Enhancement Themes
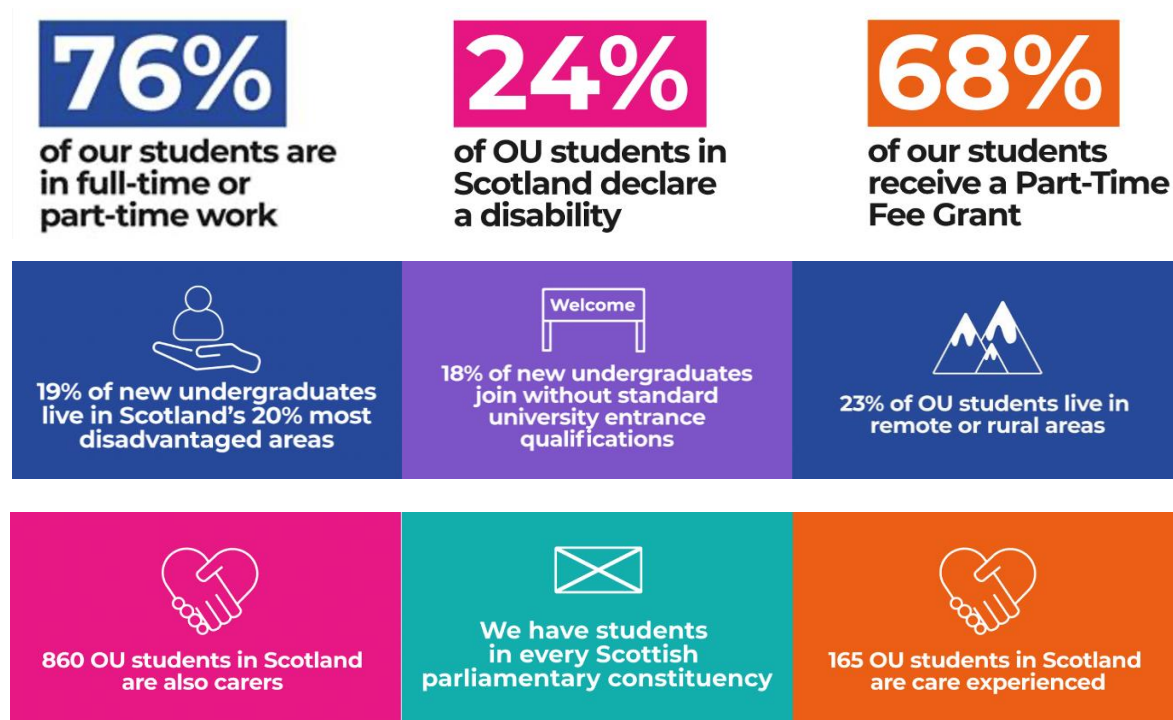
Resilient Learning Communities

Institutional Plan for: The Open University in Scotland

The Open University in Scotland (OUiS) is committed to widening access and extending opportunities for educational success to those who would otherwise be excluded from higher education. Our model of online and distance learning, the flexibility of our curriculum and our approach to learning and teaching mean that our students can study with us wherever they are, at an intensity that suits them, and with access to timely and appropriate support to succeed in their learning.

Here is a snapshot of our unique student body (2019/2020):

76% of our students are in full-time or part-time work

24% of OU students in Scotland declare a disability

68% of our students receive a Part-Time Fee Grant

19% of new undergraduates live in Scotland's 20% most disadvantaged areas

18% of new undergraduates join without standard university entrance qualifications

23% of OU students live in remote or rural areas

860 OU students in Scotland are also carers

We have students in every Scottish parliamentary constituency
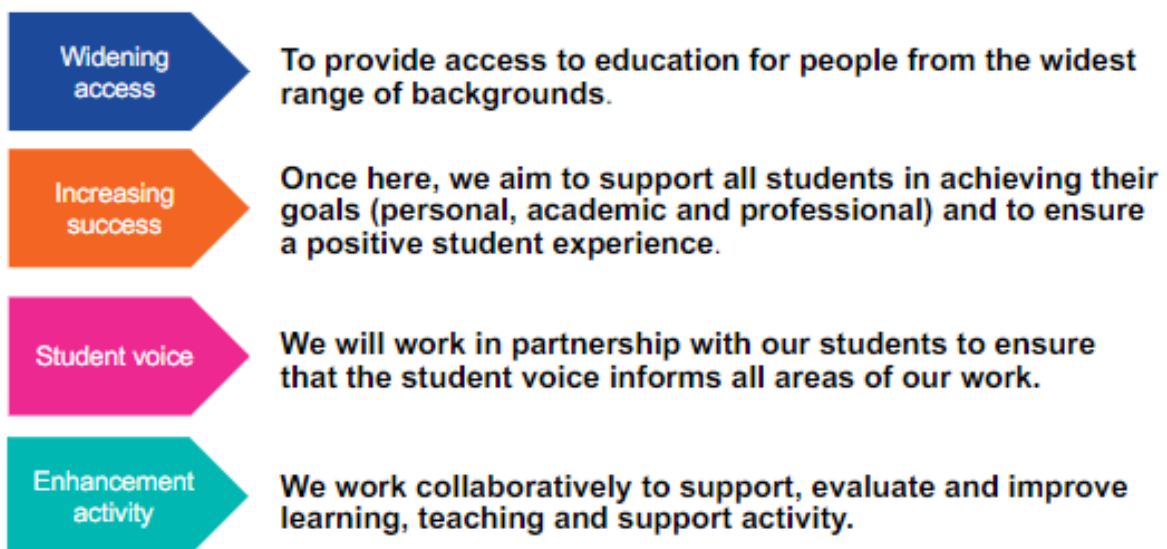
165 OU students in Scotland are care experienced

Student success is a key strategic priority for the Open University (OU Strategic Plan to 2021-22). The recent four nations Access, Participation and Success Strategy (2020-25) builds upon this, setting out a range of commitments across six broad areas. The Access, Participation and Success Scotland Plan (APSS Plan) sets out how we will achieve these commitments in Scotland, as well as those in our Outcome Agreement, and Enhancement Theme activity.

The new theme of Building Resilient Learning Communities also chimes with many of our ongoing initiatives to develop a sense of belonging among our very dispersed student community. In the time of Covid-19, fostering resilience is a particular challenge.

Context

As well as being part of the four nations Open University, OUiS is one of 19 universities in Scotland. Each year, we negotiate an outcome agreement with the Scottish Funding Council (SFC), which sets out key priorities and targets across a range of measures. The Outcome Agreement (OA) reflects the Scottish Government's commitment to access to education for people from the widest range of backgrounds. Our overall aim is to widen access, improve participation and increase student success, cementing our place as Scotland's National Widening Access University.

Enhancement theme activity in the OU in Scotland is led and coordinated by the Access, Participation and Success Scotland (APSS) team. This institutional plan is aligned with our Access, Participation and Success Scotland Plan, which was adopted in 2020 and embeds enhancement activity as a core principle. The APSS Plan sets out the guiding principles that underpin our activity, as follows:

Widening access	To provide access to education for people from the widest range of backgrounds.
Increasing success	Once here, we aim to support all students in achieving their goals (personal, academic and professional) and to ensure a positive student experience.
Student voice	We will work in partnership with our students to ensure that the student voice informs all areas of our work.
Enhancement activity	We work collaboratively to support, evaluate and improve learning, teaching and support activity.

Building on the outcomes from the last theme, we will continue to collect evidence for enhancement, involve colleagues from the wider university, and engage robustly with students and student representatives in planning and delivering theme projects.

One of the key learning points from 2017-2020 was the importance of building evaluation into projects from the outset, allowing time for reflection and learning from outcomes - both anticipated and unanticipated. We have also learned that we need to build resilience into our theme activity, so we will ensure that we have the capacity for any projects or clusters we take on and that work is shared across the team.

Institutional team

The Enhancement Theme Institutional Group (ETIG) comprises members of the APSS team and our OU Students Association representative, who attend the TLG, and members drawn from across the faculties and academic-related teams who are involved in enhancement activity to support student success.

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Institutional lead	**James Mooney** Access, Participation and Success Manager		
TLG staff representative	**Shadia El Mokdad** Access, Participation and Success Officer		
TLG student representative	**Elyse Hocking** OU Students Association Area Rep for Scotland		
Add additional rows for additional members	**Shona Littlejohn** Depute Director (Student experience and Widening Access)		
	Carla Anderson Senior Manager, Student Support (Operations)		
	Eddie Tunnah Senior Careers and Employability Manager		
	Moira Weir Information Analyst		
	Sylvia Warnecke Staff Tutor		
	Janet Hughes Staff Tutor		
	Sally Crighton Staff Tutor and Associate Lecturer		
	Gill Ryan APS Officer		
	Viki Soper APS Officer		

Planned activity: Year 1

Overall outcomes/activity

The key strategic priority for The Open University continues to be student success. It is through our scale, reach and our ability to support students to succeed that we are able to achieve our positive impact on society and the economy. Over the three years of this plan, we intend to focus our activity on initiatives to improve student success.

We will:
- Support our students to succeed by understanding our students' study goals and ensuring they get onto the right study path at the right level
- Support our students to progress successfully through and complete their chosen module(s) or qualification
- Deliver a high-quality and flexible student experience with high levels of student satisfaction
- Support students to achieve positive career and personal development outcomes

In line with our APSS Plan, our Enhancement activity will:
- Lead a strong evidence-based enhancement/continuous improvement culture within OUiS
- Work pro-actively with QAA (Scotland) and Scottish HE sector to influence and lead on activity relevant to part-time/distance learning
- Ensure that our enhancement activity is informed by and created with our students
- Work with faculties and units to influence scholarship around the 2020-23 Enhancement Theme
- Promote a culture of external engagement, ensuring OUiS' enhancement work is shared across the sector and that we learn from others
- Continue development of our 'Fika' sessions with expansion via online platform to reach a wider audience

Year 1 outcomes/activity

In year 1 of the Theme our activities will focus on scoping, research and development work to underpin the Theme and beyond. We will explore the priorities and outcomes identified above and through our Institutional Team we will build relationships and support partnerships within the OUiS to identify substantive focus for our project work.

Specific outcomes for Year 1 include:

- a series of scoping documents examining what learning communities look like in the context the OUiS and how current practices contribute to this

- an assessment of activity related to this Theme being carried out in the wider Open University community

- assessment of challenges and opportunities faced within the OUiS and how these have been addressed previously

- the development and embedding in practice of a new shared logic model

- a successful staff forum for sharing knowledge adapted to fit the current dispersed community

- identify areas for collaborative cluster work to put forward in the next call out in Spring

- progression of phase 3 of the 'Supporting Students from Deprived Backgrounds' project, initiated in the previous Enhancement Theme

As indicated in the overview above, the specific activities that will deliver these outcomes will be directed by our Institutional Team, and the impact and main benefit of these outcomes on the OU will focus on how we can best benefit our learning community.

Dissemination of work

Communication remains at the forefront of our approach to disseminating Theme work within OUiS and the sector. In Year 1 we will focus on sharing the Enhancement Theme with colleagues within OUiS to ensure an awareness of Theme work and to invite interest from colleagues who may wish to be involved within Theme activities. We will use the Theme and QAA activity as amplification to build on existing work being done within the OUiS to enhance our learning from others, and build on our ability to scale up existing projects.

In Year 1 we intend to:
- **establish a communication strategy** to highlight our Theme work through existing structures and opportunities (e.g. Fika sessions; written papers for internal OU-wide publications; multi-media pieces for public-facing blog; social media, webpage, mailings etc.);
- **organise Theme-related events for OU colleagues and ensure contributions to external Theme-related events** (e.g. attendance at Theme conferences and related events organised by others across the sector; etc.)
- **meet regularly with our ETIG** and share work through our APS Steering Group.
- **update our external website** highlighting Enhancement Theme activity
- **engage staff within OUiS** to undertake aspects of Theme activity

Collaborative cluster work

What is your intended involvement in formal collaborative cluster work? Do you intend leading a cluster? Who might be involved in cluster activity?

(Formal bids for collaborative cluster work will be managed separately.)

In Year 1 of the Theme we intend to scope opportunities with other institutions for formal collaborative cluster work where our work overlaps and where mutual benefit and broader impact for the sector is likely.

Each year we will engage in no more than two clusters, and only where there is a strong alignment and added value to APS strategic objectives to ensure we are not over committing and can deliver on the work we have.

Supporting staff and student engagement

How will you support your community to deliver on planned activities?

We recognise the importance of supporting both staff and students to enable delivery on planned activities, and we plan to do this through:

- meeting regularly with members of our Institutional Group
- setting up a Microsoft Teams channel to share good practice, learning and questions
- curating and sharing resources from QAA and attending QAA and Theme events
- engaging with our student representatives and our Students Association to enhance student voice throughout the Theme
- funding opportunities to develop new activities and attend sector-wide events
- linking to strategic activities which already have student and staff buy-in
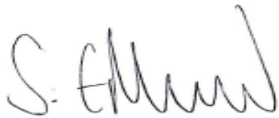- ensuring a core aspect of each project will be staff and student engagement activity

We hope that Theme activities will impact our learning community through both staff and student development, and will respond to specific concerns throughout Year 1. We will take on board feedback from our Institutional Group and embed solid support measures going forward.

Evaluation

How will you monitor progress and impact of the enhancement activities?

Following on from our successful evaluation in the last Theme, we will ensure that a logic model and planning resources are embedded within Theme projects from the beginning. We will ensure that project aims and objectives are clearly defined and achievable, and they align with strategic priorities and specific impact indicators throughout.

As above we will ensure support with evaluation work throughout the Theme, both through the Institutional Team meetings and a shared Microsoft Teams channel. We will also utilise QAA resources in relation to evaluation and impact measures.

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Financial Annex Year 1

Activity	Estimated cost (£)
Scoping and resource development work (including consultancy)	2500
Project seed funding	2000
Progression of phase 3 of the 'Supporting Students from Deprived Backgrounds' project including publication dissemination	1000
Student Voice activities	500
Total	**6000**

Authors:	
Date:	14/12/2010