

Skills boost for local communities

More people will benefit from high-quality higher education in their hometown as The Open University partners with further education providers to create more training to fill skills gaps and raise job prospects across the country.

Under the scheme, announced by Higher and Further Education Minister Michelle Donelan today (25 May), [The Open University will work with colleges](#) that do not currently offer higher technical education, or want to expand the range of courses they offer.

Backed by £10 million of Government funding, the scheme will support colleges to put on a wider range of technical courses, supporting more people to secure high skill, high wage jobs, growing the economy to help tackle the cost of living.

New courses will focus on providing the training [research](#) has shown can unlock the skills employers need, fill skills gaps and lead to well paid jobs.

Courses will be shorter than a traditional three-year degree, offering a mix of blended, face-to-face and on-line learning to fit around people's lives. They will also boost access to new higher education and technical training options ahead of the introduction of the Government's Lifelong Loan Entitlement which will give adults access to flexible student finance for different courses throughout their lifetime, levelling up more opportunities across the country. Students will also have the confidence they are receiving a qualification backed by The Open University, an institution with international recognition and prestige.

The announcement comes as work gets underway to open-up more high-quality and accessible data on jobs and skills through the government's new [Unit for Future Skills](#), so individuals and businesses can tap into the latest information needed to make informed decisions about the future.

As a first step, new data published [today](#) will show the jobs, sectors and regions people work in after gaining a qualification. This is the first time the government has brought together data on higher education and further education, making it easier for people to see where their training can take them – for example, showing the routes young people take through high-quality technical education to get good jobs where they live.

Minister for Higher and Further Education Michelle Donelan said:

For too long, people have had to look beyond their hometown for higher education courses.

The Government is backing The Open University with the funding and support to partner up with local colleges to offer high-quality higher education and training, targeting cold spots across the

country, so everyone can upskill wherever they live.

This marks a new era for higher education, supporting more people to gain the skills needed to get good jobs, with higher wages that will help to grow the economy and tackle the cost of living.

Minister for Skills Alex Burghart said:

We are for the first time opening up more data on skills and jobs through our new Unit for Future Skills.

The new data we have published today shows which courses and training pathways offer the best route into a specific sector, making it easier for people to see where their training can take them and so they can make informed choices about their futures.

This is just the first step in the Unit's plan to transform the quality and accessibility of the information available.

Partnerships between higher and further education providers are hugely important in offering people the opportunity to access a wide range of education and training, that will get them into jobs and provide the talent pipeline employers need. There are already some great examples where this is happening across the country including through the government's network of [Institutes of Technology](#), as well as local collaborations such as Greater Manchester Colleges, which are working together to offer the higher technical digital skills people across the region need and support employers like CISCO.

The Open University have been offering people of all ages and background high-quality, accessible higher education courses for more than 50 years and is ideally placed to work with colleges to deliver this scheme.

Professor Tim Blackman, Vice-Chancellor of The Open University said:

Further education colleges are at the heart of their communities. By the Government supporting us to work with colleges to develop their higher education offer we can together make a huge contribution to levelling up our most disadvantaged areas. These new courses will provide advanced skills that can attract new businesses and help others grow, creating sustainable and highly skilled jobs.

Working with colleges, The Open University, will help to transform individuals and communities, opening doors that would otherwise be closed and contribute to levelling up opportunity across the nation.

David Hughes, Chief Executive of the Association of Colleges said

This investment and partnership between the OU and colleges will bring the reputation and experience of a world-renowned institution into communities across the country and reflects an important new focus on ensuring people can access the education and training they need throughout their lives.

The OU has strong name recognition nationally, and colleges have the reach and the local reputation to engage adults from every community. Working with the OU they will be able to offer a wider range of courses to the people that need them most. Together, these partnerships will help more people get the skills they need to succeed in the labour market.

The Office for Students has asked The Open University to take forward this work.

Susan Lapworth, interim chief executive of the Office for Students, said:

The OfS has an important role in addressing current and anticipated skills shortages, locally and nationally. We are delighted to be working with the Open University on this innovative project. It's important for many learners – especially adult learners – to be able to access high quality courses close to home, and this scheme will extend opportunities and ensure that graduates from all backgrounds can contribute to local and national prosperity. This is a first step in the OfS's work to shape the validation system to ensure it works effectively to extend student choice.

The Unit for Future Skills, which sits within the Department for Education, will be a centre of expertise on future skills needs. It will bring together data and intelligence on skills and jobs from across government, transforming the way this information is currently made available. More data is expected to be published in the autumn.

Colleges and universities are also set to benefit from up to £32 million of additional funding so they can invest in equipment and facilities that will support technical studies, and boost training opportunities with businesses in key areas such as digital, construction and health care, available as part of the Higher Technical Education Skills Injection Fund.

The funding follows an £18 million investment last year, which supported 100 further and higher education providers to invest in new equipment, such as virtual reality goggles and air quality testing equipment. The funding also helped them to boost links with local businesses so employers can tap into the talented workforce they need for the jobs of the future.