

**Media Relations Office**

Communications
The Open University
Milton Keynes
United Kingdom
MK7 6AA

t +44 (0)1908 654316
m +44 (0)7901 515891
e Press-office@open.ac.uk
w <https://ounews.co/>

MEDIA RELEASE

08 February 2018

Free functional skills courses launched by Open University and FE colleges

A brand-new scheme to bring free Level 1 Functional Skills courses to tens of thousands of people via online learning is being launched by The Open University (OU), in partnership with Further Education Colleges in England. People can develop basic skills in English and Maths by studying flexibly on the OU's OpenLearn platform, and then get a functional skills qualification via a local college partner.

The pilot project, funded by the Department for Education's Flexible Learning Fund, involves three colleges – Bedford College Group, Middlesbrough College and West Herts College – who have worked with the OU to develop the online courses. This is the first time that the OU has collaborated closely with FE colleges to support learners at this level.

People can access course materials on OpenLearn at their leisure and study at a pace and time that suits them. Each college will support learners in their area and facilitate exams so that people can go on to get their Functional Skills qualification if they wish – all for free.

Helping with basic skills

The Open University, this year celebrating its 50th anniversary, was founded on the principle of opening up access to education to all.

Andrew Law, Head of Propositions at The Open University said: "In our 50th birthday year we remain true to our social mission with this exciting new project. This is a flexible, low-risk way for people to develop their basic skills, gaining confidence and even a qualification. It could transform their career prospects.

"More than seventy per cent of the seven and a half million adults using OpenLearn each year do so for work-related reasons, so we know this is an ideal way to help thousands of people gain new skills. Working in partnership to combine our digital

learning expertise with course design and practical, local support from FE colleges is a great offer for anyone that wants to gain Functional Skills.”

Two courses will initially be on offer, *Everyday Maths* and *Everyday English*, each taking a total of 48 hours of study to complete. There is an Open Licence on the materials, which means that others can copy and re-use the course content for their own teaching and learning.

The scheme will also involve collaborations with organisations and community groups including Local Enterprise Partnerships, WEA, Unison, Leonard Cheshire Disability and other union and business groups.

Alongside funding from the Department for Education, this pilot is benefiting from a kind donation by one of the OU’s supporters, Dangoor Education.

In parallel with the English pilot, the OU is partnering with colleges in Wales on a similar pilot to deliver Essential Skills in English and Maths. The Welsh pilot is funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales.

ENDS

Media contacts:

Kath Middleditch, Senior Media Relations Officer, The Open University, 01908 655026 / kath.middleditch@open.ac.uk

Notes to editors

Landing page

<https://www.open.edu/openlearn/education-development/education/everyday-skills-maths-and-english>

Courses

<https://www.open.edu/openlearn/everyday-english-1>

<https://www.open.edu/openlearn/everyday-maths-1>

About The Open University

The Open University (OU) is the largest academic institution in the UK and a world leader in flexible distance learning. Celebrating its 50th anniversary in 2019, the university was founded with a clear purpose: to open up education to all. Since those beginnings in 1969, the OU has taught more than 2 million students worldwide and has over 170,000 current students, including more than 15,000 overseas.

Through its flexible, distance learning model, the OU has a long pedigree of support for students who want to ‘earn while they learn’. Three out of four of our students work full or part-time during their studies. Sixty FTSE 100 companies sponsored staff on OU courses in 2016/17 and three out of five FTSE 100 companies have sponsored staff to take OU courses.

In the latest assessment exercise for university research (Research Excellence Framework, 2014), nearly three quarters (72%) of OU research was assessed as 4 or 3 star – the highest ratings available, awarded to research that is world-leading or internationally excellent. The OU is unique among UK universities having both an access mission and demonstrating research excellence.

The OU has had a unique educational partnership with the BBC since 1971, collaborating on a range of content across TV, radio and digital channels/platforms. Each year the OU co-produces approximately 35 prime-time TV and radio series such as, *Blue Planet II*, *The Prosecutors* and *Inside the Foreign Office*. We achieved more than 351m viewing and listening events last year which prompted more than 1.2 million visits to our 17/18 broadcast related content on the OU's free learning website, OpenLearn.

Regarded as the UK's major e-learning institution, the OU is a world leader in developing technology to increase access to education on a global scale. Its vast 'open content portfolio' includes free study units, as well as games, videos and academic articles, which have reached over 36 million people.

For further information please visit open.ac.uk