



Basic facts and figures for 1998

The Open University is open to all adults resident in the United Kingdom. Since 1992 it has also offered its programmes of study throughout Europe. The Open University is Britain's largest single teaching institution, with more than 200,000 people studying its courses in 1998. Since its establishment by Royal Charter in 1969, it has opened the door to higher education for more than 2 million people.

Everyone's 'local' university

OU courses are designed for students studying in their homes or workplaces, in their own time, anywhere in the UK, Ireland, Continental Western Europe and often further afield.

Courses use a range of teaching media – specially-produced textbooks, tv and radio programmes, audio and video tapes, computer software and home experiment kits.

Personal contact and support comes through locally based tutors, a network of 305 regional study centres in the UK and a further 42 outside the UK, plus annual residential schools.

Open Learning

Undergraduate courses are open to all regardless of educational qualifications. The OU accepts a special responsibility to make higher education accessible to people with disabilities; currently some 5,500 of its students fall into this category.

Students

The Open University has more students than any other British university. In 1997 the approximate number of people studying was as follows:

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|----------------------------------|----------------|
| Undergraduate level students | 125,000 |
| Postgraduate level students | 39,000 |
| Total registered students | 164,000 |

Of the registered students, 20,000 are resident outside the UK.

In addition, some 50,000 self-contained study packs will be sold during the year, most of which will be used by several people. Thus a minimum of 214,000 people will study with the University during the year.

Approximately equal numbers of men and women study with the Open University. The average age of undergraduate students is 37 and the majority are in the 25-45 age-group. The youngest graduate was 20 and the oldest was 94. More than 80% of OU students remain in employment throughout their studies, and the OU has awarded more than 200,000 Bachelor degrees.

Finances

In 1993 the University became part of the newly integrated funding arrangements for higher education in the UK. It now receives its core grants from the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), although because of its UK-wide operation, it is also eligible (uniquely) to receive funds from the equivalent bodies for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, and from the Teacher Training Agency (TTA).

The University's operating budget in 1996/7 was £214m. Of this, £122m comes from the HEFCE, and TTA. Fee income from students totals £74m and other income, including research grants and contracts, is £18m.

Time and Costs

Most Open University courses equate to either 30 or 60 points in the Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme (CATS) widely used in UK higher education. Students need a minimum of 360 CATS points for a BA or BSc degree. For honours 120 points must be at advanced level. It is possible to achieve a degree with the OU in three years, studying full time, but most undergraduates combine part-time study with work or family responsibilities. The average time taken for a degree is six years. The average cost of this at 1998 prices is about £3,500. Undergraduate and other courses are also available to people wishing to study without taking a degree.

OU students, like other part-time students, are not eligible for mandatory grants. Some are helped by discretionary awards from local authorities or employers. Those who are unemployed or on a low income may receive awards from the University.

Information Technology

More than 100 OU courses are using IT to enhance learning in various ways: 'virtual' tutorials and discussion groups, electronic submission (and marking) of assignments, multimedia teaching materials and computer mediated conferencing. Over 4,000 students connect to the University network every day. In 1997 OU students read 150,000 messages daily on more than 5,000 computer conferences. OU researchers are developing new applications of IT to learning: the 'virtual field trip' for level one Science students, and an Internet stadium capable of hosting mass events with up to 100,000 participants.

Staffing

The OU currently employs approximately 3,750 full-time staff, of whom about 900 are academics, 1,050 administrative and other staff, and 1,800 secretarial, clerical, and technical staff. There are some 7,000 part-time associate lecturers.