feedback

During the period covered by the TEF, feedback from students was obtained by a survey at the end of each module. This has now been replaced by a new Internal Student Survey (ISS) which is split into three separate surveys at early, mid and end of module to allow more opportunities for the University to respond to feedback.

The ISS works alongside feedback received from the National Student Survey, Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey, and a 'brand tracking' survey of continuing students which provides a regular 'temperature check' of student satisfaction and picks up issues of concern. The OU's Student Satisfaction Improvement Working Group, co-chaired by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Students) and the Students Association President brings together and monitors feedback across surveys to ensure any issues of student concern are addressed. A key source for this integrated feedback insight is our annual *Insight from Institutional Surveys* report which is produced from analysis of internal and

external student surveys, highlighting issues across eleven themed areas and making recommendations for action or further insight requirements.

Student Voice

The OU's Student Voice Steering Group, also co-chaired by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Students) and the Students Association President, has oversight of student engagement in quality enhancement and implements a Student Voice Action Plan to increase student awareness of, and engagement with opportunities to provide feedback to us to improve the student experience.

An example of work in progress is the establishment of the Student Voice and Wellbeing Group in the School of Education, Childhood, Youth and Sport (ECYS) (approximately 21,000 students registered in October 2022). The purpose of the ECYS Student Voice and Wellbeing Group is to provide strategic direction and leadership through developing an inclusive, valuable and supportive school-based resource, working in partnership to empower students and ensure that student voice is heard and acted on. The group aims to promote positive wellbeing through opportunities to increase the prominence and value of student voice. Since inception two years ago, students from traditionally under-represented groups have become ambassadors of the group, contributing to the work of the school in various ways, such as participating in staff recruitment where appropriate. Students are intentionally positioned as key stakeholders through joint Chair roles, compiling meeting agendas and facilitating meetings.

In our Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences we have an example of co-production, working with students as paid consultants in the development of our Mental Health and Counselling module. The students brought valuable service user experience and helped to create the right tone and sensitivity to the topic, whilst giving us great insights into how to teach sensitive topics.

In November 2022, during our annual student voice week which attracted over 3000 students, we ran several sessions including an environment and sustainability session which was well attended and led to an action plan and scaling up of carbon literacy training. This is a live example of student-led action which has delivered great work to support this important environmental agenda.

Student Consultation

'You said/we did' online, forum-based consultations with students are conducted for each Board of Studies. They focus on a wide range of issues that impact on students including tuition, assessment, career development and support. For example, the Wellbeing, Education and Language Studies Faculty asked students about factors that affected retention and heard that disability was a particular challenge for some students, especially getting support in place. In response, we made further investments in support so that all new students and those who declare a disability receive a proactive phone call to discuss their needs and receive support with a DSA application.

Student consultation also happens at institutional and project level. As part of redeveloping StudentHome (the platform students use to access their online module website) over 150 students were engaged to understand how students currently use the platform and what their expectations and needs are in the digital space. The engagement took the form of diary studies, focus groups and co-design workshops with students. Prototypes were created to allow user testing. A beta version of the new version of StudentHome is due to be tested in the 2023/24 academic year and the University aims to engage around 1000 students in the pilot to gain evaluation and feedback.

Students in secure environments

Providing world class higher education for students in secure environments (SiSE) is an integral element of the University's approach to inclusion and we have been doing so since 1972. The partnership between The OU and The Prison Services was set up to facilitate access to higher education for those prisoners who had not previously had the opportunity to study at this level and who had demonstrated their potential and motivation. Courses are offered in over 150 prisons and 50 secure hospital units across the four nations, supporting just under 2,000 students on more than 140 courses. The University works with the Ministry of Justice and has created a VLE that is accessible via the Virtual Campus, allowing students to access their materials in digital format or via accessible offline packs. Continuing to inspire SiSE students in realising what they are capable of,

providing a link to a better future and achieving new goals are firmly embedded in our research, teaching and learning. Specialist tutorials and support are arranged for SiSE students.

In 2018 a new student volunteer initiative was piloted to support SiSE students who were unable to access the OU library and were dependent on personal tutors or educational officers to obtain their independent study materials. Student volunteers (experienced students) now work with SiSE to source materials for their research. The pilot was hugely successful and has now been in place for four years.

Study Intensity

Throughout their qualification, students can vary study intensity year-on-year according to their needs and increasingly some students are choosing to study 120 credits (equivalent to full-time study) in an academic year. Over the last six years, there has for example been a growing number of Psychology & Counselling students studying 120 credits during an academic year, with numbers more than doubling from 1,073 to 2,552. We have developed resources to support students studying at higher intensities, such as integrated study calendars. Student feedback was also used to inform the development of a suite of resources including study templates to assist with time management, an assignment deadline planner for modules across the programme to aid module choice and planning, and top tips for successful full-time intensity study based on student and Associate Lecturer feedback. In addition, a dedicated forum is provided for peer-led support for students, with identified threads to support those studying the same combination of modules, and a supporting Associate Lecturer moderator.

3. Student Outcomes

SO1 Approaches to Success

Scale and consistency of support

The University provides a high quality, accredited Information Advice and Guidance (IAG) service tailored to the needs of our students and the specifics of OU study, at a scale unmatched in the sector. In the 2020-2021 academic year frontline services handled 438,688 inbound and 263,686 outbound calls, 362,525 emails and 69,557 webchats. In addition to frontline support, there are several specialised services that provide tailored support to students, including a Personal Learning Advisory Service (providing coaching and mentoring to students from underrepresented groups), the Mental Health and Casework Advisory Team (providing specialist support in relation to Mental Health and Wellbeing), and the Disability Support Team (supporting students to receive adjustments in line with a disability or health condition).

Consistency across all services is key to ensuring that students receive an equitable service, and that staff are kept up to date with changes in policy and process. To ensure this we make extensive use of a dedicated customer relationship management system, which provides staff with a 360-degree view of an individual student's support experience. A Knowledge Management System holds thousands of pages on content which staff can search to ensure that the information, advice or guidance they are providing is accurate and up to date. A specialist support team provides training and development across a wide range of topics, and our IAG services (delivered through our Student Recruitment and Support Teams) across all four UK nations are externally accredited to the government sponsored national matrix Quality Standard. Our IAG is one of the longest-running IAG accredited services for Student Support in the sector.

Online IAG is geared to support all aspects of the student journey, with extensive resources based around module and qualification studies, ongoing study progression and wellbeing and mental health, including a Student Help Centre (where feedback informs development and improvement of content). Students can request a call back, access webchat or contact their allocated student support team. Students rated their satisfaction with our online information and advice to help plan their study choices for their subject and qualification at over 90% in our latest annual Early Student Experience Survey.

The University has invested in chatbots to provide information to students on topics as varied as academic references, ceremony bookings, Access courses and computing helpdesk queries. The usage has been significant (the chatbots combined gave 10,955 answers in the month of October

2022 alone) with satisfaction ratings for the bots averaging 4.2 (where a score of 5 is 'very satisfied'). With straightforward information available online, this use of artificial intelligence enables frontline staff to spend time supporting students with queries that require a more detailed and personalised response.

Student satisfaction with the SST service is measured through two surveys, the IAG Survey and the Early Student Experience survey. The IAG survey is sent to students at the end of an interaction (phone call, email or webchat) to request feedback on the quality of the information, advice and guidance (IAG) service. In 2021/22 IAG student satisfaction was over 80% for all aspects of IAG. The Early Student Experience survey focusses on the provision of IAG to new students and in 2021/22 satisfaction was over 80% for core service delivery. We are currently undertaking a service design review which aims to identify opportunities to improve the service with the overarching ambition of either giving time back to students and/or time back to staff.

Additional support is available to students from underrepresented groups and disadvantaged backgrounds from a 21-strong team of Personal Learning Advisors (PLA) providing proactive contact to students who are at risk of withdrawal or failure. The service helps students develop their preparedness to learn and develop study skills, increase their confidence and highlights the importance of reflection. The service was launched in Spring 2021 and consists of PLAs from diverse backgrounds provides targeted support to help improve the retention of Black students, identifying systematic and structural barriers. Its October 2021 intake saw a take-up rate of 21.2% (a total of 491 students), delivering both one-to-one and group interventions. There was 100% satisfaction rate from the 102 students who fed back on the experience of repeat interventions.

Proactive support

Proactive student support is carried out across the University to ensure students receive the right service at the right time to maximise their opportunities to succeed. This support activity forms part of a coordinated and enhanced study and support model that covers all aspects of a student's goals, needs and study experience. An underlying objective is that proactive support should be inclusive and reach all students within a diverse student body and this is achieved by utilising different modes of contact: phone calls, emails, bulletin board messages and text messaging. We also recognise that some students will have a greater need of support from the University than others, and that students most in need of support are often among the least likely to ask for it. The approach therefore prioritises proactive telephone support to students from certain cohorts and makes use of predictive analytics (see below) to identify students who are at risk of not continuing. Some examples of proactive telephony contact include:

Pre-module start:
- Checking that the student is feeling well prepared to start and identify any support needs.

Mid-module:
- Checking that the student is on track to complete the module and make tutors aware of any potential barriers the student may have towards successful study.

High Study Intensity:
- Ensuring that the student understands the recommended hours required and feels confident in their time and commitment.

We use sophisticated machine learning models and randomised control groups in our pro-active campaigns to improve retention and pass rates for students. For example, in our October 2020 cohort we sent communications to students who had opted to study at higher intensity, as our models had identified these students as being at higher risk of not completing, particularly if new to the OU. This campaign resulted in positive, statistically significant (significant at 99.9%) improvement in pass rates. Specifically for students in the 40-60% probability range, pass rate increased by 15-19%pts.

One-to-many academic support

We run targeted academic support sessions alongside proactive student support. An example is the study catch-up sessions offered by the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASS). These sessions targeted students who did not submit their assignment with the aim to provide a supportive space to

help students with their learning and study strategy and get back on track. As you can see from the table below this initiative resulted in an uplift in submission rates from the 2020 February to October cohorts.

Assignment submission rates	February 2020 cohort	October 2020 cohort
FASS 1st year module (c5,000 students)	70.5%	76.5%

Where students have reported feelings of being overwhelmed, wanting to quit and thinking they had a mountain to climb, we have evidence by the student quote below, which shows improved motivation:

I was so surprised to see how many other students are facing similar challenges and most importantly it was good to hear about the coping mechanisms that can be used. It is fantastic that OU brought us all together in this tutorial and provided this kind of support and guidance".

We are now exploring how to scale this activity up recognising the value of catch-up sessions in improving student motivation and submission rates.

Use of predictive analytics in academic support

We have developed an early alert indicators dashboard, which is a predictive analytic modelling tool that aims to provide greater visibility of students' online study engagement levels, so that timely Associate Lecturer support can be offered when student engagement appears to have waned. The alert enables Associate Lecturers to provide more targeted and personalised academic support. Research has shown that use of the early alert indicators dashboard has improved retention overall, particularly narrowing gaps in relation to students who live in the most deprived areas as measured by the Index of Multiple Deprivation, ethnicity and gender. Two recent early alert indicator studies involving the use of test and control groups resulted in 7-8% uplift in pass rates. The Faculty of Business and Law used the tool to enable Associate Lecturers to identify students who are struggling on their module and offer one to one support with understanding concepts, assignment writing and time management. They also offered assessment extensions, where appropriate, to enable the students to meet the challenges of work and study. One Associate Lecturer reported that by using the dashboard she was able to provide additional support to students "*that probably would have dropped out undetected until it was too late…, prioritising early intervention with students who we have in the past thought we cannot identify and support.*"

Careers and Employability

Increased investment in the University's Careers and Employability Service (CES) was agreed five years ago as part of an institutional programme to embed employability via a Student Employability Strategy which runs to 2025. The educational gain this generates for students is presented in SO4-6. CES is critical to the success of the strategy and provides support to students and to alumni for up to three years after they have stopped studying. This includes one to one telephone or video appointments, interactive group sessions and a range of online tools including use of artificial intelligence. CES have developed a data-driven approach, 'Achieving Your Goals', to deliver more proactive and tailored support to students. Survey data are used alongside tracking and progressing students through four main career readiness stages: Discover, Explore, Achieve and Progress. The data obtained helps us further understand the student journey and provides insights into the career needs of students so that we can target resources and services appropriately.

Other innovative developments in service delivery include: a platform called Opportunity Hub (for events, appointments and opportunities); online careers events; Career Pulse (a diagnostic to signpost to relevant resources); the Graduate Skills Award; the Elevate career mentoring programme, which offers career coaching and external mentoring support to under-represented students; and virtual internships. These developments are informed by data and insight using a combination of:
- Service usage (increased from 20,813 in 2018/19 to 36,759 in 2021/22)
- Career readiness insights (16,409 responses from the October 2022 cohort)

- Student feedback (up from 450 students providing feedback in 2018/19 to 2,026 in 2021/22)
- Employer relationships (increased from 487 in 2018/19 to 830 to date)

For 2020/21, pass rates of students engaging with services were 16.4%pts higher than those who did not engage, hence a service priority is to continue to drive engagement. As well as a large uplift in student usage, the proportion of students taking action as a result of engagement has increased from 56% in 2018/19 to 78% currently. This data is included in the University data dashboard that predicts levels of success driving tailored and personalised interventions.

Support for students who have declared a disability

Extensive support is available for students with additional needs and/or a declared disability. These include non-medical help, residential schools support, specialist alternative module material formats, equipment loans and alternative examination arrangements. A dedicated Disability Support Team work with students and their student support team to create a personalised profile for every student that declares a disability, jointly developed by the student and a specialist advisor and capturing the key information concerning the disability, how it may affect study, what adjustments may be needed (including those for the tutor) and a preferred means of contact. Every year since the 2019/20 academic year we have had over 36,000 students declare a disability. The profiling process has been enhanced by the introduction of a chatbot to help students complete an initial disability support form. The chatbot creation was informed by research which identified how forms and administrative processes can create barriers to getting the right support for study and independent living. In addition, an Accessibility Referrals Panel has been implemented to enable independent resolutions to be found to complex requests for reasonable adjustments.

Non-medical support is highly individualised and for example can include study assistants, practical support assistants, notetakers, specialist mental health mentors and specialised study support and assistive technology trainers, all focused on enabling students to be fully supported to succeed in their studies. This is support organised and funded by the OU, in addition to any other government funded DSA support. We have already committed to £288,000 of support in the first three months of the 2022/23 academic year.

In addition to the above, the University has invested in the following services for students:
- Shout - a free (UK only), confidential text messaging service for anyone who is struggling to cope and who needs immediate support.
- TalkCampus - a peer-to-peer support app providing a safe place to talk anonymously to other students around the world about anything that is on their mind. The app supports 26 languages and is monitored by professionals 24 hours per day.
- Report and Support – a confidential process to support staff, students, learners or visitors to report discrimination, bullying or harassment.

We have also developed a short course in partnership with the British Association of Counselling, supporting practitioners, many of whom had no prior experience in online therapy. The course was shortlisted in the THE Awards 2021.

SO2 Continuation and Completion

As stated in our context section The Open University provides access to higher education for students for whom standard routes are often not an option. The reasons students choose to study with us are often the same reasons they leave study before gaining a qualification e.g., work and family commitments or health issues. The standard interpretations of success, continuation and completion do not fully reflect success for students in flexible distance education. For example, we have students who complete one or two modules and that is all they need to gain their desired promotion or start a business.

We recognise that success is defined by the student. This approach is supported by The Open University Students Association and is particularly relevant for us as a pan-UK university with sometimes differing priorities, as reflected in Nation expectations. We monitor the proportion of students who have succeeded by the third year of study; counting credit achievement, current study and gaining a qualification as positive student outcomes. Improvement in student outcomes has always been and remains a priority for the University, with the principal action being to improve year-on-year student success and satisfaction. The collaborative actions across the University have

resulted in a positive trend in student outcomes in recent years, showing more students are succeeding in their OU study, as illustrated in the table below.

Cohort year (performance measured at year 3 of study)	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
Proportion of student succeeding in OU study (internal OU data measure)	70.5%	71.9%	72.9%	73.3%
OfS Continuation outcomes	53.6%	54.7%	56.5%	58.3%
OfS Completion outcomes	31.5%	32.0%	32.9%	37.0%

This positive trend seen in our internal data, a 2.8%point increase between 2015/16 and 2018/19, mirrors the trend being seen in our OfS B3 continuation data which has increased by 4.7%pts. Due to the scale of our teaching each 1% increase in our whole undergraduate 2018/19 cohort equates to approximately 408 more students (Higher Education Statistical Agency - HESA data) achieving positive outcomes each year. Both our continuation and completion metrics demonstrate that we are improving the proportions of students continuing and completing with the OU.

Credit transfer

We play a key role in supporting students from other providers transferring in to continue their studies towards a qualification. Our flexible study model and Open Qualifications allow students to return and study regardless of previous subject constraints and at a time that suits them. On average from 2014/15 to 2020/21 we made just under 6,000 credit transfer awards each year. We also have students who start with the OU and then take their credit to study with another provider. HESA data shows that for students who started at The Open University on a first-degree qualification in 2018/19, 805 students transferred their OU credit to continue their study at another HE provider. Recent improvements in our completion metrics are partly driven by an increased proportion of students choosing to study at a full-time intensity, reflecting our ability to offer flexible study options to support students at all points in their life. The proportion of these students in the OfS population (and therefore in the student outcomes measures) is projected to increase in forthcoming years, given the increasing trend that we have seen over the last seven years. From internal analysis of the OfS data, students studying at a full-time intensity from the 2018/19 entry cohort have a continuation rate of 67%, and those from the 2014/15 entry cohort have a completion rate of over 50%. Both figures exceed the benchmarks for continuation and completion respectively.

Performance and addressing the challenges

We are determined in our efforts to close the awarding gaps between students with different characteristics and we are focussed on addressing the gaps identified in the TEF data via our Access and Participation Plan. In our TEF data we have some areas of very strong performance:

- 'Nursing and Midwifery' is our strongest subject in both continuation and completion, and 'Psychology' and 'Combined and General Studies' also perform well against the benchmarks for continuation.
- For completion, 'Chemistry', 'Economics' and 'General, applied and forensic sciences' are above benchmark.

There are also further areas of positive performance and some challenges to highlight:

- Domicile: non-UK students perform above benchmark for continuation
- Ethnicity (Asian or Other): these students perform better or close to white students
- Level: Students on first degrees have better continuation rates than those on Other UG study or with UG/PG components.
- Performance over time: there are year-on-year improvements in continuation rates over the four-year period of the TEF. For completion rates there is a drop between years one to two, but thereafter a rise to above year one level in year four.

There are areas where we see awarding gaps for certain ethnicities including Black and Mixed students. We are focussed on addressing these gaps identified in the TEF data via our Access and

Participation Plan. We have a dedicated team of evaluation specialists and analysts to direct interventions and measure progress.

In recognising the continued challenges our students face and to meet our ambition to continually support students to succeed we have recently developed new structures and teams as part of our institutional Student Outcomes Programme, which consists of seven areas including retention, access, progression and assessing our qualification architecture. This programme has been built on a foundation of evaluation and insight gained by its predecessor institutional improvement programme 'More Students Qualifying' and is enabling us to be evidence-led in our prioritisation of activity to support improved continuation, completion and progression. Two examples of work already delivering good results are:

- Communication campaigns to students who have paused their studies before completing a qualification but not returned in a specific period of time, resulted in a 9.3% uplift in registrations (1,405 students returned and registered to complete their qualification)
- Adoption of a new assessment practice allowing students to resubmit one of their assignments,

We have developed an Inclusive Curriculum Tool (ICT) to support the design and review of the structure and content of our modules. The ICT was designed with input from students and will be used by all new modules by 2024/25. Students are engaged as peers alongside academic staff to use their lived experience to support use of the ICT. We have several models of engagement of students including as contracted staff (Inclusive Curriculum Student Consultants), paid internships, and as short-term reviewers paired with tutors. More than half of the 100+ modules to have used the Tool to date have engaged students.

Another initiative focuses on improving the number of student declarations from students who are carers and care experienced, so they can be better supported. This is now a mandatory part of the enrolment process making students more aware of the support and bursaries available to them and we now include this as one of our institutional performance metrics.

SO3 Progression

Developing employability is a vital component of our students' success; enabling them to build the skills, behaviours, experience and knowledge to achieve their personal, educational and career goals. We support our students to develop a range of core skills and attributes through their learning that will enable them to be successful in any given context and across all aspects of life.

Our students demonstrate a range of differing employability needs. 55% of registered students are in full-time employment and 20% are in part-time employment. Of those students who tell us about their career intention at the start of study, 36% report that their intention is to change career, whilst 30% report an intention to develop in their current career.

Our Senate-approved Student Employability Strategy (June 2019) explicitly drives the embedding of core employability skills and attributes within the curriculum. It is supported by the newly launched Teaching and Learning Plan 2022-27. Action point 2.5 of the plan describes the ambition to expand the reach of our careers and employability services to offer increased opportunities for students, including virtual internships and placements, to enable students to understand and articulate how the skills and attributes that they are developing through their study apply to their own individual goals.

The TEF measure of progression is the proportion of students who have gained a qualification and progress to managerial/professional employment or further study within 15 months of qualifying, as established through the Graduate Outcomes Survey. With so many of our students already in employment at the start of their studies, and a significant proportion who are not studying with a view to gaining immediate employment (retired students, students in secure environments etc.), this indicator is not necessarily the most useful measure of successful progression for the OU. Our progression metric for part-time students (our largest group) is 83.5% for our most recent population (82.1% for the whole part-time sector).

There are positive points on progression to note from the TEF workbook:

- Ethnicity: students who declared a mixed or other ethnicity perform better than white students. Students who declared as Asian/ mixed are above benchmarks for their groups.
- Level: we have above benchmark performance for undergraduate with postgraduate components students.
- Performance over time: there is a drop from year one to two, but year three is highest and above benchmark.
- Subject: we have strong subject performance in Nursing and Midwifery, Physics & Astronomy, Sport & Exercise Science, Economics, Mathematical Sciences and General Applied and Forensic Sciences, most of which are also above benchmark.

We have developed our own survey which is sent to alumni three years after qualifying and which asks about the impact of study in terms of personal and career goals. The Employability of Qualifiers Survey was created by the University to address timescales of study as well as including questions more pertinent to the context of our students than those of the Graduate Outcomes survey.

Graduate Outcomes Survey October 2022	Agreement
OU study has/will help achieve my study goal	87%
OU study has/will help achieve my personal goal	86%
• *In work at the time of the survey – 76%*	
• *In further study at the time of the survey – 13%*	
Would recommend OU study to others	91%

83% (GO 2022) are in highly skilled employment after they have completed their qualification. Our work has been recognised externally by the National Undergraduate Employability (NUE) awards, where we were shortlisted (one of five finalists) for Most Improved Commitment to Employability in 2020 and our CES finished as runners-up (Highly Commended) in the Best University Careers/Employability Service category in 2021.

SO4 Educational Gains – Articulation

Educational gain in our context

One of our central aims is to continue transforming lives by helping people to realise their ambitions and fulfil their potential. Supporting students to succeed in their study, career and personal goals is a key element in achieving this aim.

Educational gains for our students are encapsulated across student perceptions of their:
- Academic gains: subject knowledge and academic skills
- Personal gains: soft skills and personal growth attributes including resilience and establishing values and
- Graduate gains: work readiness and transferable skills and confidence.

Part-time students and mature students have a range of motivations and goals linked not just to their career aspirations but also to personal achievements. Positive mental and physical health are equally valuable gains from education. Our notion of educational gain is focussed on the educational distance travelled alongside performance on student outcomes.

Confidence-building is a key aspect of the educational gains we intend our students to achieve, reflecting the atypical backgrounds and entry points of many of our students in comparison with the wider sector. Our open access policy means that many students enter the university with fewer or lower-level educational qualifications than those at other HEIs (31.6% at the start of the 2022-23 academic year did not have A levels or equivalents). Our longstanding provision of HE to SiSE students (see SE7) further shows the diversity of our student body. The previous educational experiences of many of these students often results in them lacking confidence in their academic abilities and skills.

We draw on a wide range of methods and resources to instil confidence in students, starting before they register with us. The use of student voices in social media campaigns and in targeted marketing, for example the MTV Generation Change partnership, seeks to instil confidence in prospective

students that the OU is for them and can enable them to achieve their aspirations. For registered students, alongside the support offered by Associate Lecturer and Student Support Teams, our Student Hub Live (SHL) is a key resource for building student confidence. SHL is a live, interactive platform focused on building the student community. It runs a series of study skills workshops and live broadcasts on aspects of study where many students initially lack confidence, such as critical thinking and writing, and ensuring academic integrity. SHL won an innovation award from the Universities Association for Lifelong Learning in 2018. In 2021-22, total attendance at SHL live events was 12,780 (with an average of 210 per event), while recordings of these events were accessed 16,826 times.

Qualification and module level learning outcomes are central to defining the educational gains that we expect our students to achieve. Learning outcomes are underpinned by our Levels Framework, which describes general attributes for each level of study to ensure alignment with the requirements of the Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications. Clear guidance on creating learning outcomes is provided to teams, with a focus on clarity, conciseness and student agency.

Comparison of the qualification learning outcomes for a sample of one honours degree from each of our four faculties emphasises both the distinctiveness of each qualification in terms of the breadth and depth of its academic coverage, but also a consistent focus on skills that are widely applicable to a range of professional and personal contexts. For example, qualifications in English Literature, Physics, Law and Early Childhood all include cognitive skills learning outcomes focused on analysis, synthesis and reasoning, as well as common elements around digital literacy, audience-focused communication skills, project planning and independent and collaborative working.

Our resource bank includes over fifty videos co-created with students, featuring their articulation of wider educational gains from their study. Subjects cover time management, setting goals and milestones and coping when you are struggling.

Our Student Employability Strategy is a key enabler for students' educational gain. It is structured around fulfilling aims and objectives under three themes: Enhancing Student Support and Engagement, Embedding Employability in Curriculum Design and Deepening our Employer Engagement. This strategy supports our students in personalising employability: recognising, recording, reflecting and articulating the employability/graduate attributes via the Employability Framework and FutureYOU (Personal Development tool) that they have already acquired through previous life, work and study experiences, and are developing through study.

The Employability Framework is a common point of reference for embedding and making explicit employability within the curriculum and provides greater transparency in terms of the way employability is developed through a student's study journey. Classified into three domains (core skills and competencies, personal attributes and behaviours and external awareness), the University created the Employability Framework following substantial consultation and research. It describes ten key skills and attributes that address the development of Educational Gains (academic, personal, graduate and increased confidence) in a structured and supportive manner, across study levels. Our Employability Strategy requires that the Employability Framework is embedded appropriately across all curricula by 2024/25, with its inclusion in curriculum design now stipulated for all new modules and qualifications. The consistent use of the Framework in curriculum design will provide every student with an equitable opportunity to develop key skills and attributes we believe are important to achieving success, in whatever form that takes for the individual student.

Our Student Employability Strategy also recognises the integral relationship Personal Development Planning (PDP) has with the framework to enable our students to reflect upon, articulate and evidence the core employability skills and attributes being developed and enhanced through study. Our FutureYOU tool has been developed to provide students with a mechanism to do just this, and it is designed to be relevant to all students, whatever their entry points, subject area or study motivation. FutureYOU is integrated and accessible across the whole student journey (on study/subject sites and linked to from modules) to incorporate the development of study goals. It is also available for students to plan across their lives in work, study and personal contexts. Through in-module and wrap around guidance students are encouraged to engage with FutureYOU to develop their own narrative, encapsulating and supporting them to articulate their unique set of educational gains.
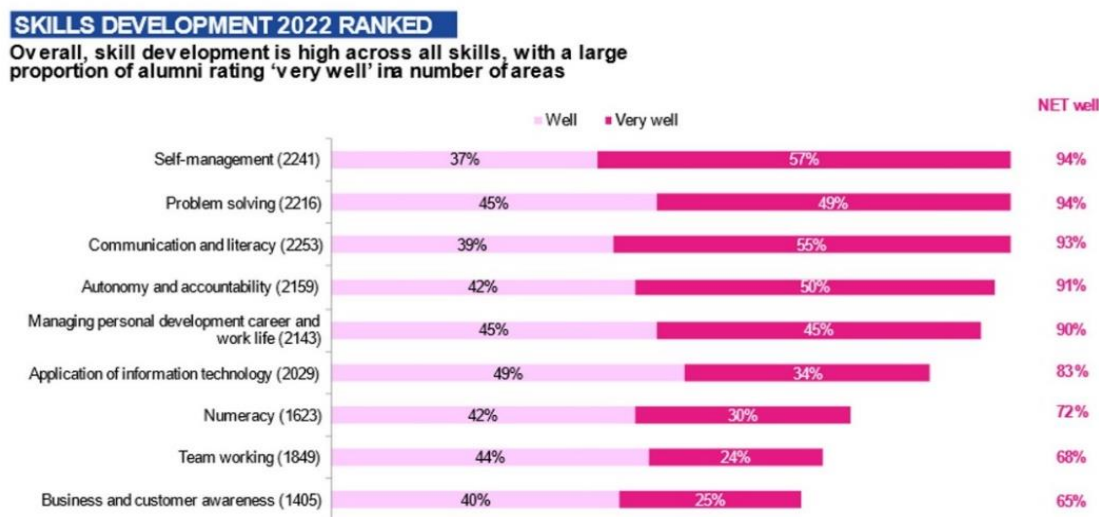
FutureYOU builds on our induction principles which require that support is provided for our students to assess the skills they will need and to help instil and build confidence in those skills. Induction skills include not only disciplinary specific skills but also time management, digital, maths, self-reflection and academic writing and referencing skills. The induction process includes an opportunity for students to understand what skills they should expect to gain from their study so they can readily recognise and articulate their development.

SO5 and SO6 Educational Gains – Support and Success

Graduate gain

Through their study students develop and build many of the skills and behaviours that are of high value to prospective employers. In a competitive labour market, it is incumbent upon us to ensure that employers fully recognise these strengths and the unique experience of our students and what they offer. Our annual employer perceptions survey reported that the top five words synonymous with OU students are: self-starters, adaptable, diverse, determined and ambitious.

Our Employability of Qualifiers survey (targeted at alumni three years after completion) asks qualifiers to reflect on their skills development. Results are shown in the following graph:

SKILLS DEVELOPMENT 2022 RANKED
Overall, skill development is high across all skills, with a large proportion of alumni rating 'very well' in a number of areas

	Well	Very well	NET well
Self-management (2241)	37%	57%	94%
Problem solving (2216)	45%	49%	94%
Communication and literacy (2253)	39%	55%	93%
Autonomy and accountability (2159)	42%	50%	91%
Managing personal development career and work life (2143)	45%	45%	90%
Application of information technology (2029)	49%	34%	83%
Numeracy (1623)	42%	30%	72%
Team working (1849)	44%	24%	68%
Business and customer awareness (1405)	40%	25%	65%

Q26 How well did your overall experience with The OU / your institution help you to further develop these skills?
(All OU alumni exc not applicable) (Base: OU alumni 2022 = see graph)

Personal gain

Our student population represents a uniquely diverse cohort whose career and personal aspirations change as they develop confidence in progressing through study. Students begin study from wide-ranging starting points and as their confidence and self-belief grow, they often achieve so much more than their original goals and motivations.

Recent student confidence metrics	Agreement
My studies are helping me with self-confidence (SEaM student survey 2022)	72%
My communication skills have improved (NSS student survey 2022)	69%
The OU has helped me achieve my personal goals (EQS alumni survey 2022)	86%
My course has helped me to present myself with confidence (EQS alumni survey 2022)	68%

Our suite of Access modules provides a starting point for many students (circa 4000) who need to build their confidence and skills before embarking on their first Level four module. These courses attract students who have not studied at university level or do not have traditional HE entry requirements. Our evaluation shows that students who start with an Access module have improved

pass rates of on average 13% in 2020/21 and this is higher for some students (17% for students from low socio-economic backgrounds, 21.6% for students with low previous educational qualifications).

Academic gain

OU students come with a very wide range of previous educational qualifications and for many, the distance travelled from their previous qualification to the point where they finish studying with us can be huge. Our students tell us that one of their key reasons for studying with the OU is to develop confidence in their academic potential, a motivation second only to studying due to interest in their subject (in our Internal 'Early' Student Survey, 2022). These sentiments at the start of the course are also carried through to perceptions of the OU as students come to the end of their time with us as our NSS 2022 results showed:

NSS 2022 results	OU students	Comparison to the sector
Q3 The course is intellectually stimulating	88.7%	+7.1%
Q5 Opportunities to explore ideas or concepts in depth	85.3%	+5.6%

Furthermore, when our graduates report on their perceptions of how their OU studies have contributed to their work or activities after qualifying, most students agreed that they were currently making use of what they had learned during their studies.

Graduate Outcomes Survey 2019/20	Agreement
I am utilising what I learnt during my studies in my current activity	72%
I am utilising what I learnt during my studies in my current work	71%

English for Academic Purposes (EAP) refers to a specific style of communication that is used in English-medium higher education. We have two dedicated credit-bearing EAP modules and a range of tutor and student-facing EAP-focused supporting websites. We also have a university-wide EAP individual student support service which provides students with dedicated subject specific individual EAP sessions. Attending EAP sessions has showed a statistically significant positive impact of 11% on module completion rates. 41% of students were from 'non-white' groups, 50% had English as an additional language and a higher proportion had low previous educational qualifications and a declared disability. 93% of students found the sessions very useful and 7% found them useful. We have also used our 'Student Hub Live' platform to host a live broadcast event 'Busting some myths around academic integrity' talking to students about the importance of writing in their own words. 120 students attended with over 500 interactions in the chat. It was recorded and is being made available to all students. Student feedback has been positive:

'*I felt reassured and supported, increasing my confidence in this area.*'

Institutional embedding of the Employability Framework and adoption of the FutureYOU (see SO4) continues at pace. An annual evaluation to understand student perceptions of their employability linked to their engagement with FutureYOU shows encouraging results that students are beginning to recognise their individual educational gains. Over 50% of students in the evaluation (628 students) acknowledged that their studies are helping them develop core skills and competencies along with personal attributes and behaviours in relations to academic, career and personal goals. Students have told us that:

"*I have the set of skills and achievements developed in the course of learning and working and continue to grow in or develop communication and self-confidence*" and "*I can now recognise the skills I have learnt and my next steps to reach short term and long-term goal*s" (Institutional Employability Impact survey 2021).

Students highly rate the skills development associated with their studies, with 81% agreeing that the skills they develop will be useful for their future career and 74% believing that their studies have improved their career prospects (NSS 2022).

Provider name: The Open University
UKPRN: 10007773

Academic gain for a number of students can be achieved by successfully completing a single module, particularly when this is used for continuing professional development purposes, in addition to completion of a degree or other qualification. Students volunteer such comments such as:

"The Open University allowed me to study without having to give up the full-time work that I was doing at the time. The materials and help provided are clearly the result of many years of building them up perfectly for the long distance setting they're made for. Without my degree I wouldn't have the job that I love, and without the Open University I wouldn't have my degree." (GO, 2022*)*

Summary

Our Mission of being 'Open to people, places, methods and ideas' is at the heart of our teaching and learning, and staff and students take great pride in what we achieve together. Our first Chancellor, Geoffrey Crowther, charged us to serve those who are "fully capable of a higher education, who for one reason or another, do not get it, or do not get as much of it as they can turn to advantage, or as they discover, sometimes, too late, that they need". We are firmly committed to continuing to be the provider of life-changing learning for those whose choices are often limited and constrained by circumstances through supporting, building and nurturing skills and growth in knowledge to enable our students to achieve their goals.

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