

From Lancaster to London - A brief history

As OCN London celebrate 30 years of supporting adult learners, we look back at the history of Open College Networks (OCNs) from their pioneering days in the 1980s to the present day.

The concept of an open college was first established back in the 1970s when Nelson & Colne College set up a partnership with Lancaster University. Called the Open College of the North West, they provided courses and certificates as an alternative route for adults wishing to progress to Higher Education.

OCN London Today

- **25** qualification suites from Interior Design to Independent Living
- **32** staff
- **50** Access to HE Diploma titles
- **202** different qualifications
- **357** Centres
- **45,000** learners



OCN London staff past and present from 1988 to 2014. Acting CEO Jacquie Mutter (left) is pictured with Michael Sargent at his retirement as an External Moderator for OCN London. Also pictured next to Michael (L to R) are Maree Walker, Linda Dicks and Sue Pedder. Michael, Linda and Sue were three of the founding members of LOCF.

North and South meet

Barnsley was the setting for the first Open College Seminar in 1986 which brought together the Manchester Open College Federation, London Open Colleges and five other OCNs from across the country. The seminar looked at the systems of accreditation being developed in different parts of the country and considered a common 'national' model, later rationalised through the Credit Accumulation and Transfer Agreement (CATA).

With the demise of the ILEA in 1990, the work of developing a comprehensive accreditation system which could also link with Access to HE was taken up by the newly formed London Open College Federation.



Jack Straw, key speaker at the launch of LOCF in 1989

In 1981, Manchester Open College Federation was created and went on to develop the system of accreditation which became the model for all other OCNs. The model Manchester adopted broke the mould by showing that there were credit-based alternatives to conventional school and exam-based qualifications.

At the same time OCNs were developing in Inner London, working in partnership with the then Inner London Education Authority, ILEA. The ILEA were very supportive of the concept of giving adults without formal qualifications and from under-represented groups the opportunity to access Higher Education. They shared the OCN view of widening participation in learning for adults who had previously been excluded from such opportunities.



Marks & Spencer sponsor the London Access Directory in 1991

Key developments

Key events over the next 20 years included Access to HE becoming officially accredited through the creation of Access Validating Agencies, OCN awards becoming eligible for funding, and the London Open College Federation transforming into the OCN London of today.

Today as we face the complexities of adult learning, reduced funding and an ever changing political landscape, we are committed to entering the next stage of our history with a strong sense of supporting adult learners by providing a quality learning experience, recognising achievements and providing the opportunity to progress to further and higher education.

A more detailed history of the OCNs compiled by Michael Sargent will be published as an e-book later this year.

Timeline - 1970s to 2014



Mid 1970s - The OCN Movement begins

The term 'Open College' is first used for a partnership between Nelson & Colne College and Lancaster University.



1981 The Manchester Open College Federation is created

The 'Manchester Model' broke the mould by developing a credit-based alternative to conventional school and exam-based qualifications



1982 Open College of South London (OCSL) is formed

The Polytechnic of the South Bank and local colleges form the OCSL to give advice and guidance to adults and support progression to HE



1983 ALFA created

North London follow with a collaborative group known as Access to Learning for Adults (ALFA)



1984 ILEA publish Advanced Further Education Review

As a result three additional London groups are created, thus establishing the foundations of the London Open College Federation; The Central & West London Open College (CAWLOC), Open College of the City and East London (OCCEL) and Greenwich and Lewisham Education for Adults Network (GLEAN)



1988 The government announces the abolition of ILEA

The Conservative government of Margaret Thatcher announces the forthcoming termination of the ILEA under the Education Reform Act



1988 ADU is set up

In response to the planned closure of the ILEA, the Accreditation Development Unit (ADU) is set up, overseen by the ILEA and London Open College networks



1989 Jack Straw key speaker at LOCF

Jack Straw, Shadow Secretary for Education attends the launch of the London Open College Federation (LOCF), a partnership of the four London Open Colleges to deliver a London-wide accreditation system, eventually taking on the Access validation franchise



1990 Access to HE officially recognised

Access to HE courses are officially recognised through the creation of Access Validating Agencies (AVAs)



1992 OCN funding established

The Further and Higher Education Act establishes new funding bodies HEFCE and FEFC and recognises OCN accreditation for funding purposes



1993 LOCF is reconstituted as a limited company with charitable status



1998 LOCF renamed LOCN

London Open College Federation is renamed London Open College Network



2005 Regional OCNs come together

Open College networks across the country are reorganised to create 9 regions and LOCN, already a region, agrees to rename as OCN London Region (OCNLR)



2010 OCNLR becomes an Ofqual recognised Awarding Body



2013 OCNLR is renamed OCN London