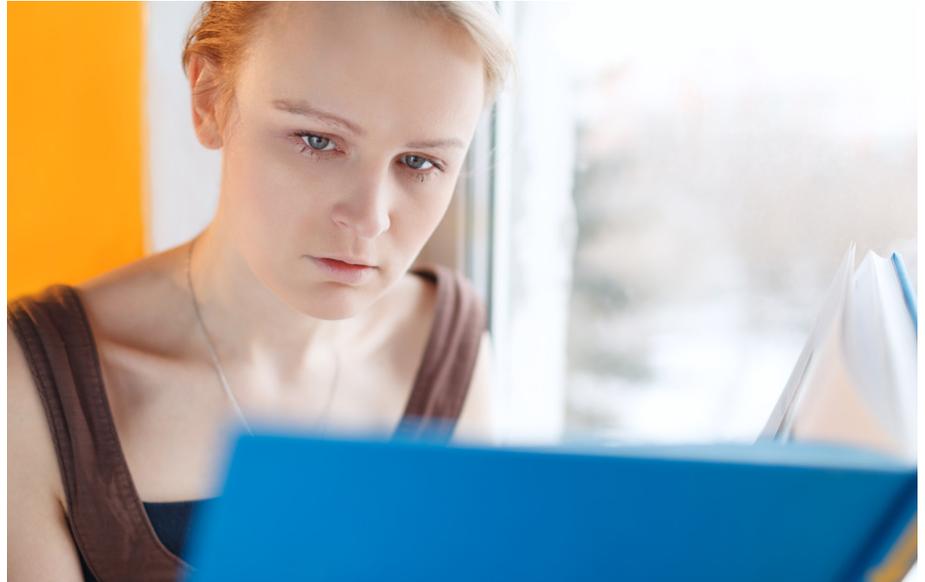


THE OU'S OFFENDER LEARNING PROGRAMME

Education for All

Established in 1969, The Open University (OU) was founded upon the principle that no-one should be denied access to learning. Open to people, places, methods and ideas, the OU has long recognised the power of education in stimulating economic development, increasing social mobility and promoting equality. In short, education has the power to transform lives. This is no better exemplified than by the OU's Offender Learning Programme.

Providing higher education to those within prisons and secure environments has long been part of the OU's mission. This work began in the 1970s and was brought together under one coherent scheme: **The Offender Learning Programme**. Working in partnership with institutions such as the Prisoners' Education Trust (PET) and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skill (BIS), the Programme allows prisoners access to core OU curriculum.



The Programme has proved a great success. We now work with 150 secure establishments and have more than one thousand offenders studying with us across the UK and Republic of Ireland. Furthermore, in 2014/15, the OU awarded three postgraduate masters degrees to students in prison, 85 undergraduate BA/BSc degrees

and just over 100 higher education certificates and diplomas.

“OU study is dynamic, extremely interesting and engaging, giving me a new perspective on my life.”

Edwin, HMP Chelmsford

Why support the Offender Learning Programme?

“Education gives you the option to stop reoffending”

Male student

Education is not simply about the end goal: a qualification. Whilst this can of course make a significant difference to an individual's life, it is the 'learning journey' that has the largest impact of all.

Qualities and skills such as: confidence; empowerment; time management; discipline; communication; and listening, can all be gained through study and are of real importance in enabling offenders to choose a more productive lifestyle.

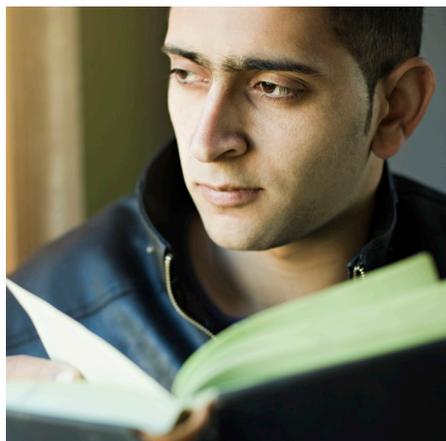
The result is that offenders are significantly less likely to re-offend.

- A recent PET report discovered that those students who used PET's grant scheme to study via distance learning were less likely to re-offend, with just one quarter going on to re-offend, compared to a national average of 65%. This is a considerable achievement.
- The same PET report found that 70% of respondents felt that education would increase their employability, whilst 65% said they wanted to continue learning after their release.

Challenges facing the Offender Learning Programme

Prior to 2012, offender learners received government funding, enabling them to study an OU 'Openings' access module and their first level one module, free of charge. With this support, student numbers increased year on year, from 430 registered learners in 2000/2001 to over 1,700 in 2011/2012. However, in 2012, the decision was made to withdraw this funding, as students within prisons were instead able to apply for a student loan, provided that they committed to a full qualification before starting their studies.

Whilst being able to access a student loan has ensured that students within prisons are afforded the same funding opportunities as their peers outside of secure institutions, many have been deterred from



studying since their introduction. Reasons including financial concerns; lack of employment and income; confidence issues and a reluctance to commit to a full qualification in order to obtain a loan, has meant that student numbers within prisons have rapidly decreased from 1,787 in 2012 to 1,079 in 2015. For many of these students - most of whom are

unconfident learners - committing to a full qualification with no prior experience of higher education, at a cost of over £12,000, has proven understandably daunting.

The OU therefore wishes to provide offender learners with the same support that they received prior to 2012; enabling them to study an access module and an initial higher education qualification, free of charge. We hope that this will increase student numbers and encourage more offender learners to engage with OU study.

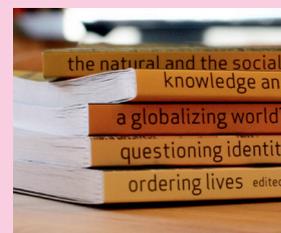
We therefore wish to set up a scholarship fund to support offender learners in gaining a range of higher education qualifications, ranging from a single first year module through to a full degree.

Study skills workshops

Traditional OU students are able to access online resources to develop their study skills, and can speak to their tutor via telephone or email if they require help. Whilst students in prison may have subject-based face-to-face tuition, they have limited access to study skills workshops, which address vital non-academic skills required for study. The University therefore piloted a series of four sessions with a mixed group of students in one prison, to teach these indispensable skills. The initial feedback from students demonstrates the value of this work and we are keen to extend their reach and scale.

'Set Books' for OU Study

Under the new funding arrangements in place since 2012, students in prison now fund their studies through a Student Loan, which covers their tuition fees. However, since they are not eligible for maintenance loans, they struggle to fund the cost of 'set books' required to study some OU modules. These range from classic novels for English Literature courses to specialist dictionaries for Language and Law courses. We would like to support students in acquiring these key resources, by providing textbooks and literature free of charge.



Through the Gate programme: ICT funding

Most OU teaching is delivered online. This poses a significant problem to prisoners within a secure environment. The OU, in partnership with BIS and NOMS, has therefore developed a prison Virtual Learning Environment (VLE): a secure access site that allows students to access module material and valuable information to aid resettlement. Yet whilst learners receive this IT support within a secure environment, we are unable to ensure that students will have the funds to replicate this upon release, thus allowing them to complete their OU studies or access valuable resources. We therefore intend to support students with the provision of ICT equipment, enabling them to access this important resource once they have left prison.