

DISABLED VETERANS' SCHOLARSHIPS FUND



IMPACT REPORT: LEIDOS UK 2020



“

The success of the Disabled Veterans' Scholarships Fund, in changing 160 lives so far is thanks to supporters like yourselves.

The scholarships offer not only the opportunity to study but do so with Careers and Disability wraparound support. Our scholars tell us that most importantly, the scholarships re-ignite self-belief, give a renewed sense of purpose and hope for a future following service to their country.

Your support has offered a student a chance to build their futures, and this impacts not just on their own lives but on their families, the people around them and the wider DVSF population. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Leidos for their generous support over the year and to say we are looking forward to continuing the partnership moving forward.

”

*Tim
Blackman*

**Professor
Tim Blackman**
Vice-Chancellor

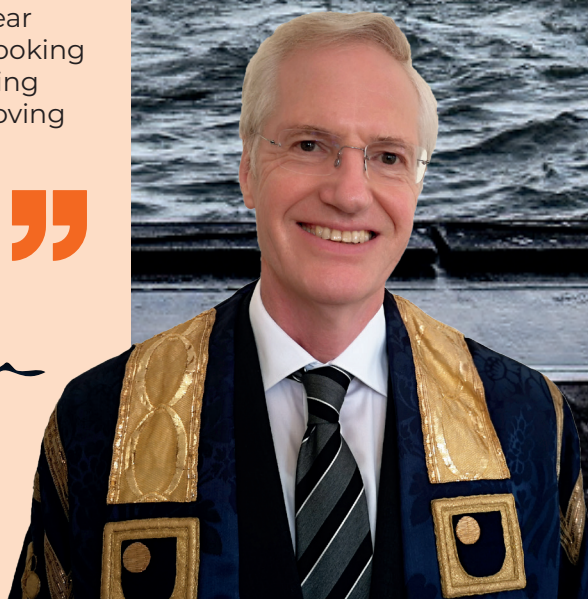


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Thanks to the support of Leidos we have been able to offer a scholarship place to a disabled veteran in cohorts 2 and 3. These students started their studies in 2019 and 2020. Students on the DVSF programme have the opportunity to start their studies while having the expert support of our disability and career advisors.

Learning with the OU is a journey. As well as reaching a final destination in the form of a qualification, it is also a journey of discovery. Some of the scholars have entered with a clear idea of what they want to achieve and where they want to get to. Other are exploring what options are out there and making decisions as they work through their studies. Consequently, some students want advice and interventions at an early stage while others want to wait until they are more settled in the studying routine. At whatever stage a student needs support, our teams are on hand to help them.

While funding has specifically equated to two students, Leidos is involved in our whole DVSF community – with the students and in publicity.

Leidos' impact

- 2 students directly supported. One in cohort 2 and one in cohort 3.
- All 160 students on the DVSF programme have the opportunity to engage with the careers support team
 - > To explore placement opportunities and mentoring
 - > To put a plan in place to develop further

The following report demonstrates the impact of the DVSF. Your funding is an important part of enabling these students to change their futures.



Cohort 2

50
scholarships

64% PASS

42%
aged
40-49

18%
studying
STEM
subjects

35%
studying
to progress
career

77% Army

2% Scotland

6% Female

2% N.I.

8% Wales

Cohort 3

55 scholarships

20%
aged
35-39

24%
studying
STEM
subjects

31%
studying
for a new
career

62% Army

2% Scotland

12.7% Female

2% N.I.

8% Wales

What is DVSF?

In 2017, The Open University (OU) launched the Disabled Veterans' Scholarships Fund (DVSF). The first of its kind in the UK, this pioneering scheme provides both free education (up to the value of £26,000) and tailored support to the ex-military population who have been injured in or during military service. So far we have given 160 scholarships and have now committed a further 100 more scholarships in 2021 and 2022.

How it was developed

The Fund was designed in partnership with the MoD, in consultation with several charities who work with veterans. We also drew on the findings of the Deloitte report Veterans Work – recognising the potential of ex-service personnel. This report identified that veterans were struggling to transfer their military skills and attainments into the civilian workplace, a challenge exacerbated by their disability. It also found that poor engagement with education was another factor aggravating the situation.

Why the OU?

The OU's nearly 27,000 disabled students are testament to the suitability of OU study to this community. The OU also has an existing military student population with around 1,400 in-service individuals learning with us. This gives us a unique understanding of the military community and the challenges they face. The OU is the logical place for disabled veterans to study. We are experts in distance learning and student study wherever they want and whenever they are able – this is particularly helpful to disabled students. They can study from their own homes and periods of poor health and medical appointments can be accommodated by the flexibility of OU learning.

Image © Crown Copyright



What we offer DVSF students

We built additional disability support and careers guidance service into the scholarships programme. The disability support service offers practical help including alternative format study materials or equipment, ergonomic furniture or text magnifiers. The careers support service will help students in areas such as advice on looking for employment, mentoring and work placements. Combined, the elements of DVSF not only give disabled veterans the chance to gain a recognised civilian qualification but also break down the barriers to education so they are able to pursue fulfilling careers outside of the military.

“

I think I can speak for many veterans when I say that this opportunity is beyond valuable... it's having this opportunity that gives me purpose and allows me to focus on something that is already changing my life.

”

Rob
DVSF student

Kate is studying Law through The Open University's Disabled Veterans' Scholarships Fund (DVSF). After being medically discharged from the Army in 2016, she had no idea what she was supposed to do next. As someone who always wants to help others, Kate hopes to pursue a career in the legal sector where she can continue to support the serving and veteran military community. As Kate explains:

"I had built up my identity around the idea of being someone who helps others, not the person who needs help themselves. So when I was medically discharged from the Army in 2016 I had no idea what I was supposed to do next. For the sake of my own mental health, my previous careers as a police officer and a registered nurse were no longer an option for me and I was left questioning my very sense of self.

"I had no idea what I was supposed to do next. When I stepped into the job market there were a couple of false starts and I clutched at more than a few straws – HR? Teaching? Candlestick making? However, in late 2017 I finally found a role within a local junior school as a teaching assistant, working with special education needs pupils, the hours of which allow me to work around my family and study commitments. Although I have settled into the working environment and find it rewarding, my ultimate goal is to work towards a role in the legal sector, where I can provide help to both the serving and veteran military community.

Focusing on the future

"I came across the advertisement for the OU Disabled Veterans' Scholarships Fund on the Help for Heroes website and was overjoyed to be selected for a scholarship. I commenced study on a Bachelor of Laws degree (LLB) in October 2019 and the experience has so far been overwhelmingly positive, with comprehensive student support throughout. The careers service has also been extremely helpful, providing guidance on both courses and career paths.

"The recovery process is neither straightforward nor easy and I am very aware that there are veterans out there who have suffered life-altering and far more complex physical and mental injury than my own. Everyone's journey is different, but one thing that seems clear to me, speaking both as a former health professional and a recovering veteran, is that focus on a positive goal can be very beneficial.

"I would urge anyone considering applying for a scholarship to go for it. The OU will not be the answer to everything, but it just might be a part of the answer."



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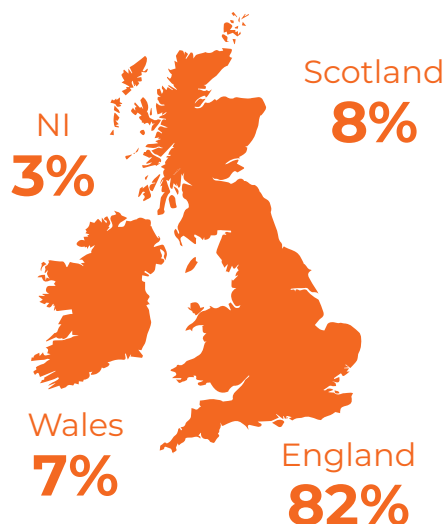
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Kate Moth
DVSF student

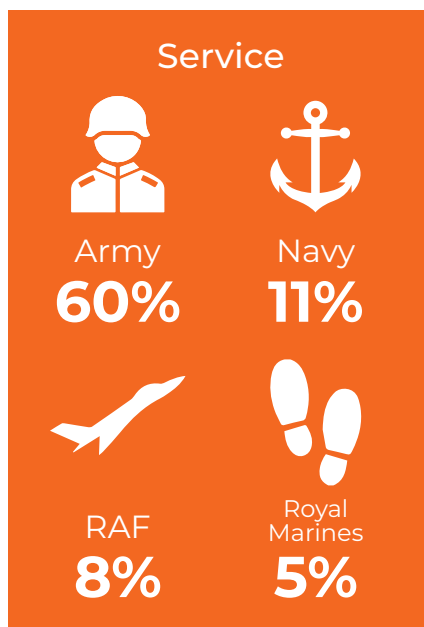
Summary

160 scholarships have been awarded in the first three cohorts of which 77% are studying at undergraduate level, and 9% studying for a Masters. For more information about the 3 cohorts, the students and their progress, see the Appendices.

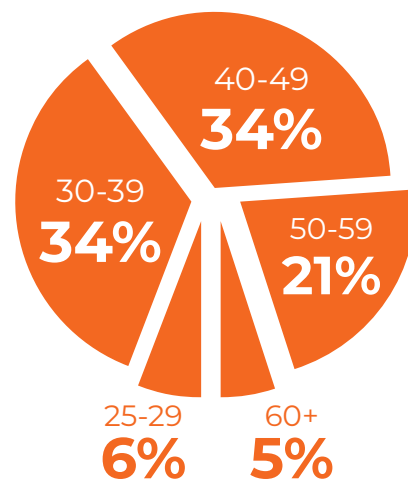
Location



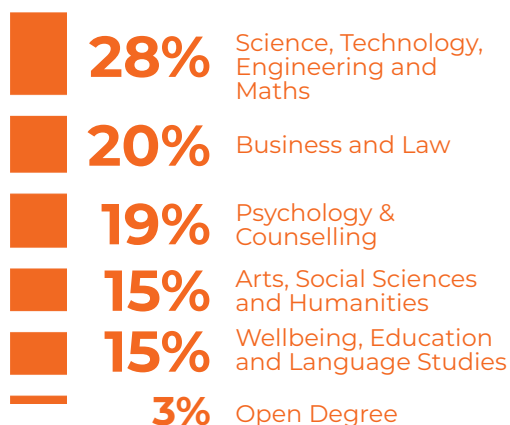
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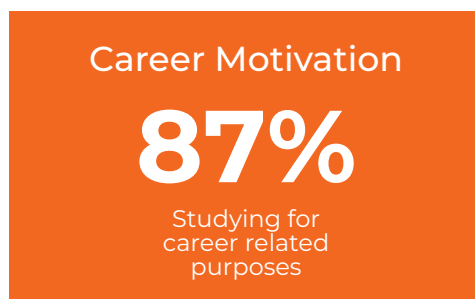
Age Profile



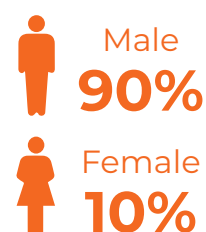
Subject



Career Motivation



Gender



Disability



66

DVSF Students used career services

Dedicated DVSF careers LinkedIn group with **77 members**

Regular careers **podcasts and webinars** produced for DVSF



Monthly careers newsletters

12

work placements or volunteering opportunities

Expert support team

As a university with over 27,000 disabled students at any one time, the OU already has an established team of disability support staff dedicated to providing individual support for students with mental health or physical disabilities. This can be through personal support, providing specialist technology, or ensuring study materials are as accessible as possible.

How we help

Our team proactively contact students on a regular basis to ensure they are accessing any areas of the support services they could benefit from.

New way of working

For the first two cohorts, we provided an exclusive range of dedicated support to DVSF scholars, tailored specifically for the veterans on this programme. However, the team however found that, unlike the general population of disabled students, the veteran students do not make as many requests for help and are also reluctant to be defined by their disability.

In response to this, we created a group of 17 specialist DVSF Champions comprised of Senior Advisors across the Student Support Teams (SST) Network. Enabling DVSF scholars to access on-module support or pre-module start course choice advice from skilled advisors who also possess detailed understanding of the scheme and the additional support available.

What we offer

A support system for every student from start to finish. Staff guide them through their learning journey from the very first introductory call, support with applications for Disabled Students' Allowances and offer ongoing support to pro-actively identify and address their specific support requirements through every module.

- Additional data recording and monitoring of the students to aid analysis and decision making.
- Each student has a key named contact who they can get in touch with if they have any issues.

Ongoing personal support

The team also monitor academic progress and offer support students might not be aware of such as IT equipment.

For example, from the first cohort, eight did not own a laptop prior to beginning study. The structure of the DVSF has enabled us to help those individuals with their equipment needs and offer IT support when required.

Alternative formats provided

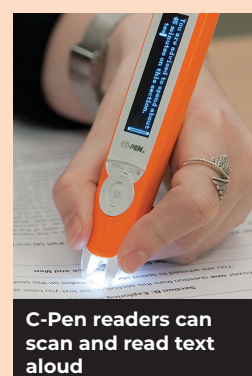
- 56 x Daisy talking books
- 9 x Bespoke printed materials
- 26 x Comb-bound texts
- 48 x Electronic texts
- 5 x Transcripts
- 1 x Daisy CD-ROM

IT equipment provided

- 5 x Laptops with assistive technology

Auxiliary aid/services provided

- 2 x C-Pen reader
- 1 x Digital voice recorder
- 1 x Proof reading
- 1 x Mentoring



Alternative formats and study support

The different alternative formats we currently offer to our students:

- DAISY talking books (audio versions of printed material) – online audio (as well as CDs, USB sticks, SD cards etc.)
- Electronic text of printed material available via the VLE (virtual learning environment where students receive all their online instructions)
- Large print/enlarged print
- Standard print of online materials
- Bespoke print of online materials (coloured paper, different methods of binding, etc.)
- Transcripts
- Braille versions
- Tactile diagrams

Non-medical help is also on offer and this can include study skills support for dyslexia, mentoring support for mental health, note takers, study assistants, proof-readers and sighted guides. There is also assistance to help with residential schools and face-to-face tutorials such as ordering specialist furniture, arranging accessible accommodation, etc.

Disability support



What disability support is available

Information on the additional support available for students and guidance on how to get this support.



How to get disability support and funding

Key information on how to get funding and support through the OU and Disabled Students' Allowances (DSA) if you're eligible.

Your Help Centre

- 👍 Recommended for you
- 🔖 Saved by you
- 📞 Contact us



Learn more about the OU's disability support
<https://help.open.ac.uk/browse/disability>

A new beginning for disabled veterans like James

Lieutenant James Champion flew Gazelle helicopters for the Army on dangerous reconnaissance missions after the end of the Bosnian War. The frequent stress of being targeted by surface-to-air missiles combined with the sleep deprivation of living in an operational conflict zone, eventually took its toll on James's mental health and he was medically discharged.

Life outside the military has been challenging for James, who has been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and suffered many stress-induced conditions over the years, including being diagnosed with bipolar disorder. But, true to his character, he continues to fight back, working in health and social care so that he can use his experiences to support others.

"I wanted to study law since I witnessed a burglary when I was nine years old," explains James. "I gave evidence in court; the man was convicted, and I was given a commendation. When I left school at 18, I did not have the right grades to study law, and I wanted to get straight to Sandhurst anyway for Officer Training, so I followed that instead."

James applied and, to his delight, he began studying Law with the OU in 2019. "I am delighted, and tell everyone who wants to listen, and even those who don't! My sister is a barrister, and her husband is a lawyer also."

James gained a distinction in his first year and is now into his second of six years of studies. He says that he thoroughly enjoys the challenge of learning and that focussing on his assignments can be a useful and much-needed distraction.

“

I'm extremely grateful to have been awarded my scholarship, thank you with all my heart. I now want to give back and I know many more disabled veterans feel exactly the same.

”

James Champion
DVSF student



Career goals – placements and work experience

The specialist Careers and Employability Services (CES) team support the students in identifying and progressing career goals including the provision of placements and other work experience opportunities. This team actively supports the students by helping them to recognise the opportunities offered by further learning. Support includes a range of one-to-many digital activities, facilitating mentoring and one-to-one specialist consultations whilst building links with employers and those working in the students' chosen sectors.

Working with students

The team send a monthly careers newsletter to the scholars via email which highlights organisations recruiting veterans, as well as upcoming activities such as webinars and virtual careers fairs. The team have created a careers LinkedIn page aimed specifically at disabled veterans and employers. Members can keep up to date with our latest activities, take part in discussions, ask questions and start conversations with key people in relevant organisations. This has been popular, and there are now 77 members in the group.

CES are using their experience of supporting two cohorts of students to build sustainable practices into the programme, including the development of a website to support scholars more effectively.

12 work placements or volunteering opportunities

77 LinkedIn group members

5 organisations supporting opportunities

130 career consultation appointments

5 students mentored

3 webinars

4 podcasts

Opportunities for Students

Podcasts

The Disabled Veterans' Careers Team have produced a series of careers podcasts entitled 'Spill the Beans' aimed specifically at disabled veterans. The podcasts have focused on topics such as what to do with their OU degree, gaining work experience, how to network effectively and an interview with a disabled veteran who has set up a social enterprise to support other veterans.

Blogs

The series provides an opportunity to build rapport with students and covers a range of career themed topics of interest to our cohort, including:

- Managing your mental health throughout the recruitment process
- Current labour market trends and the likely impact for disabled veterans

“

Always really helpful to chat through objectives, giving you alternative options to consider that you may not have previously thought off. Really useful preparation discussion for placement.

DVSF student

”

“

Having a dedicated advisor is really helpful, the wealth and knowledge and support is amazing. I never thought I would be able to access such a wide variety of knowledge/expertise. Thanks, OU!

DVSF student

”

Careers and employability



Plan your career

Define your career path and move forward whether you're starting, changing or developing your career.



CVs, applications and interviews

Excel at all stages of job hunting from preparing your applications to interviews and assessment centres.



Jobs and work experience

Find national, local and international opportunities, investigate options like further study and self-employment.



Careers with your OU subject

Make the links with your OU study and career routes, identify employability skills and research employers in your sectors.



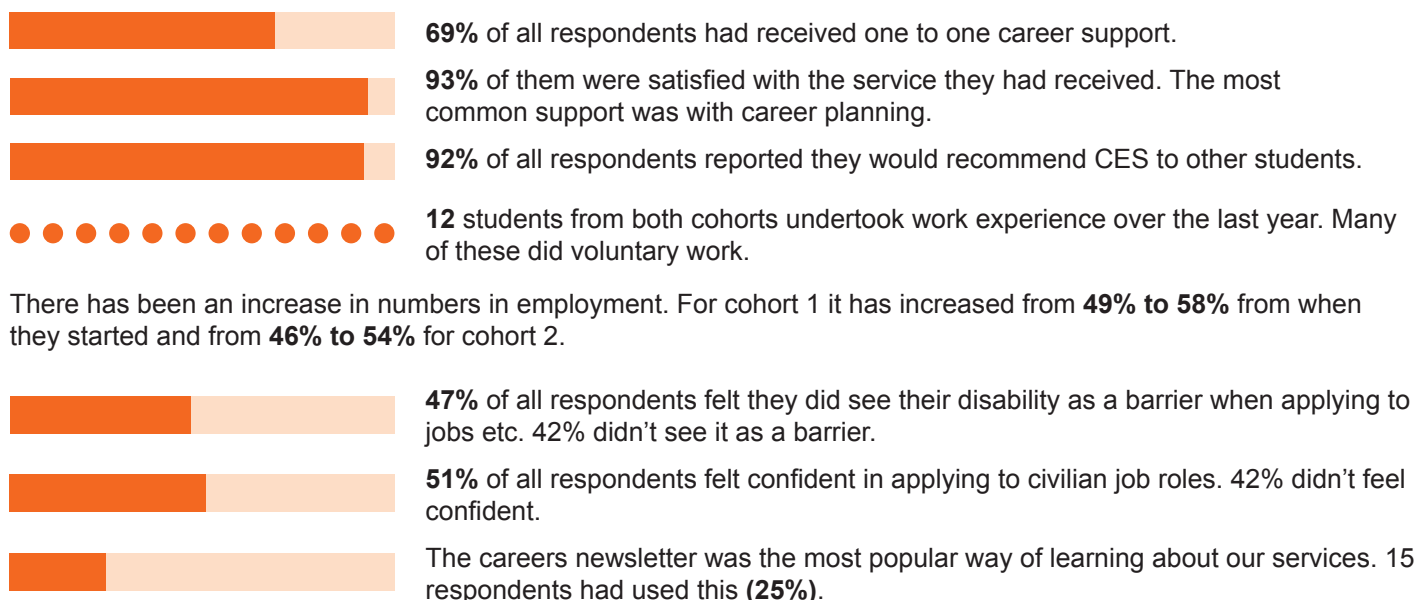
Learn more about the OU's disability support

<https://help.open.ac.uk/careers-support-for-military-veterans-with-disability>

Feedback from our veteran scholars

Each year the Careers Services team gather feedback from the students – both to ensure that the services they offer are relevant and required, but also to improve the service moving forward.

The latest survey was completed in October 2020 and here are some of the highlights:



What our scholars are saying:

- “ The follow up email after each call is very useful and the career advice is excellent, your service helps guide the student towards their required fields of study. ”
- “ This service is a great service which has already changed my life. I feel like I am able to move forward with my life and focus on my studies. ”
- “ I have felt very supported by the OU since starting my studies, especially from the careers team who have offered me a great deal of support, to undertake a placement, improve my CV, gain a new role. Without them I felt unsure how to take the next steps. ”
- “ All people that I have spoken to at the OU have gone out of their way to help with any issues. My only pitfall was that I have had to place my learning on hold due to COVID. ”
- “ Left feeling very positive with a plan to start on the path to achieving my goals. ”

“Studying is the light at the end of a very dark tunnel”

OU student Steven Wilson was badly wounded while putting his life on the line to save others. After struggling to adapt to life outside the military, he's now rebuilding his future through The Open University's Disabled Veterans' Scholarships Fund.

Steven served as a Private in the 1st Battalion Parachute Regiment (1 Para) and took part in a top-secret rescue operation in Sierra Leone, alongside the Special Forces.



“A peacekeeping patrol from the Royal Irish Regiment had been ambushed and taken prisoner by around 200 heavily armed members of a brutal local militia group,” says Steven. “Our comrades were being badly beaten and their lives were clearly in imminent danger. We had to rescue them – fast!”

Despite facing fierce resistance, Steven, 1 Para and the Special Forces successfully freed every single one of the hostages. Unfortunately,

an explosion during the battle caused multiple serious shrapnel wounds in Steven's legs, arms and back, causing him to fear for his life.

“I thought my time had come. As I lay on the ground, all I could think about was my mum and family back home and if I would ever get to see them again. The heat radiating throughout my body was intense and I knew the adrenalin was masking my injuries and that pain would follow. I got into cover and tried to gather my thoughts. Though I couldn't fight effectively, I knew I had to survive for my family. There was no way I was going to go without one hell of a fight.”

After having open surgery on his wounds, Steven was transported to hospital where he would spend months recovering and was eventually discharged from his Regiment. Back home, Steven struggled to adapt to his new life and sadly, his mental health soon deteriorated.

“I felt lost, ripped away from the life, comradeship and sense of purpose I so loved. I was still suffering from the stress of my injuries and became very depressed. I turned to drink just to ‘escape’, ending up homeless and sleeping in shop fronts. As an ex-Para, I could certainly survive on the streets, but I knew my life was going nowhere.”

Steven managed to move back to his mum's house and began working long shifts at a recycling plant. It was then that his stepfather and a member of the Help for Heroes Band of Brothers network both suggested he apply for the OU's Disabled Veterans Scholarships Fund (DVSF).



“

This is an amazing opportunity, it gives others a light at the end of the tunnel, the chance to retrain for a job that would bring meaning and brings a sense of purpose back to their lives.

”

Like many ex-military personnel, Steven was nervous to return to education and unsure of what to expect. Thankfully, Steven says the support he's received from OU tutors, support staff and students each step of the way has been outstanding.

“Being part of the DVSF allows you to access everything you need, from funding for equipment through the Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) to resources like tuition, online courses, the library or just someone to talk to, it makes you feel part of something again. From the beginning I started to get the feeling of ‘belonging’ again. Bearing in mind that I was 42 years old and throughout my life had never needed to use a computer until now. I was a nervous wreck not knowing where to start but, the information was clear, easy to understand, supportive, and socially connected you not just to a student support team or computer helpdesk but to thousands of students throughout The Open University.”

Now in his third year, Steven is inspired to use his own experience to support others who may be struggling with their mental health.

“I chose to study Health and Social Care as I have always felt good when helping others and taken a sense of pride in doing so. I would like to be in a position to be able to help others who are in a similar position to what I was. My main incentive to do well in this is my son, to do better in myself and show him that if you work hard you can achieve anything.

“I want to be in a position to help others, not necessarily just veterans but anyone who is in need of help should be able to access it. I keep hearing and reading articles of service leavers taking their own lives because they feel isolated, scared and have nobody to talk too, I've been there and done that and I've seen more than anyone should see in a lifetime.”

DISABLED VETERANS' SCHOLARSHIPS FUND

Promotion and recognition

We promote the DVSF to two distinct segments:

- To the disabled veteran community** for awareness of the opportunities of the scheme for potential students. This year we took space in SAAFA's (Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association) VE Day 75 publication and have attended Armed Forces Day events. We also use social media and work with specialist publications to generate more publicity.
- To potential supporters of the Fund** through fundraising campaigns such as The Big Give, direct mail campaigns to alumni community and fundraising events. Our activities are supported by the OU's social media team and external communications team to amplify the messages. We work closely with donors to design a recognition plan for both internal and external communications.

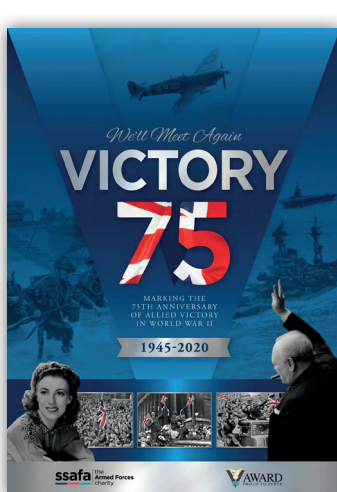


theBigGive raised over £44,000

The Big Give 2020 campaign raised over £44,000 for the DVSF in just one week.

Donor recognition

Leidos has partnered with the OU to support the DVSF. Jhumar Johnson, Director of The Vice-Chancellor's Office, said: "It is a privilege to welcome Leidos to the OU family as funders to The Disabled Veterans' Scholarships Fund. Their support brings not only vital funding but also invaluable experience and expertise to enhance the employability prospects of our disabled veterans."



The programme was created with the advice and guidance of experts across the private, public and not for profit sector as well as in partnership with the MoD.

The DVSF is supported by four Ambassadors who help by sharing opportunities with their networks and offer advice based on their military backgrounds to assist with fundraising.



Sir Christopher Coville KCB BA

is a graduate of the OU and a former Royal Air Force fighter pilot and Air Marshall; since leaving the RAF he has been a company director and advisor.



Rowena Fell BSc (Hons)

is also a graduate of the OU and served in the British Army for 12 years; since leaving the Army she has worked for several large companies and currently for Citi.



Dr Roger Hood QVRM TD DL

is an experienced strategist, business developer and consultant and a former senior officer of the British Army Reserve.



Seumas Kerr CBE was a Major General in the British Army, now he is Managing Director of The D Group and a senior advisor to business and government.

We have raised over £3 million so far in the programme thanks to:

ABF The Soldiers' Charity
Amey plc
BAE Systems plc
The Big Give
Boeing
The Chancellor using LIBOR funds
Constance Travis Charitable Trust
Sir Christopher Coville KCB
Englefield Charitable Trust
Simon Gibson Charitable Trust
The Inman Charity
Lara Cournoyer
The 'Lest We Forget' Association
Leidos UK
PF Charitable Trust
Queen Mary's Roehampton Trust
The Samuel Storey Family Charitable Trust
The Sandra Charitable Trust
Thales Charitable Trust
The Trelix Charitable Trust
The Utley Foundation
The Veterans' Foundation
The Wakeham Trust
William Allen Young Charitable Trust
The Worshipful Company of World Traders Charitable Trust
and over 3,800 OU alumni, supporters and friends

A new lease of life

A year after being medically discharged from the RAF, Steff needed a fresh perspective on life. Through his personal experience of the value of counselling, Steff wanted to find a way to help other veterans and retrain as a Counsellor himself. He came across the OU's Disabled Veterans' Scholarships Fund and applied for a place.

“

I was so ecstatic when I heard I got the scholarship. I didn't expect to get it and was so proud of my achievement, as was my partner, who is very proud of what I have attained so far. I still can't believe I'm doing this and it's just getting more and more interesting.

”

Steff has adjusted his life to make the most of the opportunity. “I'm a procrastinator and I know I am. I adjusted by setting alarms on my phones to do set things at set times. It's the knowledge of what's at the end that motivates me, and I can put my degree to use helping other veterans.”

“Doing my degree through the OU has helped me to understand, not only my own issues, but also those of other veterans who have had to deal with horrific incidents that they have been involved with. It has allowed me to be comfortable with this and it gives me the confidence to understand how these men and women are feeling.

“I would say to others thinking about applying: Go for it, if it's what you want then get in there, but you have to be prepared to work and work hard. The OU will help you all along the journey, use them, ask them for help, ask other Veterans in the system for help.

“To those who have made the DVSF possible, I would say thank you. You have saved people's lives. Even though you don't realise it. That is a very big statement to make, but it's also true. You are giving Veterans, who thought they could never be a useful part of society again, a new lease of life.”

“I've gone from rock bottom to a brighter future”

When OU student Andrew Fenwick-Green broke his back while serving in the Army, he feared his life was ‘effectively over’. Though he has suffered severe trauma and ongoing mental and physical challenges, Andrew is now focused on a new career and is studying Computing through The Open University's Disabled Veterans' Scholarships Fund.

“After being discharged from military service I almost felt forgotten about. It feels like the system doesn't want you to do things. A few years after my injury, in 2001, I enrolled in a degree course at my local university. But then I had a fall, this led to a lot of surgery and I had to pull out of my degree course” says Andrew.

The constant cycle of surgery, recovery and suffering with illness and infections along the way has taken its toll. Andrew admits he has hit rock bottom at times and says; “Sometimes it felt like there was nothing and I couldn't see a future in anything.”

When a fellow veteran told Andrew about the Disabled Veterans' Scholarships Fund and the opportunity to study with The Open University for free, he decided to apply and to his surprise, received a scholarship place.

“

When I received a letter of acceptance it was a complete surprise and meant I could finish something I had started all those years before. Being injured, it's easy to just sit down and do nothing. But now, studying with the OU has given me a hard focus, I've got deadlines to keep to and assignments to do now.

”

With an interest in computer maintenance and solving problems, Andrew chose to study for an Open Degree in Computing, which suits his capabilities.

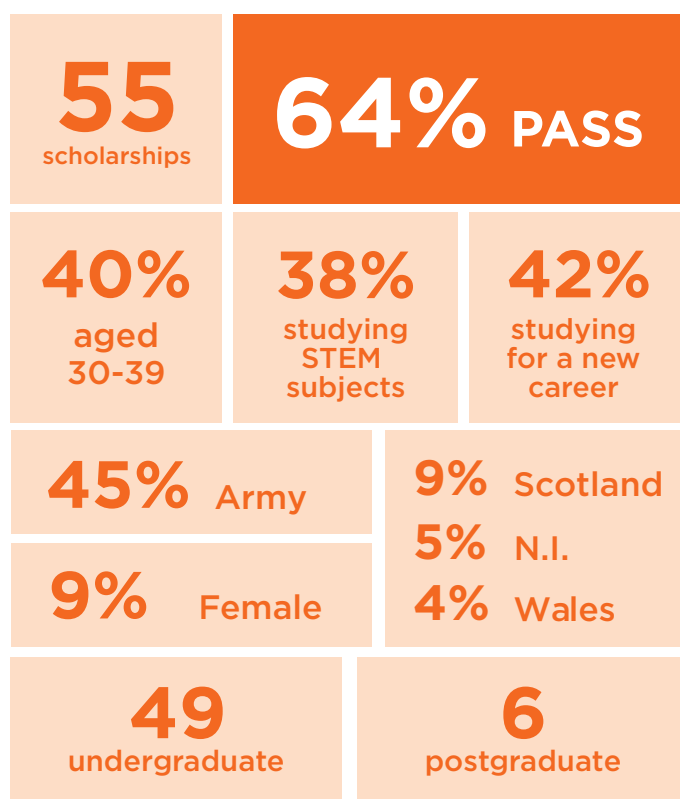
“The Disabled Veterans' Scholarships Fund has offered me, and the other veterans, access to education that we wouldn't get otherwise and it's an absolute godsend. I'd like to thank everyone who has supported the scheme and made this opportunity a possibility.”

In August 2018, 55 disabled veterans were awarded scholarships. Each student was asked to provide details on their background, their reason for studying and to select a course of study.

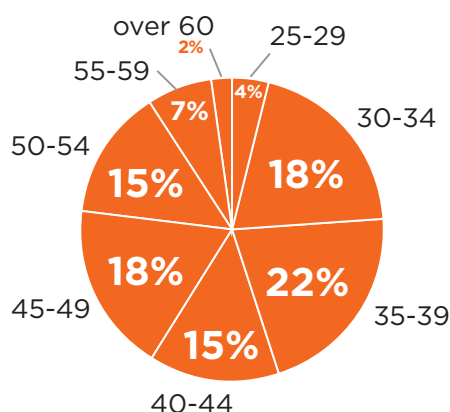
As STEM skills are routinely employed within military work, it was unsurprising that STEM subjects, particularly Computing and IT, were the most popular areas of study for Cohort 1. The Social Sciences and Business have also been chosen by a large proportion of students.

We received proof of medical disability from all the students which confirms service-related issues. We know from speaking to the individuals that the extent of their disability is seldom easy to explain. Those who have experienced physical injuries have faced operations that have in turn led to infections and bouts of illness.

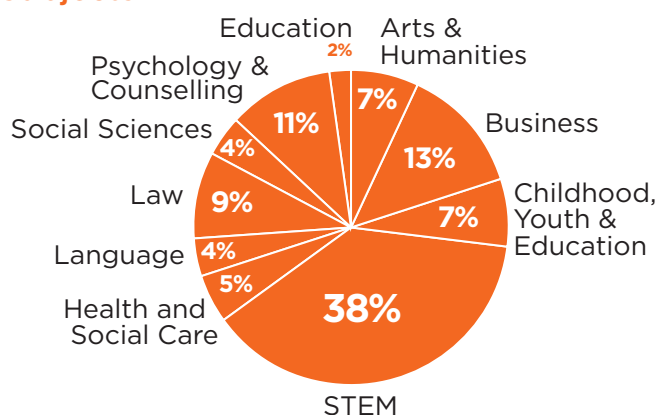
Individuals who have been diagnosed with mental health issues may have lived with their conditions for many years before diagnosis, and such illnesses can lead to further health complications, so explaining them can be difficult. The high occurrence of mental health issues and PTSD was anticipated, and we put specialist support in place.



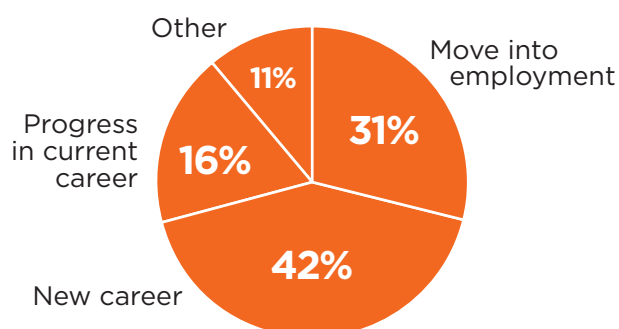
Age



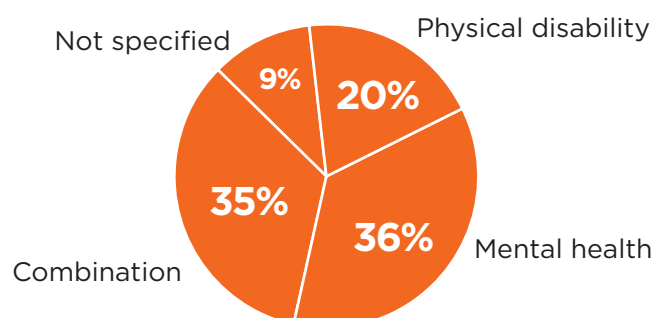
Subjects



Motivation to study



Disability



The students from the first cohort began studying in September 2018, and many are entering their third academic year.

Most students chose to study OU undergraduate degrees, which comprise 360 credits and take on average six years to complete at a rate of 60 credits per year. Each module takes around nine months to complete; some are entirely online assessment based, while others have a final assessment conducted under exam conditions.

Of the 55 students, 39 students are currently studying on active modules, 35 students completed their first module and 30 of these achieved a pass mark. Thirteen students deferred their registrations, three failed their first module, five cancelled their registrations and two passed but have not yet selected their next module.

Cancelling, deferring or not registering for a module is not a sign that the student is no longer studying. They may be taking a break to reconsider their course choices or due to events in their lives that make studying difficult. We know that many veterans are still adapting to practical changes, such as finding accommodation outside of the military, or may need to pause studying at any point when their health demands it. The OU student support teams remain committed to staying in contact with the students to stay up to date with their circumstances.

During the first modules, the OU student support team were able to help nine students register for an alternative module to allow them to continue their studies. Six of the first cohort who deferred their studies are now ready to begin their learning journey and have registered on 2019/20 modules.

This illustrates why supported OU study is a highly appropriate means of studying for this group. The modular mode of learning offers the opportunity to take breaks when needed. And, being part of this scheme means that students are closely monitored so that when things do become difficult, they have the support to defer, rather than drop out of study.

“

During my first module I had a marriage breakdown and found myself homeless, then spent a few months in temporary accommodation before being placed into a council house with nothing but a bag of clothes and all while doing my first module on my mobile phone... yes, stressful isn't the word I would use.

The DVSF has given me the chance to get a fresh start and achieve something positive from the rest of my life, a fresh start, a new house and hopefully a new career doing something worthwhile.

”

Cohort 1 student

“

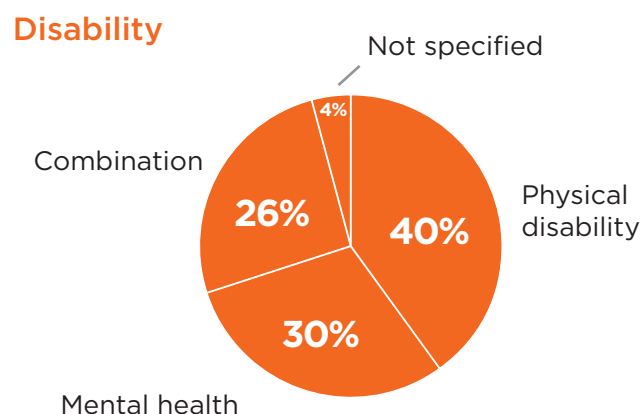
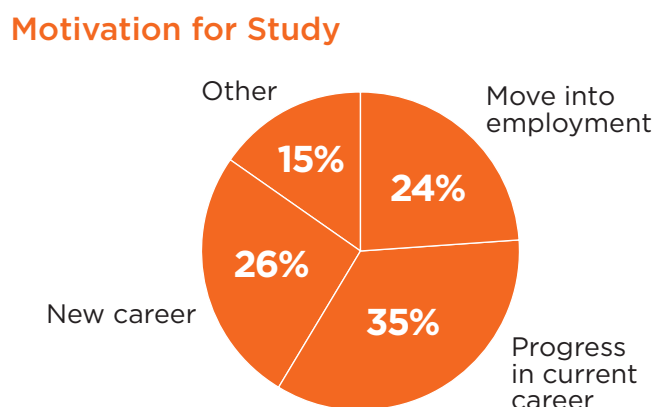
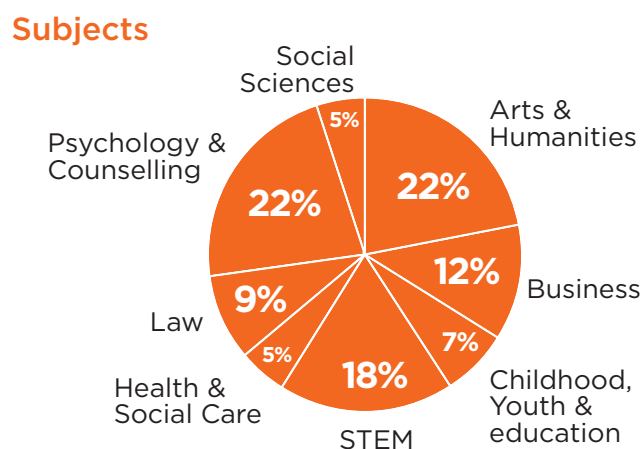
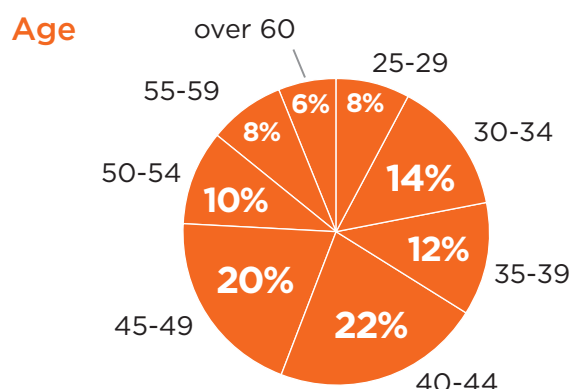
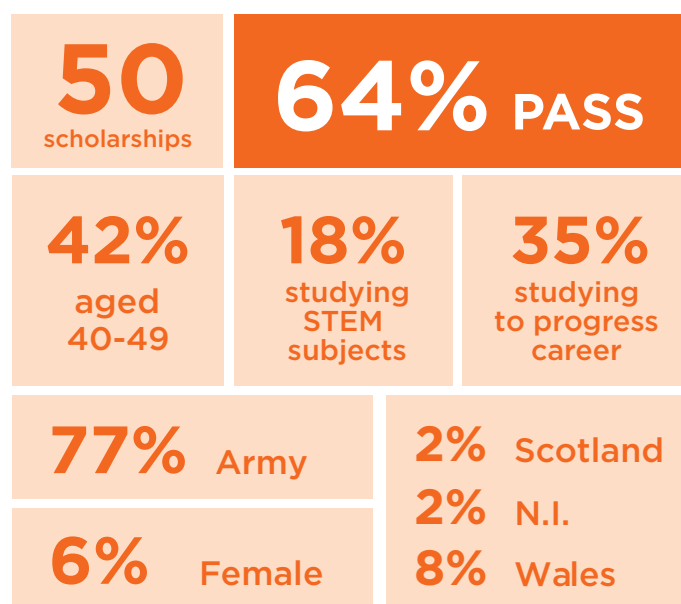
PTSD has, over years, robbed me of friends, family, my house, jobs and almost my life. Through necessity I left the career that I loved and eventually sought help. I was fortunate enough to receive some excellent treatment and, while the symptoms are ever-present, I am able to mostly control them. One aspect of PTSD is the ever-spinning brain where acute consciousness prevents normal life function. I realised that I needed to have some focus, some goal that I could focus on at those moments when I needed my brain to stop its wanderings. Enter The Open University. I was unable to attend many of the tutorials as some of them coincided with days where I did not feel able to leave the house but the tutors have been incredibly understanding and supportive. I would not be able to afford the course without the DVSF and therefore I am so grateful that I have been given this opportunity. It has helped me considerably with a goal, support, focus.

”

Cohort 1 student

The application window opened in March 2019 and closed at the end of June 2019, with successful applicants drawn at random on 5 July 2019. We have been able to award 50 scholarships out of over 80 applications. We had even more interest from students this year as our work with the first cohort has enabled us to raise the profile of the programme within the military community. We have encouraged those unsuccessful in gaining a scholarship in 2019 to apply for the 2020/21 cohort and offered help and support so they can pursue their educational goals through other means if needed.

The second cohort of students are in their second year of study. It is interesting to see the wide range of subjects chosen by the students. We know from contact with the students that many have an awareness of the mental health challenges faced by veterans, either having experienced it themselves or seen it in friends and colleagues. This has prompted an interest in Psychology and Counselling. The diversity of subjects chosen also highlights that there is no typical veteran, their experiences both in and out of the military shape their lives and set them on course for work in numerous fields.



The students from the second cohort began studying in September 2019.

Each module takes around nine months to complete; some are entirely online assessment based, while others have a final assessment conducted under exam conditions. Of the 50 students, 30 students are currently studying on active modules, and 26 of these have achieved a pass mark. 12 students have deferred their registrations and two have cancelled their registrations. Six have not yet selected their next module.

Cancelling, deferring or not registering for a module is not a sign that the student is no longer studying. They may be taking a break to reconsider their course choices or due to events in their lives that make studying difficult. We know that many veterans are still adapting to practical changes, such as finding accommodation outside of the military, or may need to pause studying at any point when their health demands it. The OU student support teams remain committed to staying in contact with the students to stay up to date with their circumstances.

During the first modules, the OU student support team were able to help nine students register for an alternative module to allow them to continue their studies.

This illustrates why supported OU study is a highly appropriate means of studying for this group. The modular mode of learning offers the opportunity to take breaks when needed. And, being part of this scheme means that students are closely monitored so that when things do become difficult, they have the support to defer, rather than drop out of study.

“

During my first module I had a marriage breakdown and found myself homeless, then spent a few months in temporary accommodation before being placed into a council house with nothing but a bag of clothes and all while doing my first module on my mobile phone. yes, stressful isn't the word I would use.

The DVSF has given me the chance to get a fresh start and achieve something positive from the rest of my life, a fresh start, a new house and hopefully a new career doing something worthwhile.

Cohort 2 student

”

“

Without the scholarship I would not be able to afford to study. I was recommended to apply, and I am very humbled to have been chosen to receive a scholarship from the OU's DVSF.

I have completed the first year and am just starting my second. I have chosen to study for a BA (Hons) in Arts and Humanities and I hope to use this to go into teaching adults, particularly those who have experienced PTSD like myself. Starting my studies has given me a routine in my day and given me something else to focus on. My PTSD will always be with me, but it is a welcome relief to focus my mind on something new and interesting.

The course has had a positive impact on me that I cannot begin to put into words. It has relieved some of the pressure on my health issues put on to me and gives me something rewarding to focus on even during the darker days when I struggle with PTSD.

Cohort 2 student

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While the OU continued to support and monitor our two intakes of students, we have also been settling the third cohort into their studies. The application window opened in March 2020 and closed at the end of June 2020, with successful applicants drawn at random on 5 July 2020. We have been able to award 50 scholarships out of over 100 applications. We had even more interest from students this year as our work with the first two cohorts has enabled us to raise the profile of the programme within the military community. We actively encourage those unsuccessful in the draw to reapply for the 2020/21 programme.

We extended the closing date in 2020 as we felt we could raise the profile of the scheme and amplify our social media messaging around Armed Services Day and this proved effective. Next year we will extend this again to give students more opportunity to choose their course and submit their application before the closing deadline.

The third cohort of students are now engaged with their first module of study. To introduce a closer relationship between the OU and DVSF students we have introduced DVSF champions who are allocated a number of students each and work with them to achieve their goals.

55 scholarships

20%
aged
35-39

24%
studying
STEM
subjects

31%
studying
for a new
career

62% Army

2% Scotland

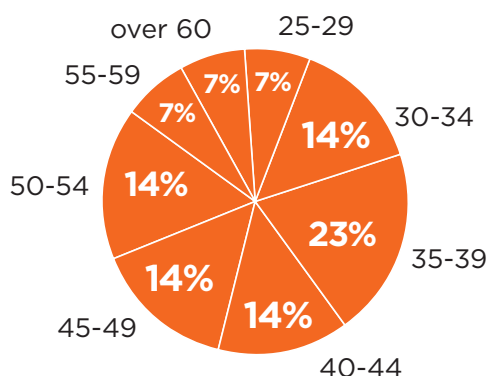
2% N.I.

12.7% Female

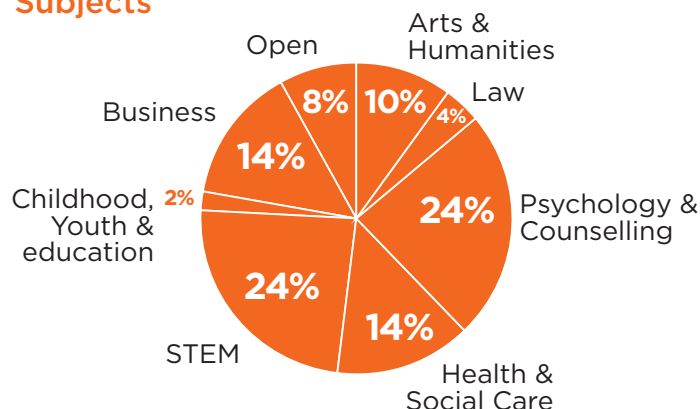
8% Wales

More students are opting for Arts & Humanities, STEM or Psychology & Counselling courses than the previous years but still covering a wide range of subjects. Students are studying at both undergraduate and postgraduate level and we have seen an increase in female students in this cohort.

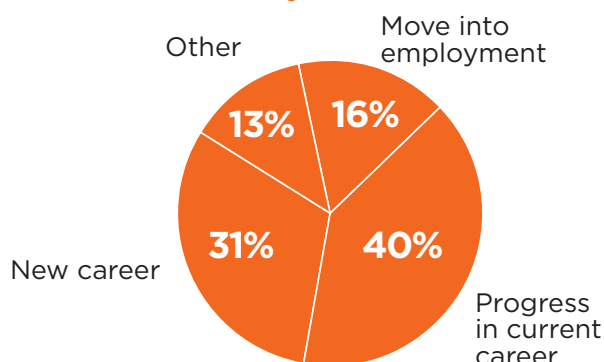
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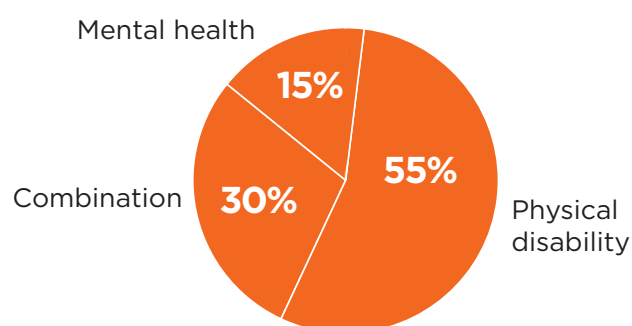
Subjects



Motivation for Study



Disability





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As a Pioneer Graduate of The Open University, and an ex-serviceman, I recognise both the effort required to complete an OU degree, but also the immense value gained from doing so. I am proud to be an ambassador for a programme which is changing the lives of our disabled veterans.

Sir Christopher Coville KCB FRAes FCIPD BA (Open)
Disabled Veterans' Scholarships Fund Ambassador

”



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