

2024



December 2024

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A Year in Review

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New Years Honours List



Open Awards CEO, Heather Akehurst OBE (right) speaks with HRH Prince William upon being awarded her OBE for services to Further Education in Merseyside.

1st January was an amazing start to the year as we announced that our Chief Executive, Heather Akehurst, had been awarded an OBE in the New Years Honours List for her work with Further Education in Merseyside. An amazing day in February followed with HRH Prince William presenting the award at Windsor Castle. Whilst it was Heather who got the lovely day out, she was keen to stress it was an award for all the hard work put in by the Open Awards team.

Celebrating Learner Achievement



Access to HE in numbers
(Open Awards - 2023/24)

1812

learners registered

with

22

different providers



Winners of the Keith Fletcher Awards for academic year 2022/23.

In March, Access to HE Development Manager, Vicky McClymont, represented Open Awards at the Keith Fletcher Awards, held in the Palace of Westminster. Now in its 13th year, the awards shine a light on the best of our Access to HE learners from all nine AVAs, recognising the outstanding achievement and commitment that learners have demonstrated throughout their studies. The award ceremony provides a wonderful opportunity to see the incredible impact that an Access to HE qualification has on the lives and careers of our learners, as well as to celebrate their enduring passion for education and the desire to succeed.

Support from the Board



Blessing Maregere, Lynn Adam, Sheila Clark, Jen Colbourne, and Claire Blanchard joined the Open Awards Board of Trustees in 2024.

AGM

Our Annual General Meeting saw us sadly say farewell and ‘thank you’ to several Trustees: Adrian Bevin from South Devon College; David Tilley from Novus; Gill Mason from Kids Planet; Gordon Laing from Edge Hill University; and Kieran Gordon representing careers advice. It did however, give us a chance to welcome Blessing Maregere from the Open University, Lynn Adams from Wirral Met College, Sheila Clark from Career Connexions, Jen Colbourne-Davies from IfATE, and Claire Blanchard from University of Wales Trinity Saint David to the Trustee Board.

NHS England

July saw the relaunch of our contract with NHS England to deliver Functional Skills exams to Health and Social Care staff. This partnership sees us working with over 145 sites who provide NHS commissioned services. The scheme is essential for helping NHS staff overcome obstacles in developing their skills and progressing in their careers, especially by providing opportunities to access examinations. The scheme is due to run until June 2027 and we look forward to the continued success stories.

Awarding Season

All our Access to Higher Education providers worked hard with the Open Awards team and as a result, nearly 1300 Access results were uploaded to UCAS well ahead of the upload date, enabling those learners to progress to university. Alongside other AVAs, we responded to QAA's far reaching Consultation on how they plan to regulate Access to Higher Education provision moving forward and we look forward to hearing their conclusions in early 2025.

By the end of the academic year we had issued 34,338 results across all our provision and congratulations to all our learners and apprentices who worked hard to gain their results.

35

Different Access to HE qualification titles awarded

261

Learners achieved a full Distinction profile

30,199

Individual Access to HE unit results processed

Behind the scenes

Although July is our busiest time of year for awarding, work continued behind the scenes in preparing all of our qualifications for the new academic year. Significant changes to the Access to HE Diploma specification (from August 2024) resulted in the successful validation of 73 new units across a number of subject areas. All units were successfully approved for inclusion across applicable Access to HE qualifications, therefore broadening the choice of subject specific content and developmental skills units available for our learners and providers. The new units also increased our offering of 6-credit units - a new mandatory requirement for inclusion in all qualifications and provider programmes as detailed in the revised Access to HE Diploma specification.

Inclusion Certified

Open Awards has committed to being an inclusive assessment organisation by signing up to Cognassist's Inclusive Assessment Partner Program.

The team completed the Neuro-Inclusion Charter training provided by Cognassist and our processes have been updated to acknowledge our Cognitive Report as evidence when considering reasonable adjustments for neuro-different learners.

As a charitable awarding organisation and end-point assessment organisation, our mission is to support educational achievement for all which includes providing all learners (regardless of their neuro-differences) with a level playing field for success. Our mission runs through all decision making at Open Awards, keeping accessibility as a key consideration in the development and delivery of our qualifications and assessments



Cyber Secure

In August we worked with the North West Cyber Security Centre who undertook an independent check of our website and we were pleased that they found no significant risks. Following on from the September riots all Open Awards staff undertook the Prevent UK training for offices and found it very useful.

In November, Open Awards was pleased to be awarded the Cyber Essentials Plus - Certificate of Assurance. This certification certifies that our ICT defences have been assessed as satisfactory against commodity based cyber attack.



New Qualifications

During the year we have regulated six new qualifications:

Open Awards Level 1 Award in Use and Production of UEB Braille Content (RQF)

Open Awards Level 2 Certificate in Use and Production of UEB Braille Content (RQF)

Open Awards Level 3 Certificate in Supporting the Teaching of UEB Braille (RQF)

Open Awards Level 2 Adult Social Care Certificate (RQF)

Open Awards Level 3 Diploma for the Early Years Educator (RQF)

Open Awards Level 4 Award in Preparing for Mentoring Role (RQF)

We have also updated the Open Awards Level 3 Diploma in Master Quilting (RQF), to support the Quilters' Guild in recognising their Master Quilters.



Work from learners of the Quilters Guild - (left) *Colourwash Stripes*, Deirdre Amsden; (right) *Organic Radiation*, Kaffe Fassett.

Access to HE

We were also pleased to announce the approval of two new Access to HE qualifications: Access to HE Diploma (Nursing) and Access to HE Diploma (Health Professions). Both qualifications adhere to the new QAA subject descriptor for Nursing and Health Professions, and delivery began in the approved pilot year (24/25) with wide release in the 2025/26 academic year.

One of the most important factors for Open Awards when developing new qualifications is the element of flexibility. Working with providers up and down the country, we understand that a “one size fits all” approach does not work. With particular reference to the subject descriptor for Nursing and Health Professions, whilst there are mandatory elements for inclusion, we have still been able to offer providers no fewer than 80 different units for selection. This will ensure that not only will every programme be compliant with the requirements of the subject descriptor, but providers can build a programme which is truly reflective of their learner needs, but also that of local HEIs and admissions criteria.

New Qualifications

Technical Qualifications

As part of the post-16 qualification review the Department for Education identified current offerings as 'complex and variable' and invited awarding organisations to submit reformed qualifications, which were assessed against new and robust assessment and funding criteria.

Open Awards collaborated with a wide variety of providers and employers to show support and demand for our qualifications which were in the scope of this reform. We attended meetings with both Ofqual and IfATE to ensure our submission reached the highest standard. This year, we received notification that both qualifications we submitted had been approved as technical qualifications, and approved for public funding. Technical qualifications meet the knowledge, skills and behaviours set out in the occupational standards approved by IfATE, and 'they are linked much more closely to employers' needs and meet specific criteria to improve quality and learner outcomes'. The reformed qualifications, Open Awards Level 3 Technical Occupational Entry in the Principles and Practice for Pharmacy Technician and Open Awards Level 2 Technical Occupational Entry in the Principles and Practice for Pharmacy Support Staff, will both be available for first teaching in September 2025.

Exams4Zoom

Over the past year, we have transitioned from using Teams and Zoom to a dedicated platform, Exams4Zoom, for remote invigilation. This shift required addressing several technical challenges, including resolving system blockers such as firewalls, implementing whitelisting protocols, and expanding browser compatibility on the platform. With these hurdles overcome, we are now successfully scheduling remote invigilation sessions using the Exams4Zoom platform. This advancement has significantly improved our efficiency, allowing us to scale from a 1:1 invigilator-to-candidate ratio to a 1:4 ratio. As a result, we can monitor more candidates simultaneously while maintaining the integrity and security of the examination process.

Growth and Reform



EPA

Our EPA provision continued to grow as we added Level 3 Peer Worker, Level 3 Community Health and Wellbeing Worker, Level 3 Junior Energy Manager, Level 5 Horticulture and Landscaping Technical Manager, Level 2 Customer Service Practitioner, Level 3 Customer Service Specialist and Level 3 Teaching Assistant. Work continues on Level 4 EMS (Building Energy Management Systems) Controls Engineer ready for an early 2025 launch.

By the close of September we were proud to announce an EPA milestone - claiming our 400th apprenticeship End-point Assessment certificate. This number has now increased to 450 certificates by the end of the calendar year,

Wales

Open Awards continued to work with Qualifications Wales and other Awarding Organisations as they continue their educational reforms, particularly looking at the new vocational qualification landscape. This is an exciting time for Wales and we are looking forward to working with schools and colleges to refine those qualifications and the assessments that support them.

Supporting SEND

We ended September with our first SEND Forum for the academic year and had a great turnout with 25 people joining for the session. It was hosted by Sonia King and Jo-Anne Coxall from Fable House, who took us through their personalised curriculum, expressing why it is so important to their learners, talking about how the qualifications meet these needs and allowing a lot of flexibility. They received a lot of positive feedback from those who joined expressing how insightful and refreshing it was to see the learners at the core of their approach. The projects they had shown from their learners were brilliant and well received by the audience.



Sonia King (left) and Jo-Anne Coxall (right) of Fable House who delivered our first SEND Forum of the 24/25 academic year.

Growth and Skills Levy

In September, the new Labour Government announced its pledge to tackle the growing skills gap with a report launched by a new government body - Skills England. The Skills England report highlights the challenges faced in the current skills landscape, alongside plans for the future to support local and national priorities, and promoting employer investment in workforce training schemes.

A strategic response to the skills shortages faced across the UK include the introduction of the Growth and Skills Levy which will enhance employer-driven training options. The Government are still to set out in more detail what the Growth and Skills Levy will look like and how businesses can engage, so until that time, Open Awards will look forward to the Growth and Skills initiatives in 2025; and playing a full part in allowing people and businesses to achieve their potential.

Read the Skills England 'Driving Growth and Widening Opportunities' report [here](#)

AI in Education Summit



Enhancing Accessibility

In November we were delighted to co-host the Liverpool AI in Education Summit with Disrupt HR. It was a thought provoking event and thanks go to: James Pallister from Metaverse; Kieron White from Engine AI; Professor David Reid from Liverpool Hope University; Steven Tallant from Videosign; and Mike O'Flynn from Samphire, who shared their insights on the impact of AI in education, including bias reduction, AI personal tutors, and alternative assessments. Heather and Nina Hinton, Director of Business and Development for Open Awards, also talked about how Open Awards were using AI to benefit providers, learners and apprentices.

The event was rounded off with an engaging panel discussion, moderated by Heather, on the topic of "The impact of AI on our personal lives and professional development in the context of education". Alongside some of the guest speakers, additional panellists included Isa Mutlib from AI Skills Academy; Conrad Hemingway from the University of Salford, Steve Foulger from NFP, and Jackye Clayton from Textito.

Provider Collaboration

Access to HE standardisation took place at the Open Awards offices at the end of November with 30 delegates attending to share knowledge, collaborate, and align on best practices.

Attendees from Aquinas College; Blackburne House; Bolton College; Bury College; Calderdale College; Connect Institute; Education Partnership North East; Oldham College; Oxbridge; Return to Learning; St Helens College; Tameside College; The City of Liverpool College; The Manchester College; Trafford and Stockport College Group; Wigan and Leigh College; Wirral Met College; and Weston College, joined forces to have a productive and insightful discussion on the future of standards in education and training.

We look forward to continuing these important conversations and working together to shape the future of qualifications and assessment.



Employee Recognition



Sam Belk, Greg Jones, Jane Drummond, and Emma Kettle with their Open Awards Employee Awards for 2024.

The Open Awards Employee Awards received many nominations and thank you to everyone who got involved. In line with our values, Emma Kettle received the Excellence award, for Respect - Jane Drummond, the award for Innovation went to Sam Belk, and Peter Tidswell took home the Open Awards Value award for Aspiration.

Earlier this year all of us at Open Awards were extremely sad to hear that a much loved colleague, Josh Byrne had passed away. Josh was only with us for a short time providing maternity leave cover but made a big impact on all of us with his caring and compassionate nature. In our reminiscences about our time with Josh the word that came up most was 'kind'. As we thought about how we best to honour Josh, we decided to introduce a new Employee Award for Kindness (an under rated quality) and it was awarded to Greg Jones. Many congratulations to all of the winners.

The Year Ahead

Next year we look forward to the launch of our new Microcredentials, Forestry Works Manager suite of Qualifications (including a Qualification for Wales), along with Level 4 in Preparing for a Mentoring Role, Level 2 and Level 3 Maritime qualifications that support apprenticeships for the sector, Equine Physiotherapy qualifications from Levels 4-6, and new units to our Level 4 Certificate in Professional Development (Youth Work).

Open Awards is also working with several Universities to help them develop an Access to HE offer alongside, or replacing, their Foundation Degrees. We believe an Access to HE course provides better value for learners - their Advanced Learner Loan will be written off upon completion of a degree or other recognised higher education course, and statistics show that learners who have completed an Access to HE qualification are more likely to continue their studies to HE, as well as being more likely to gain employment at the end of their Degree. A qualification such as this, also helps Universities to build closer links with Further Education. If you'd like to be part of this please contact us.



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