



Open Access with Success

Promoting Access and Widening
Participation in the Open University,
UK

SARUA Open Access Leadership Summit
November 2007



A small matter of definitions...

- Open Access
 - People
 - Curriculum
 - Resources
- Accessibility



The Open University

Mission

To promote educational opportunity and social justice by providing high-quality university education to all who wish to realise their ambitions and fulfil their potential



Strategic priority

To promote fair access to all

Core Values

We believe in the transforming power of education. We are committed to removing barriers to participation of those who have been previously disadvantaged in their pursuit of education and to stimulating and supporting people's engagement in learning throughout life.



The Open University

The four 'Opens' since 1969

Open as to....

People

Places

Methods

Ideas



Open Access to People

The only requirement – age

- Initially 21 years of age
- Then 18 years of age
- Now 16 years of age and occasionally younger

No entry requirements



Challenges of Open Access

- Students' previous schooling and educational experience
- Level of preparedness for HE study
- Institutional concerns around
 - Quality of student learning
 - Perceived Quality of awards and qualifications
 - Overall credibility in the HE / Employer world



Responses/Remedies to Open Access

- Information, advice and guidance to get students on the right course and level of study
- Careers guidance to support choices
- Well designed curriculum and learning materials to pace and support learning
- Preparation for OU study and studentship
- Level of support to match student need and avoid the 'revolving door'



Responses/Remedies to Open Access

- Collaboration with other providers for ‘Access’ and ‘Return to Study’ courses
- People who provide support during study – tutors, learner support staff, peers, employers, community, family and friends
- Preparation and provision of supporting self-help resources
 - Skills for study toolkits
 - Personal Development Plans



Responses/Remedies to Open Access

Particular interventions to aid retention

- Additional academic support
- Proactive contact
- Mentor schemes
- Financial support strategies
- Personal Computing Scheme
- Relevant curriculum
- Monitoring progress



Open Access – where next?

Explore the role of

- Formative assessment
- ICT and mobile technologies
- New curriculum
- Learning/Social Communities and networks



How are we doing?

- 44% of our new undergraduate students have low previous educational qualifications (i.e. less than two 'A' Levels which is the standard entry requirement for conventional universities)
- 10.8% of our new undergraduate students come from under-represented and minority ethnic groups
- 6.3% of our undergraduate students have disabilities



What are we doing to re-align our activity?

- New University structures: a new Widening Participation Advisory Group, a new WP Management Group and a new evaluation officer post
- An emphasis on working in partnership, with community groups, workers unions, schools, workplaces and colleges in communities
- Continued development of appropriate curriculum e.g. the Openings Programme and Foundation Degrees



Some challenges

We need to

- Target more resources at students from lower socio-economic and under-represented groups
- Take the university to the student rather than expect the student to come to the university
- Become a more diverse university – in terms of staff composition and institutional culture



•Some challenges

- Get better at working in partnership, identifying the agendas of other agencies and presenting our offer accordingly
- Provide support tailored to individual need and address the digital divide
- Get better at co-ordinating activity across different units in the university



‘Degrees of Success’

What constitutes success?

Achievement of a.....

- Module
- Certificate
- Diploma
- Degree

**Allow for potential – judge on exit
not on entry qualifications!**



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