

# Reflections on the launch of an interdisciplinary STEM qualification

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The Open  
University

## The BA/BSc Open - a history

- OU's original mission: [to provide] *“a broader type of education than that provided by a usual degree and an interdisciplinary one”* (Open University Planning Committee, 1969).
- *“a student is the best judge of what [s]he wishes to learn and that [s]he should be given the maximum freedom of choice consistent with a coherent overall pattern. ...this is doubly true when one is dealing with adults who, after years of experience of life, ought to be in a better position to judge what precise studies they wish to undertake...”*. (Perry, 1976).



**357, 000 Open degrees awarded since 1969**

**3054 students awarded Open degrees in  
2018/19: 31% of undergraduate degrees**

**Open box modules**



## Who are the Open BA/BSc students?

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**Students who wish to combine a set of subjects not catered for by the University's named degrees**

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**Students who want freedom from having to take some of the compulsory modules associated with named degrees: e.g. to avoid exams, residential schools**

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**Students who start on a named degree wish to change their subject focus**

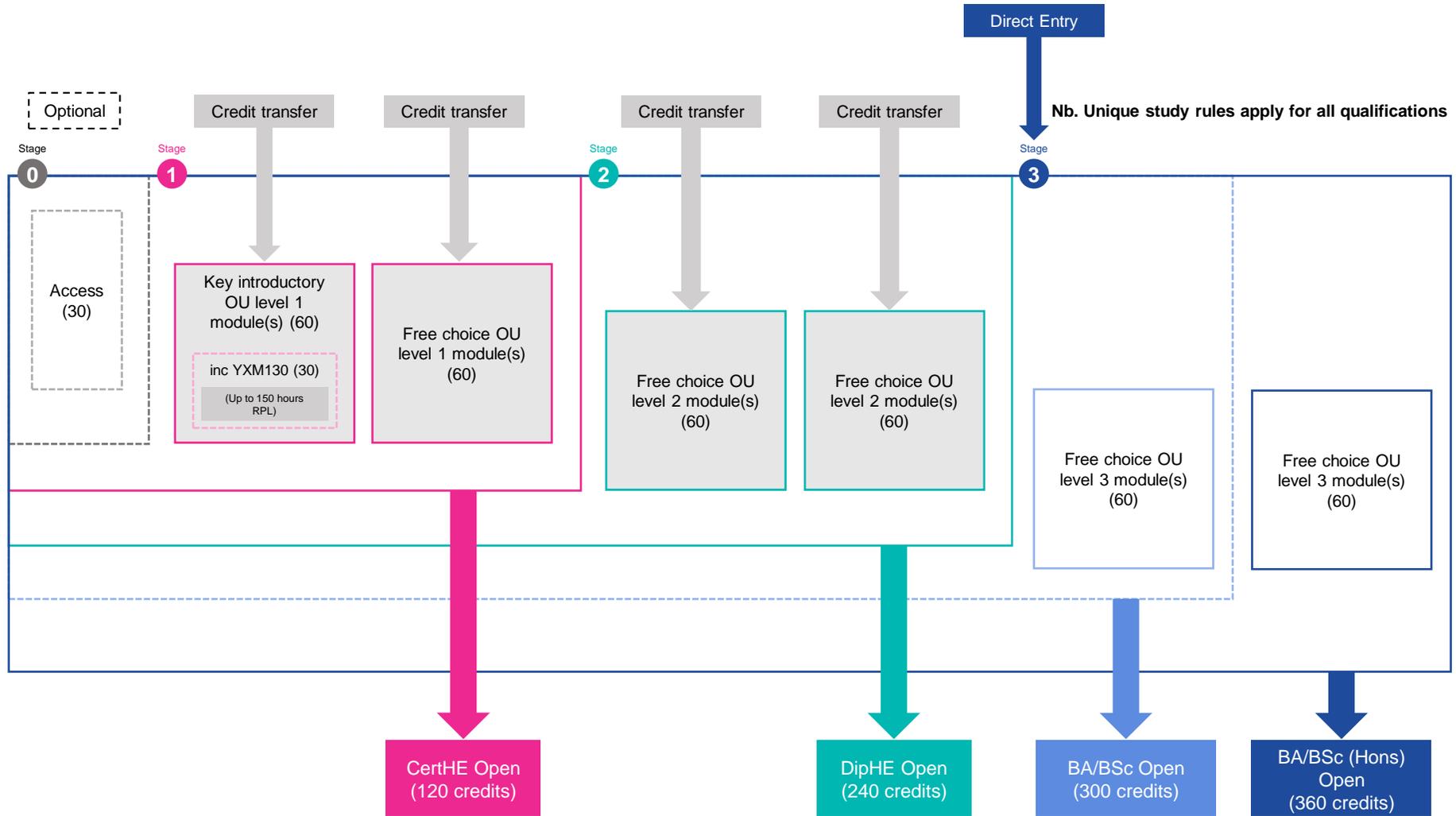
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**Students transferring from other institutions who want to maximise credit transfer**

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**Students with particular needs seeking flexible/personalised pathways**

# THE STRUCTURE OF THE UNDERGRADUATE OPEN DEGREE



# The Combined STEM BSc (R28)

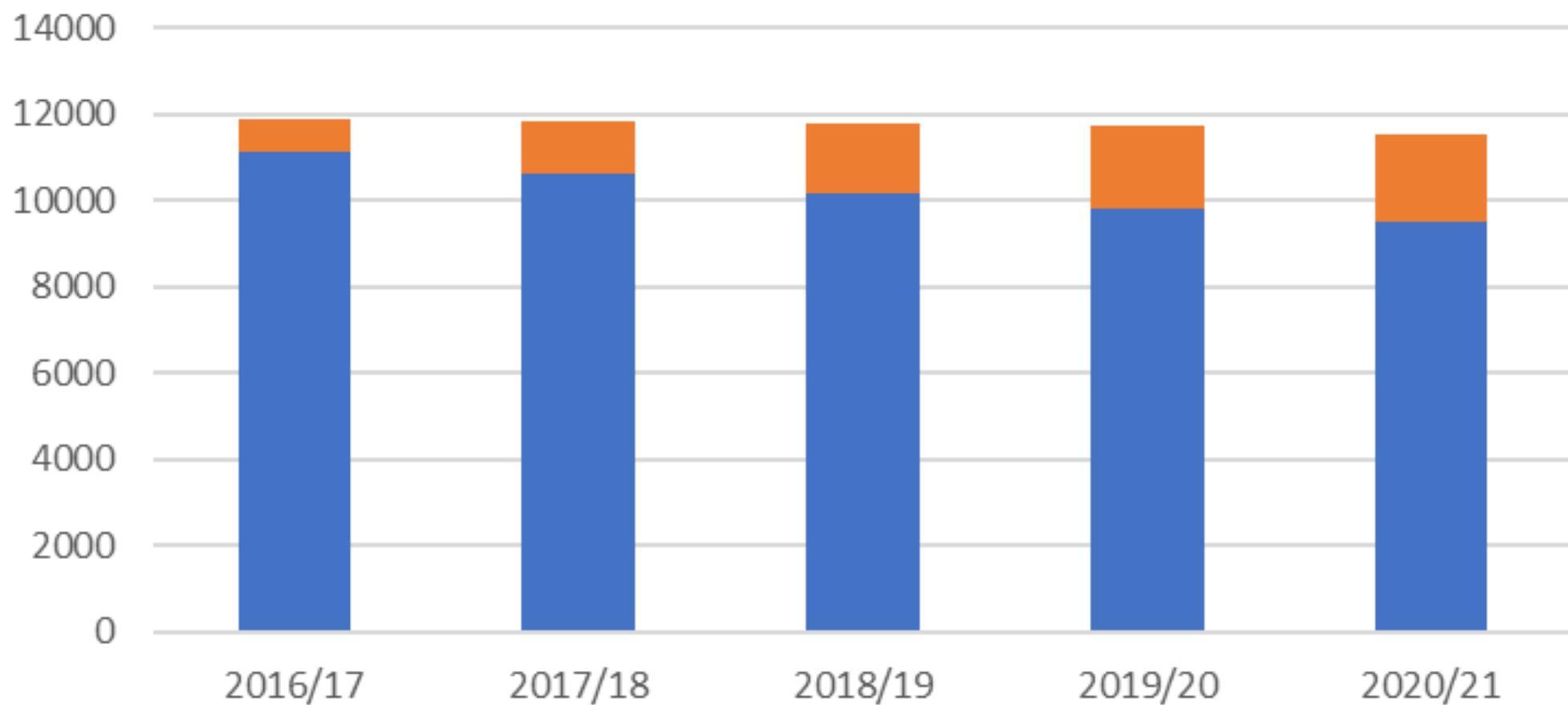
Launched in 2017 aimed at:

- Providing an “Open type” BSc degree in STEM for students who might prefer that designation
- Allowing some students with an ELQ to receive a student loan for a STEM qualification.

Students study a minimum of:

- 60 points of STEM at level I
- 60 points of STEM at level II
- 120 points of STEM at level III

## Student numbers



■ students studying towards BA/BSc Open ■ students studying towards BSc STEM

# Tentative Conclusions

- **From the data on the previous graph we can definitively conclude that the launch of a BSc STEM has not led to a large increase in student numbers studying Open style degrees.**
- **We can tentatively conclude that overall we have simply given a different title for students who would otherwise study our BA/BSc Open degree**

## Selected data and tentative conclusions

- On average 31% of Students studying for the BA/BSc Open have previous higher educational qualifications, this has remained steady over the last five years.
- The equivalent proportion of students on the BSc STEM has varied between 20 and 40%, but averages at 30%
- *The launch of the BA/BSc STEM has not recruited a significantly greater number of ELQ students*

## Selected data and tentative conclusions

- The ratios of female to male students studying key introductory STEM modules was higher in R28 than in the named degrees, especially in disciplines where the percentage of female students is low.
- *Further work is being undertaken to investigate*

## Selected data and tentative conclusions

**In 2019/20 the NSS satisfaction rate for the BSc STEM was 81% compared with 86% for the BA/BSc Open degree and an institutional rate of 87%**

***Other sources of evidence indicate that the lower satisfaction rates on the BSc STEM may be related to a dissatisfaction related to advice on course choice.***

# John Baxter

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