



The Open University

sesame

Reaching the Open University community worldwide

- sesame awards: help us find the stars

Study in
a horsebox

Issue 228
Winter 2005

Business opportunity



Do you think figures matter?

There are 12 million obese people in the UK. Each has their own reason for being overweight. Could you help them understand why?

Become a LighterLife Counsellor

LighterLife operates a weight loss programme specifically aimed at people with 3 stone or more to lose. We are expanding our network of Counsellors throughout the UK and seeking to recruit motivated self starters to run their own businesses under the security of our national brand.

This business opportunity offers comprehensive and accredited training (with an 80% LSC Career Development Loan available), business support and personal development whilst providing a medically approved weight loss programme that offers an income of £50k +.

If you have a real desire to help people change their lives then contact us:

Call Samantha or Katie for an information pack:
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or email: new@lighterlife.com
www.lighterlife.com

lighterlife 

SIMPLY THE BEST

If you're one of the thousands who're waiting with bated breath for your exam results, we hope when the news comes it will be good. This year you have something extra to look forward to: for the first time the university will be making available personalised feedback, albeit limited, on your exam performance (see story page 22). This is something students have been wanting for a long time; we at **sesame** will be interested to hear what you think of it. You only have 28 days after your results become available to view it, so don't forget. And then enjoy your well-earned rest before plunging into your next course – and if you still haven't chosen that, turn to page 16 for some advice.

And should you need something more than the **sesame** crossword to keep your brain ticking over during the festive season, turn to page 6 and read about the new **sesame** Student Awards. In the next issue of **sesame** we'll be giving you the opportunity to nominate someone – a fellow student, family member or friend, or even yourself – for these Awards which aim to reflect just how much and in how many different ways OU students are achievers. And even if you don't send in a nomination you can be part of the celebrations – more details in future **sesames**.

And finally, to all our readers, many thanks for your letters and comments throughout the year. We wish you all a merry Christmas – or happy holiday – and a very happy New Year.

Yvonne Cook, Editor



The **sesame** Student Awards will take place in London in 2006

Image: Visit London

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PVC'S VIEW

Yes, you can trust the tables

NONE of us believe in league tables.

They first entered the university world in the early 1990s. The agents of change were two forms of external assessment: the teaching of individual departments was measured by the Quality Assurance Agency and their research by the Research Assessment Exercise. Neither measure was intended to be used to create national rankings of departments or universities, but the educational press soon found means of compiling and publishing tables.

Pernicious

These had pernicious effects. They simplified the complex work of teaching and research into crude numerical scores. They encouraged vice-chancellors to pursue marginal improvements in their rankings rather than the delivery of the mission of their institutions. Ingenious effort was invested, not in improving the lot of students, but in manipulating the scoring system. So we deplore them. Except when we come top.

The National Student Survey, the first ever to be wholly based on what the students themselves think about their teaching, placed The Open University ahead of every other institution in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (except Oxford, Cambridge and Warwick, whose students failed to send in enough returns).

There are technical problems even with this simple measure. But it is straightforward enough to contain real meaning. There was a tendency in the press to discount our achievement as if we were competing in a mini-league of part-time distance education. We were not. The national table confirmed the claim we have always made. That through our curriculum, our educational technology, and our student support, we have developed a way of teaching which is just better for the student than much of what happens in nominally full-time, nominally face-to-face institutions.

We should take pride in the Survey. This year.

David Vincent

Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Strategy, Planning and External Affairs

NEWS

More news online at
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NEWS

Scientists find new way to locate North Sea oil reserves

RESEARCHERS based at the Open University and the University of Aberdeen have found a way to improve the odds on finding undersea reservoirs of oil off the north coast of the UK.

The scientists have developed a new technique that can help to predict which rocks are most likely to contain oil, and have successfully demonstrated their new technique on sandstone rocks found deep beneath the seafloor between the Shetland Isles and Faroes.

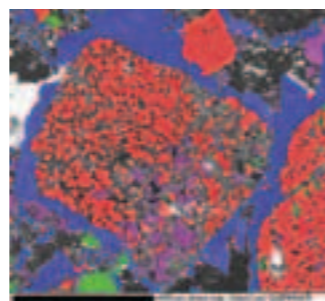
Mineral clues

Not all sandstone rocks contain oil and millions of pounds have been spent drilling only to find nothing, because the oil passed through millions of years

ago without being trapped. Many things need to be in place to trap enough oil in the reservoir to make drilling economically worthwhile.

The new technique involves measuring the age of a mineral, potassium feldspar, which is present as a natural cement in many oil reservoirs (see the electron microscope image, right). When the cement also contains bubbles of oil, it pinpoints the time when oil passed through the rock, and allows geologists to determine which areas would have provided good oil traps.

"This is important for science because we are able to determine both the time and temperature at which fluids moved through the



Sandstone reservoir rock

rocks," says Dr Simon Kelley, at The Open University's CEPSAR research centre, "but it's also essential information for the oil industry in searching for future sources."

Dr Kelley along with Professor John Parnell from the University of Aberdeen headed the research team. Their work was published in a paper in *Science* magazine in September.

It's 'make your mind up' time

STUDENTS are being urged to register for their course/s for next year as soon as possible rather than leaving it until 27 January 2006, which is the final cut-off date.

Isobel Bates, Centre Manager, Student Registration and Enquiry Service, explains why: "Registering now means that students will have a better chance of getting a place on their preferred course."

Preparation time

"Students will also receive their course materials in plenty of time before the course starts and if the course includes preparatory study, students will be able to complete this at a pace that suits them."

In the meantime if you are unsure about which course/s to take or are waiting for exam results before embarking on a new

qualification, visit the OU's online prospectus at www.open.ac.uk/courses/

For further details about learning with the OU visit www.open.ac.uk/learning/index.cfm Here you will find guidance on choosing an appropriate course, a link to the university careers site and ideas about further developing your skills as a learner.

Alternatively, if you would prefer to discuss your options for next year with an advisor or you would like to register by phone telephone 0870 333 4340. Lines are open weekdays 8.30am to 9pm; Saturdays 9am to 5pm.

Students can also register online at www3.open.ac.uk/courses/bin/p12.dll?A02 You will need to click the 'to register' button for your chosen course.

For new students the closing date for registration is 16 December.

More cash for worse off

IN a move welcomed by The Open University, government is putting an extra £40 million into supporting part-time study over the next two years, targeted at students from groups which are underrepresented in higher education.

The funding boost, which will be shared between the OU and other part-time education providers, was announced on 4 November and comes on top of an enhanced support package for part-time students announced by Education Secretary Ruth Kelly on 18 October.

Sir Howard Newby, Chief Executive of the Higher Education Funding Council for England, said on 4 November: "Today's announcement demonstrates our continued commitment to the importance of part-time study." But the long-term impact on fees for OU and other part-time students is not yet clear.

Before the announcements were made, the OU had been appealing to government to make sure part-time higher education providers did not lose out next year, when full-time institutions will be boosting their income by charging their students "top-up" fees (see *sesame* 227 p 5). The extra funds just announced will enable the OU to increase the level of fee grant payable to students on low incomes from £590 to £750 per 60-point course from 2006.

It will also have more money available for discretionary grants that universities can give to part-time students through their Access to Learning Fund, and for the first time it will be allowed to use this Fund to waive fees for low-income students.

These moves by government should help to reduce the disadvantage the OU faces next year when conventional full-time universities start charging top-up fees of up to £3,000 per student, a measure that will give them significantly more funds to invest in teaching and learning.

Part-time institutions such as the OU would not have access to this additional money unless they increase their own fees, which government had suggested. But the university had told government this would make its courses too expensive for thousands of part-time

students who do not have access to the same loans and other support that full-timers do.

Following the series of government announcements the OU now says its fees will rise by seven per cent next year, which is considerably less than the 'top up' fees rises planned by many full-time universities.

Speaking on 4 November the OU's Vice-Chancellor Brenda Gourley said: "The extra £40 million announced today, in addition to the recent support package for part-time students on low incomes, gives us a real opportunity to extend educational opportunity and promote social justice."

The Open University Students Association has joined forces with the National Union of Students to campaign on behalf of part-time students. OUSA's President Joan Jones told *sesame* she still has a 'major concern for those students who are just above the threshold for support and who may still face significantly increased fees.'

"I still have a major concern for students just above the threshold"

"I am pleased that our university will benefit from the extra £40million announced by the government. However, at the moment I have so few details it's hard to know exactly how this will be allocated and what it will really mean for our students," she said.

"It may sound a lot of money but when you consider that it has to be distributed across the sector and the OU estimated that comparatively it would be under-resourced by £34million a year by 2008/09, it doesn't seem quite such a big amount. I will be talking to the university about the details but I still have a major concern for those students who are just above the threshold for support."

The latest initiatives to help part-time students apply to those in England only. The OU in Wales, which is funded differently from the OU in England, is awaiting the outcome of a review into funding and fees for part-time students. There are no plans for top-up fees in Scotland at present. For details on how part-time students on low incomes can receive financial assistance contact the OU's Financial Assistance Advice Line on 01908 653411 (weekdays 8.30am to 5.30pm).

Secure job?

INFORMATION security has never been a hotter topic than in these days of electronic commerce, identity theft and terrorism. Which is why there's always plenty of work for OU students like Martin Forsdick. Martin, who gained his BSc (Honours) with the OU and who is now studying on the Postgraduate Computing programme, has won the Insight Consulting Prize for best student on the first presentation of M886 *Information security management*. Martin says that managing information security is a significant aspect of his work as a consultant for the Ministry of Defence.

The prize is sponsored by Insight Consulting, part of Siemens Communications. Managing Director of Insight Consulting, Ian Glover, told *sesame* that Information Security Management is now gaining recognition as a profession in its own right. "A lot of very bright people are now choosing this as a career," he said, adding there is still a huge need for more professionals in the industry.



Prizewinner Martin (right) with Ian Glover

IN BRIEF

Stuart Hall honoured

PROFESSOR Stuart Hall, Emeritus Professor of Sociology at the OU, has been elected a Fellow of the British Academy. Its Fellowships are awarded to scholars who have attained distinction in the arts or humanities. Further details are at www.britac.ac.uk

Frog logged

A NEWLY identified species of Sri Lankan frog has been named after OU Biology Professor Tim Halliday. *Philautus hallidayi* was so called to honour the Professor's 'three decades of research on amphibians and his exceptional commitment to advancing our understanding of the global amphibian decline crisis'. Professor Halliday is international director of the Task Force on Declining Amphibian Populations (DAPTF). One of DAPTF's most recent projects is to investigate the decline in ghost frogs in South Africa, and how this may be related to water supply. More information about DAPTF, and its bulletin *Froglog*, is available at www.open.ac.uk/daptf/

Maths Professor elected

PROFESSOR Jeff Griffiths, Associate Lecturer in Region 10 (Wales), has been elected as President of the British Operational Research Society from January 2006. Professor Griffiths has been an associate lecturer with the university since 1971 and has taught a range of level 1 Mathematics courses, starting with the first foundation course M100. He currently tutors MST121 and MS221 in Cardiff. For his 'day job', he is head of the School of Mathematics at Cardiff University.

Hidden histories

RESEARCHERS at the OU's Faculty of Health and Social Care have captured the voices and stories of families caring for those with learning disabilities, with a collection of poignant and revealing oral histories spanning the last 100 years. Dr Sheena Rolph and Professor Dorothy Atkinson are among the editors of a new book, *Witnesses to Change: Families, Learning Difficulties and History*. "This is a comparatively neglected area of study of which little is known or has been recorded," said Dr Rolph. The book is published by the British Institute of Learning Disabilities, see www.bild.org.uk

NEWS

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New for 2006 – sesame Student Awards

THE Open University is delighted to announce the first-ever national student awards which are entirely for students.

The **sesame** Student Awards comprise 10 award categories and will provide all currently registered OU students with an opportunity to nominate themselves, or somebody else they think deserves a special mention. Award categories include OU Entrepreneur of the Year, Research Student of the Year, Student of the Year, Lifelong Learner Award and the Vice-Chancellor's Award.

Students will also be able to nominate a family member or friend who has helped them during their studies.

Nominations

Full details of the awards categories and the nomination form will be made available on

StudentHome and the **sesame** website in the New Year. The nomination form will also be printed in the spring issue of **sesame**.

The winners will be officially announced at a special awards ceremony at a world-class venue in London next year. If you don't want to nominate yourself or somebody else for an award but would still like to join in the celebrations there will be an opportunity to attend.

As well as an awards dinner students will be able to take part in workshops and lectures and find out more about OU courses.

For further details on the **sesame** Student Awards email sesame-awards@open.ac.uk Alternatively, tel: +44 (0)1908 274066. Or write to us at **sesame**, The Open University, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes, MK7 6AA, UK.

Probing chaos

IT IS now possible for astronomy students across the UK to access recent data and images of stars with their own pcs using SALT, a record-breaking new telescope.

SALT (the Southern African Largest Telescope) cost £11 million to build, equals the largest telescope in the world in size and was built by partners in six countries. The

partnership included a UK consortium consisting of The Open University, Armagh Observatory, the University of Keele, the University of Central Lancashire, the University of Nottingham and the University of Southampton.

Its future studies and observations will vary greatly, ranging from asteroids and comets in our

own solar system to the most distant galaxies. Dr Andrew Norton, Senior Lecturer in Physics and Astronomy at The Open University, explained: "We'll be able to see how the light from stars changes on very rapid timescales. Some of the most violent star systems in the Universe – those containing white dwarfs, neutron star or black holes – vary extremely rapidly. SALT's contribution to these time domain studies in extreme environment astrophysics promises to be enormous."

'First-light' trial colour images were recently released, achieving SALT's first significant scientific results and marking the completion of the facility. SALT was officially opened on 10 November. See www.salt.ac.za

by Margo Macnab



Spiral galaxy NGC6744 as seen by SALT

Picture: © SALT 2005

We're top!

THE OU has been named as the institution with the highest overall satisfaction rate following the publication of the results of the first National Student Survey in September.

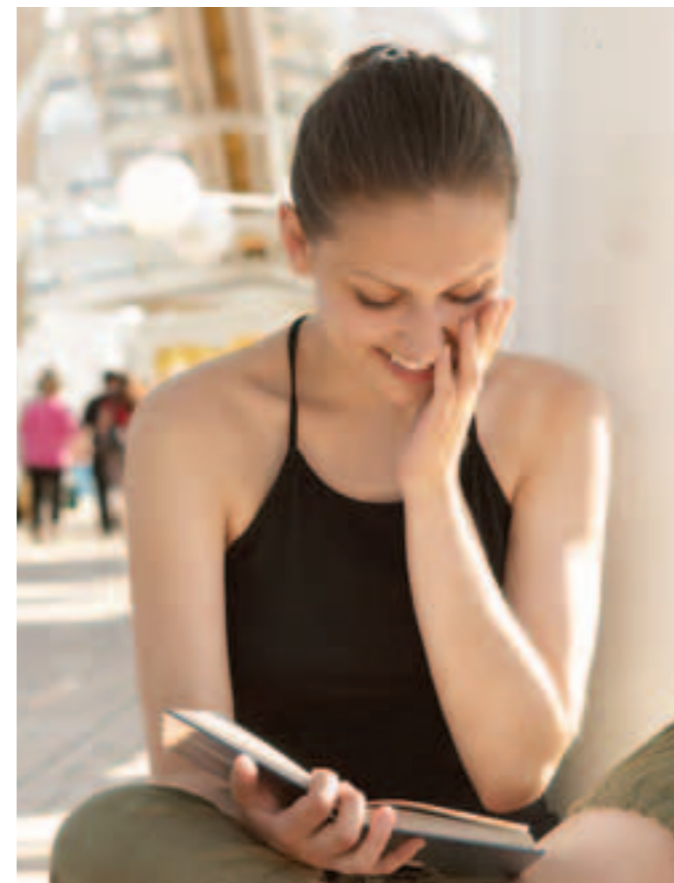
The results also show that the university achieved the highest overall score for assessment and feedback, and shared the highest overall score for organisation and management.

This success puts the university at the top of a new rankings table created by the *Times Higher Education Supplement* (THES).

A second THES table on specific subjects shows that Open University students are more satisfied than those at any other university in 10 subject areas of the 41 listed; no other university listed has achieved top ratings in as many subjects.

In the survey, participating students were asked to rate their universities on a range of measures, which included teaching and learning resources. In addition they were asked to provide an 'overall satisfaction' rating, for which the OU achieved 4.5 out of a possible five points.

The National Student Survey is part of the government's new Teaching Quality Information website, which went live in September. The TQI site (www.tqi.ac.uk) brings together key sources of official information about the quality of UK higher education. The survey is based on responses from more than 170,000 students at higher education institutions in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Of the 141 eligible institutions, 131 are included in the survey. Most



OU students are more satisfied than any others

students who were near the end of undergraduate courses were invited to take part.

Welcoming the survey results, Open University Vice-Chancellor Professor Brenda Gourley said: "Study with The Open University requires commitment and dedication to succeed. We make every effort to ensure that our course materials, support and systems are of the highest quality and the students' commitment is matched by our own," she said.

More surveys to come

If you have studied with The Open University during each of the last three years and completed at least 120 credits during that time, you will be invited to complete the next National Student Survey at the end of January 2006 online or by post. If you were

NEWS

IN BRIEF

A national institution?

AS if becoming a published author in his 70s wasn't enough, OU graduate Gerry Hanson has won praise for his first book from no other than *Daily Telegraph* diarist W.F. Deedes. He dubbed Gerry's *England my England*, a dip-in anthology of all things English, 'admirable' in his *Notebook* column. Among the entertaining snippets Gerry has garnered for his collection is the following taken from Bill Bryson's *Notes from a Small Island*: 'What other nation in the world could possibly have given us William Shakespeare, pork pies, Christopher Wren, Windsor Great Park, The Open University, Gardeners' Question Time and the chocolate digestive biscuit?' *England my England* is published by Robson Books, ISBN 1-86105-893-4.

Research without walls

A NEW book shines a light on the rarely noticed but invaluable researchers who operate outside the university system. *Participating in the Knowledge Society: Researchers beyond the University Walls*, edited by Open University historian Professor Ruth Finnegan, looks at the work of the freelance family historians, internet bloggers and many others who are continuing a generations-old tradition laid down by 17th century village astronomers, Victorian amateur botanists and others. The book provides a rebuttal of the notion that 'research' can and should be delimited within academically policed boundaries, said Professor Finnegan. "The most creative and untrammelled researching today may be outside the universities." *Participating in the Knowledge Society* is published by Palgrave, ISBN 1403939462.

Earn while you learn to teach

ARE you interested in trying out teaching in secondary schools? You could benefit from up to 30 days work experience in a secondary school in England alongside your studies, and earn £40 a day, tax-free. That's up to £1200. This opportunity is available only until 31 July and there are only 600 places for the 2005/06 school year. Applications should be submitted by the end of February 2006 to secure a place. For more information email sa-scheme-enquiries@open.ac.uk or call 01908 858685.

asked to take part in the 2005 National Student Survey, however, you will not be asked to complete it again. Your views will be kept strictly confidential and the results of the survey will be presented in a way that will not identify any individual.

If you have recently completed a degree or postgraduate diploma the OU will be in touch with you shortly to ask you to take part in another survey about the destination of leavers in higher education. This is a national survey which all universities are required to carry out. If contacted please do complete and return the questionnaire as soon as you can. You can see results from the 2003/04 survey for all UK higher education institutions, including the OU, on the TQI website www.tqi.ac.uk

FIFTH COLUMN

NEWS

PEOPLE

Keep it simple



STUDYING with the OU is supposed to be accessible. So why do I find its methods of communication and dissemination so bothersome?

I've been with the OU for three years, but it wasn't until I studied a journalism course with a different establishment that I realised how much simpler distance learning could be: one succinct introductory email; collection of lessons online; swift submissions and retrievals of assignments via my personal email account; and online tutorials with the option of a full transcript if you missed it.

I'm not suggesting this approach would be appropriate for the OU, which is course based, not lesson based, but it can adopt some of this modernity and effortlessness.

Why are OU postal mailings so frequent and often long-winded? Why does my OU email account open window after window every time I perform a new action? Why are there so many forums to follow: for my course; my tutor; my study area?

The OU has to start making more effective use of contemporary forms of equipment, including audio and visual media formats, far advanced from VHS and audiocassette tapes. Keep the non-technical options for those who need them, but tailor for requirements; hi-tech options will eventually be less of a strain on resources and be less environmentally wasteful.

Provisions are still not innovative or sophisticated enough for such a lithe institution.

Natalie Gilbert is a Social Sciences student living in Oxford.

Do you have a gripe or would like to share something interesting? Send us an article of no more than 250 words to The Editor, sesame, The Open University, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes, MK7 6AA or email sesame@open.ac.uk Include contact details and a daytime telephone number. We pay £50 for each contribution used.



Sports study: OU gets the ball rolling

OUR piece about putting more sport in the OU curriculum provoked a huge postbag from readers – and nearly all were in favour. Your comments were among the evidence heard by OU academics who held a sport forum at the OU's Walton Hall headquarters on 4 November to discuss proposals for sports study at openings, level

one and foundation degree level. **sesame** will keep you updated with further developments. Readers who missed the opportunity last time should contact Dick Skellington if they have any comments or suggestions regarding sport at the OU. Email r.s.skellington@open.ac.uk or telephone him at the OU on +44 (0)1908 274066.

Ordinary degree requirements correction

IN the story of Carys Swinger (**sesame** 227 page 8) we outlined the current requirements for a degree without Honours and stated that at least 180 points must be achieved at level 2 and at least 60 at level 3. What we should have said is 'at least 180 points must be achieved at level 2 or above and at least 60 at level 3'. Sorry for any confusion caused.

It's dino-might

MIKE Walley has been interested in paleontology since he was eight, but never imagined his interest in dinosaurs might one day earn him a living.

The former chemicals industry marketing manager was studying for an OU MBA when he and partner Sue Judd, who was studying for the OU's Professional Certificate in Management, visited New York's Museum of Natural History. "What blew us away were the reactions on the kids' faces when they saw the giant dinosaurs by the entrance. We wanted to do something that generated that same excitement about science," he said.

So was born Everything Dinosaur, an online store that has regular clients from all over the world, selling what Mike describes as "fun, imaginative, creative and educational items" connected with prehistoric creatures.

"The great thing about all the OU's business courses is that they teach you how businesses are run," said Mike. "Above all the MBA gives you confidence. I call the time I gave up my job to start Everything Dinosaur my Indiana Jones moment – when he's not sure if he's going to make it to the other side of the ravine, he just makes a leap of faith."

Everything Dinosaur, based in Middlewich, Cheshire, is getting bigger and bigger. "I do think the thing that attracts parents is the knowledge that we really want to help their kids learn," added Mike. "Maybe one of them will end up doing an OU science course – all because one day they saw something interesting and fun to do with dinosaurs. I hope so."

For more details visit www.everythingdinosaur.com



Sue and Mike with some of their dino-goods

Advertisement

Does Your English Let You Down?

A SIMPLE technique for acquiring a swift mastery of good English has just been announced. It could double your powers of self-expression. It could pay you real dividends in business and social advancement, and give you added poise, self-confidence and personal effectiveness.

Many people do not realise how much they could influence others simply by speaking and writing with greater power, authority and precision. Whether in business, at social functions, or even in casual conversation with new acquaintances, you could dominate each situation simply by using the right word in the right way.

WHAT THIS FREE BOOKLET COULD SHOW YOU!

- How to stop making embarrassing mistakes in English!
- How to earn more—get a better job!
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- How to pass English examinations!
- How to develop self-confidence!

For example, when you are presenting a report, training a child, fighting for a cause, making a sale, writing an essay, or asking for a rise . . . your success depends upon the words you use.

Yet thousands of talented, intelligent people are held back because their powers of self-expression do not equal their other abilities.

But now the right words are yours to command! A free booklet, "Good English — the Language of Success", tells you all about a remarkable home-study Course which can give you a swift mastery of good English in just 20 minutes a day.

Never again need you fear those embarrassing mistakes. You could quickly and easily be shown how to ensure that everything you say and write is crisp, clear, *correct*.

This amazing self-training method can show you how to increase your vocabulary, speed up your reading, enhance your powers of conversation, and tremendously improve your grammar, writing and speaking — all in your spare time at home.

What's more, you could command

the respect of people who matter, because you could learn how to use English accurately, impressively, incisively — to cut through many barriers to social, academic or business success.

For your free copy of "Good English — the Language of Success", and proof that this unique home-study method really works, simply post the coupon below — NOW. You have nothing to lose, not even a postage stamp, and you may gain a great deal by sending for this free booklet. Just phone 0800 298 7070 free or post the coupon below. Or you can send an e-mail to: SSE75E@bowdenhall.com.

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LETTERS

LETTERS

Is OU for young?

OUR piece on support for young students (sesame 227) provoked a number of letters, here's a sample.

I WAS interested to read that the OU intends targeting school leavers. I must ask has the OU considered its role in providing a well-trained workforce for the future?

Current Government policy is to encourage 50 per cent of school leavers to take degree courses, regardless of the student's abilities or the needs of the employment market. The result is likely to be a dumbing down of studies and the introduction of yet more courses that have no relevance to the workplace.

The future for all universities lies with employers sponsoring graduates through relevant courses. Universities would be turning out well-trained, qualified employees meeting the market's needs virtually from the moment they leave school. The OU already invites employer sponsorship. Is this not the time for the OU to be selling itself to employers, finding out from them what their employees need to learn, tailoring the OU courses to future employment demands?

I am confident that as 'traditional' universities increase their fees and students question the need to spend three or four years racking up debt, the OU can provide a viable alternative. But please don't use this as an excuse to set up lengthy popularist courses in the belief that is what students want.

Mary Hayward
Taunton

IN THE Autumn issue of **sesame** I read that more and more under 25s are choosing to study with the OU. It is indeed brilliant and I highly recommend it, having opted for it myself soon after I left college at 18.

Having wed at 18 and coming from a culture highly strung on

the stereotype of the housewife, yet practising a religion which encourages one to learn and be educated, and having a personal thirst for knowledge myself, the OU was more than perfect.

The OU deserves a round of applause for being able to satisfy such diverse and complex needs.

Sadia Mahmood
West Yorkshire

Make haste slowly

NUMEROUS letters that you have published in recent years have requested that the OU supply audio-visual (AV) material in digital format, requesting TV programs on DVD rather than on tape. I am techie-savvy, and I too would like this. Digital is possibly even more environmentally friendly now than tape (production, packing, sending), and is definitely easier to reference.

However, I don't ask the OU to make this changeover too soon. It isn't lowering teaching standards to supply AV material on tape, but it is hugely increasing the target audience, i.e. making study available to all.

Offering the student a choice of AV format would be good,

STAR LETTER

Meeting of minds?

I HAVE been a highly satisfied student of The Open University for many years and, like many others have thoroughly enjoyed the beautifully prepared materials, the excellent course planning, and the continually positive feedback from tutors. I think there must be a special place in heaven which makes OU tutors!

I do, however, have anxieties about the OU approach to postgraduate study. There is no problem with the materials, course design, or tutor support, but unfortunately the wholesale adoption of

but would increase marginal unit costs and warehouse management costs – and we all know who pays extra costs at the end of the day.

Being modern is good, and the OU is modern in so many good ways. But going for a standard, low-cost AV medium remains, at least for the moment, the best approach to permitting study for all.

Peter Culleton
Budapest

Testing questions

IT'S exam time and you have a few questions for the examiners.

WHY doesn't OUSA supply specimen answer papers for the exam papers it sells? It's all very well working through old papers, but unless you can compare your trial answers with actual ones, it is very difficult to improve. Besides it would raise more money for OUSA.

Tim Fox
Beckenham, Kent

CONGRATULATIONS to the OU on being ranked top for student satisfaction in the recent and first National Student Survey.

However, please do not be tempted to rest on your laurels. While the accolade is, in my view, well deserved much can still be done to further improve the level of student satisfaction and some of this can surely be learned from the conventional universities which lag behind the OU.

This is particularly the case with regard to exam results; for where other universities are able to report to students on exam success in a matter of two to three weeks, OU students can wait up to nine or ten weeks. I find this a frustrating and unsatisfactory experience and urge you to seek out ways of improving on this area of life for students.

Kenneth Campbell
Motherwell

JENNY BULL, HEAD OF EXAMINATIONS AND ASSESSMENTS, REPLIES :

WE are acutely aware that all students want to have their course results as soon as possible after completing the assessment on their course. However, in the weeks following the examinations and submission of end-of-course assessments in October the University determines the results of over 100,000 students on more than

understanding of our own mindsets and prejudices.

I quite understand that there may be difficulties for some students taking advantage of opportunities to meet others, and that others may actually prefer not to spend time on activities not directly related to their work. Nonetheless I am sure it should be possible to arrange some sort of assembly for those students who are interested, and who could thereby be encouraged to experience a real academic community, and not just a virtual grouping.

Dr Jo Walsworth-Bell
Uppingham, Rutland

600 courses. There are essential quality assurance measures that go with the determination and issue of course results on each course, and it is not possible to issue the results in a shorter timescale than we currently do.

I HAVE just sat the examination for the level 3 course AA314 *Studies in music*. Why, oh why does the OU have this paranoia about collecting in question papers from all candidates at the end of the examination?

I would have appreciated retaining mine if for no other reason that I could show it to interested musical friends and, in the unfortunate event of my having to resit the exam, it would have been useful for revision purposes. I cannot conceive of any risk to security or any possibility of cheating. I later realised that I could download the main text through my online student record.

Peter Highnett
Alnwick, Northumberland

JENNY BULL REPLIES :

OU students sit examinations all over the world. As a result, it is not possible for all students on a given course to sit their examination at exactly the same time. Given the number of students studying overseas, there are concerns that the security of the question paper could be compromised if we did not collect it from all students at the end of their examination. The question paper for most courses is made available via StudentHome shortly after the examination, although there are reasons – for example copyright restrictions – where we cannot do this on all courses.

Postgrad poverty

WHILST I have every sympathy with the financial difficulties of undergraduate students, postgraduate students are in the same predicament but are practically ignored as far as financial assistance goes. I would like to live on the planet where the completion of a first

degree guaranteed a significant rise in income – but on this planet it certainly doesn't.

The two awarding bodies that I know of that do assist OU postgrad students are so short of funding that unless you're on a benefit-level income they can't help, which leaves people like myself, who are just on a low income, to have to find full course fees ourselves.

The two modules I have completed (both only five months long) cost in the region of £1,400. I've had to cancel the course I wanted to do this winter (£630) due to lack of funds, and now I am having to seriously consider if I will have to cancel next year's course (£835) as well, which will make me worry about getting my required study in within the defined deadlines for completion of a Masters degree.

I believe it's about time that postgrads got parity with other part-time students in the financial assistance stakes.

Clover Baker
Cheltenham

Thank you

I WANT to write in praise and thanks to The Open University. My husband took an electrical engineering degree after school and national service, then became a patent attorney but he always wished he could have studied history too.

In his retirement he read for an Honours history degree with the OU. He enjoyed every minute of his studies and got his degree.

He is terminally ill now and I am so happy he was able, through the existence of the dear OU, to achieve his dream; to do what he'd really wanted to do for all those years of his working life.

Dorothy Pope
Middlesex

Doctors for life

I TOTALLY sympathise with the plight of Avis Pearson (letters,

sesame 227). I am in the same predicament myself having obtained a London medical degree in 1967, and being retired from the NHS am now working towards a named degree in Geosciences.

The 1971 cut-off date seems very arbitrary and begs the question as to whether there is any scientific study showing that a 1970 degree is inferior to one obtained in 1972.

I am pleased to say that the General Medical Council recognises medical degrees obtained before 1971 otherwise there would be a sudden loss of doctors aged about 58 and over with a catastrophic depletion of medical services to the nation.

Colin Sykes
Ulverston, Cumbria

Tutor's e-allergy

I HAVE just completed A216 *Art and its histories*. In my previous courses I have been able to email essays to my tutors and receive a typed critique in return.

My tutor this year refused to receive work by email. Working away from home I had to download my essays from laptop to disk, borrow a printer, fill in form PT3, go to the Post Office, get proof of postage etc. When the essay was returned I then had to spend time trying to decipher the tutor's decidedly spidery handwriting. Should it not be compulsory for tutors to enter the 21st century?

James Hayes
Teddington, Middlesex

QA for MEng

ON RE-READING the new course

requirements sent to me for the forthcoming postgraduate MEng degree I was most surprised to find, as an 'old' MEng student, that there is no major engineering project requirement that is essentially filled by the 60 credit point project module on the 'old' undergraduate MEng, and other comparable postgraduate Masters degrees, usually MSc's.

There is only a 120 credit point overall achievement required for the new 'postgraduate' MEng while all other postgraduate masters need 180 credit points. Surely attainment standards are slipping, and the postgraduate diploma is the appropriate quality assurance measure; even if the MEng is a broadbased rather than a more specialist Masters.

Kenneth Jones
Mold

MARK ENDEAN, DIRECTOR OF ENGINEERING, REPLIES :

THE standards for engineering degrees are set by the UK Engineering Council, see their UK-SPEC (www.engc.org.uk/UKSPEC/). The 'old' MEng degree did not meet the standard in force at the time (SARTOR3) because it did not include a specific 'group-working' requirement. Anyone wishing to complete a 'new' MEng degree will have undertaken a 30-point individual project at undergraduate level and a 30-point postgraduate project working as part of a team of students. This represents an increase in the educational standards for MEng. We are working towards the new MEng being accredited by a number of engineering institutions. Please see the new engineering website at <http://engineering.open.ac.uk/> for more information and an explanation of the differences between MEng and MSc degrees.

Please send your letters to: Letters to the Editor, sesame, The Open University, Milton Keynes, MK7 6AA.
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Have books will travel

CAROLINE Buffery studied for her OU degree in a horsebox as she toured the country as a New Age traveller.

But now Caroline has given up the road for a permanent address and hopes to use her BSc as a stepping stone to help her train as a lawyer.

Caroline began her itinerant lifestyle after she bought the vehicle "on tick from a couple of mates" 15 years ago, and joined a travelling community. "I started in Gloucestershire, where my parents live, but

we went to Sussex, Wales, Northumbria – all over the place."

It was at one of her stops, Worcester, in 1993, that she first became interested in taking a degree and studied for a year at the local college. "But I decided I didn't like Worcester so I hit the road again," she said.

On the move

"I always wanted to finish my degree but

"I could study wherever I was. I had the materials sent to my parents' house and I'd call in there to pick them up"

never got round to it. My dad kept suggesting I complete it and in the end we did a deal. He's a photographer and I told him that if he got around to putting his pictures on display, I'd finish my degree. And he did."

Caroline quickly discovered that the best way to study on the move was with the OU. "It was great," she said. "I could study wherever I was. I had the materials sent to my parents' house and I'd call in there to pick them up, but otherwise I could be anywhere. And the courses were great. I started off doing some social policy, which interested me, and then I branched out."

Settling down

Becoming pregnant in 2000 gave Caroline a little less time to dedicate to her studies, but she still managed two 30-point history courses to keep her degree on track. Her daughter is now five and it is for the sake of her education that, earlier this year, Caroline reluctantly gave up her travelling lifestyle.

"I miss the road," she said. "But travelling was getting harder and harder. Years ago there was decent provision for travellers and there were loads of really big sites. Now you have to travel in smaller groups of two and three vehicles and you still have to move every couple of days."

Horsebox to house

But she's hoping that settling in her new permanent home in Hove, East Sussex, will give her the chance to forge a career at the bar. "I did want to do a PGCE and become a teacher but the OU doesn't do the specific course I wanted. I have been doing a lot of work with the Community Law Partnership and the lawyers I have worked with there have given me references to help me get on a law conversion course. Now I'm very keen to get into the legal profession."

"I'm grateful to the OU for giving me the opportunities I have. Staying at a permanent address, in a house, is a complete change of lifestyle and I'm still getting used to it. Mind you, I've still got the horsebox..."

Picture: Skye Brackpool



Study and travel were a winning combination for Caroline

Students at the final frontier

OU PhD student Melusine Colwell enjoyed her very own space odyssey when she was selected to attend a two-month summer session at the International Space University (ISU).

Melusine, a physics specialist who works in the OU's Planetary and Space Sciences Research Institute, travelled to the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, venue for this year's session, as part of the ISU's annual intake to develop the future leaders of the space community. The curriculum included space science, space engineering, systems engineering, space and society and even space law.

Space business

Melusine joined students from Egypt, France and China to complete an assignment formulating a proposal for a satellite that would fit into the International Space Agency's weather satellite programme.

"We proposed a satellite which would use existing Global Positioning System (GPS) signals to detect the height of ocean waves, which would then lead to a service for shipping companies to enable them to avoid stormy seas," said Melusine. "I am very pleased to say that our team won the bid and we each received a small prize!"

"The whole experience broadened my perspective of space study," added Melusine, who is in the third year of her PhD researching the



Melusine (front row, right) with ISU classmates

dust flux monitor instrument on NASA's space probe Stardust. "I learned so much about law and business concerned with space and life sciences. It's all excellent background when thinking about future space missions and how we can use space for the good of humanity."

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TV tuition is a rough business

IT'S a big step from being out in front of a tutorial group to being out in front of millions of TV viewers, but for OU associate lecturer Hermione Cockburn it's all about getting her subject across.

Hermione, an earth scientist who tutors S216 *Environmental science* students in Edinburgh, is the new face on what is probably the Open University's most popular, and among its longest-running, TV series, *Rough Science*.

Throughout November and December BBC TWO viewers will be following Hermione's exploits as she and fellow scientists Mike Bullivant (who also revealed his talent as a TV presenter while working for the OU), Jonathan Hare and Ellen McCallie race, sweat and laugh their way through a series of science survival challenges among the spectacular peaks of Colorado's Rocky Mountains.

Filming the sixth series of the popular science show has been like a dream come true for Hermione, who shunned the ivory towers of academia in favour of a career communicating her passion for science to the rest of the world.

"I was doing post-doctoral research at the University of Melbourne," said Hermione, whose specialist subject is

geomorphology, the science of how our landscape has evolved. "I had fantastic facilities, a fully equipped lab and a beautiful office. But I was lonely. The most enjoyable side of my work was giving lectures and research presentations."

Deciding her strengths lay in communication and presentation, Hermione entered for a BBC talent competition, *Science on Screen*, in 2002, and won. Since then she has landed a number of media roles: presenting science on Radio 4, as specialist contributor on BBC Scotland's *Time Flyer* and currently as presenter of *Resource Review*

on Teachers TV. Her big break, though, came when she was chosen as a co-presenter alongside Adam Hart-Davis on the OU/BBC TWO series *What the Ancients Did for Us*. But *Rough Science*, she says, has been something

of a "Holy Grail" for her.

"*Rough Science* stands out as one of the best science series on TV. It is fun, it is a challenge. There is a tremendous focus on getting the science right.

"For me it represents exactly the kind of media work I want to do. It is making science accessible. I am not in it for the hair and make-up."

Which is just as well, as the latest *Rough Science*, filmed in a old

ore-processing mill at an altitude of 3,000 metres, leaves the team far from spotless – in fact their challenges include building a washing machine from junk, producing soap from local plants and even manufacturing their own deodorant.

But even body odour does nothing to dent the camaraderie of the *Rough Science* team, which is a part of the series' appeal. "There is no competition between us, even when the three of us were making different deodorants, we were very keen to play down the competitive element. We talk things through with the others, and if someone is filming the others who are listening may make suggestions," says Hermione.

The lack of competition is one example of why *Rough Science* stands out from the crowd – it is not contrived, said Hermione. Although the scientists do have an inkling of the challenges they face before filming starts, nothing is tested in advance. "Each programme is filmed over three days and they are absolutely packed," she said. "You

really are up late at night on Day Two, preparing for Day Three. Sometimes there is no time to try something out before it is filmed."

Academics like Hermione and Mike Bullivant, a former OU Chemistry Lecturer whose popular series *The Chemistry of Almost Everything* paved the way for shows like *Rough Science*, are a far cry from the traditional lecturer with blackboard. But *Rough Science*, which has had audience figures running into millions, proves it is possible to make popular, eye-catching TV with serious educational content. Wouldn't it be nice if the media stars of the future turned out to be academics?

The new series of *Rough Science* is currently on BBC TWO at 7pm on Wednesdays. Check listings for details.

Programmes for 2006

There are several other OU/BBC programmes to look out for in the New Year. *Does Alternative Medicine really work?* a new series on BBC TWO, presented by Kathy

Sykes, looks at some of the therapy on offer and the evidence for its effectiveness. Broadcasts are scheduled to start in January.

A new series of *Child of Our Time* begins on BBC ONE in January. What makes a happy family? Why does an individual child develop in a particular way? Presenter Sir Robert Winston tries to find answers to these questions as the millennium children turn six.

History Mysteries is a new series for daytime BBC TWO, investigating some of the unsolved puzzles of the past. It's due to be broadcast in January/February.

Unravelling their family secrets proves a painful but exhilarating journey for the individuals in *Family Ties*, scheduled to start on BBC FOUR in January.

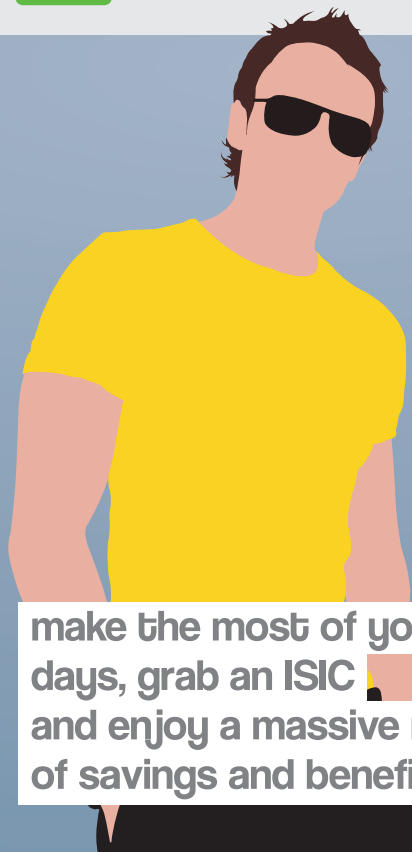
And a new series of the *Mark Steel Lectures*, featuring the comedian's irreverent take on distinguished figures of history, is due to start on BBC FOUR (with repeats on BBC TWO) in March next year.

Please check listings as scheduled start dates are liable to change at short notice.

Rough and ready: (l to r) Mike, Jonathan, Kate, Hermione and Ellen



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SUPPORT

Get the inside information

Choosing a course can be a leap in the dark – things don't always turn out to be what you expected. **Ormond Simpson** reveals how you can put some flesh on the bare bones of the official course description

THIS year I met a student who was taking both A214 *Understanding music* and TA225 *The technology of music*. As an accomplished musician she'd expected to enjoy A214 and to have to struggle with TA225. In fact she discovered that she didn't really like the amount of Bach in A214 which proved to be hard going, and she enjoyed the stuff about Midi and MP3 in TA225 more than she'd expected. "So Bach was worse than Bytes?" I enquired – she gave me a cold look.

It's worth taking a little time to try to ensure that the course you're thinking of taking is what you expect, and there are a number of sources of information.

● **Students' views**
Try the course views website www3.open.ac.uk/coursereviews/ where you'll find comments on courses from students who've taken the course you're interested in – real horse's mouth stuff... Ask your regional centre for a paper copy of the comments for your course if you don't have web access.

● **FirstClass Course Choice Fair**
Go to the 'Course Choice Fair' in FirstClass (OU Symbol > Campus Map > Info Centre > Advice > Course Choice Fair) where you'll find students

discussing course choice. Maybe you'll find someone who knows about your intended course – or maybe even someone who'd like to study it at the same time as you.

● **Taster packs**
Some courses have taster packs where you can get a feel for the content and maybe see what a TMA looks like. Check the faculty website or ask your regional centre.

● **Diagnostic quizzes**
Some courses have diagnostic quizzes which will help you decide whether you're ready for the course. Again check with your regional centre.

● **Course choice meetings**
There are local meetings aimed at course choice where you can discuss your choice with an adviser – contact your regional centre.

So there are several ways to check out your intended course – see what helps you the most. And maybe you'll find that for you Bach is better than Bytes...

Ormond Simpson is a Senior Lecturer in Institutional Research in the OU's Institute of Educational Technology

Choice is fine, but you may have some urgent questions before you commit yourself



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Seeking out Busby's Babes

Footballer Tony Whelan has written a book about a golden era in the history of Manchester United. He tells **Sheila Forman** how the OU helped him do it

It was a snowbound afternoon in 1958 when a British European Airways Elizabethan plane hit Munich airport's perimeter fence during its third attempt at take-off, resulting in the deaths of 21 people, among them eight members of the Manchester United 'Busby Babes,' flying home in triumph after their success in the quarter-finals of the European Cup.

Open University graduate Tony Whelan, a former professional footballer and now Manchester United Youth Team Manager, was just six years old at the time. He was totally unaware that nearly 50 years later his MA thesis would lead to the publication of his first book, *The Birth of the Babes*, based on Manchester United Football Club's visionary youth policy which was responsible for the success of this youthful, yet experienced, team.

Family of Man U

In his book Tony not only examines the roots of Matt Busby's

socialism and his approach to the care of his players, but illustrates the system of scouts, coaches and trainers that made Manchester United a prototype for the youth systems of today. The emergence of the Busby Babes was a social as much as a sporting phenomenon. Not only did these young players receive expert football training, they were treated as part of a family, to them Manchester United became a 'home away from home.'

Tony says he would never have had the confidence to write the book if it hadn't been for his OU study. On leaving school in 1968 at the age of 15 with no formal educational qualifications, Tony joined Manchester United Football Club as an apprentice professional footballer, having been spotted by their talent scout while playing for his local team. He signed full professional in December 1969 and went on to enjoy a 16-year

"I used to sneak books on the plane and hide them from my team mates"

football career with Manchester United, Manchester City, Rochdale and the North American Soccer League (NASL). During that time, he played with and against some of the greatest footballers of all time.

"Throughout my playing career I always had an active mind," said Tony. "My main passion then was history and I used to sneak books on the plane and hide them from my team mates because I wasn't sure how they'd react. Friends were always saying to me that I should read for a degree at university, but I didn't think this was an attainable goal for someone without traditional qualifications.

Degree

When he stopped playing football Tony embarked on a second career as an educational welfare officer for his local authority where he got his hands on an Open University prospectus.

"Given that I had a job, family commitments and also coached part-time the OU seemed ideal," he said. He claims that he only ever really intended to do one course, the arts foundation: "That first course gave me so much confidence, I took my books everywhere with me, my daughter's dance classes, son's cricket, the swimming baths, everywhere, I was hooked."

He secured his BA in 1994 after eight years of study. The Professional Football Association (PFA) has a fund that ex-players can tap into. They paid two-third of his fees and also paid for his books as well. "I was not on a big wage as a social worker, married with two kids growing up, money was tight so I'm extremely grateful to the PFA," said Tony.

In 1990 Manchester United Manager Brian Kidd invited Tony to coach at the club's Centre of Excellence. After coaching sessions Tony would sit in the bath with his coaching mate, who was also a former player. "He used to tell stories about what it used to be like when he was a young kid at the club and I was fascinated. One day I said to him, this is an important part of history, someone should write it down." His mate just happened to be Nobby Stiles, OBE and member of the victorious 1966 World Cup Team. "Nobby just said to me, 'Well write it down then', and I thought, why not?"

Saved for posterity

Tony did his research with Manchester Metropolitan University, as at that time the OU were only offering taught MAs. It wasn't until after his thesis was complete that Tony thought of turning it into a book. "I was keen on the idea to publish it mainly because some of the lads who died in Munich are mentioned in the book and there are a lot of relatives and fans who I know would be interested to read it. There is also a lot of history that is not written down about that period and hopefully I have bridged the gap a little bit," he said.

During his research Tony spoke to many people from the era, including: Bill Foulkes, Munich survivor and a legend of the club; Wilf McGuinness former manager/player and coach, and Albert Scanlon, another Munich survivor. He also writes about two of the most famous graduates of the system: Duncan Edwards, who died from his injuries 10 days after the crash; and Bobby Charlton who survived. "The fact that I'm a former Manchester United player made it easier for me to get to talk to people," he said.

Tony was astounded by some of the artefacts and memorabilia that the people he spoke with dug out. He was shown programmes from the 1968 cup final, letters from Sir Alf Ramsey, photographs that had never been published before. Thanks to Tony some of these

"I owe The Open University a debt of gratitude. It is such a unique experience and only the people who have done it understand"



Tony Whelan: "I always had an active mind"

© John Peters

items are now in the Manchester United Museum or are being properly catalogued and stored by their owners.

Tony believes he could never have done any of this without the OU. "I owe The Open University a debt of gratitude," he said. "It is such a unique experience and only the people who have done it understand. It gave me the opportunity to study areas that I would never have studied."

Proud

"People I sat next to at school would never believe that Whelan could get a degree, let alone an MA. I just wasn't ready at 15," he said.

Tony is currently Deputy Assistant Academy Manager at the Manchester United football Youth Academy. Many famous names have come up through the academy system during Tony's time there. Players such as David Beckham, Gary and Phil Neville, Nicky Butt, Paul Scholes, Ryan Giggs and Wes Brown to name but a few.

Talking of his OU graduation ceremony Tony says: "I don't know whether I was more proud to play for United and City first teams or to turn up at my OU graduation day at Preston, and pick up my degree with my wife and family, who had been so supportive through all those years of study."

The Birth of the Babes, Manchester United Youth Policy 1950-1957 by Tony Whelan, foreword by Sir Alex Ferguson, preface by Cliff Butler, published by Empire Publications, price £12.95, ISBN: 190174663.

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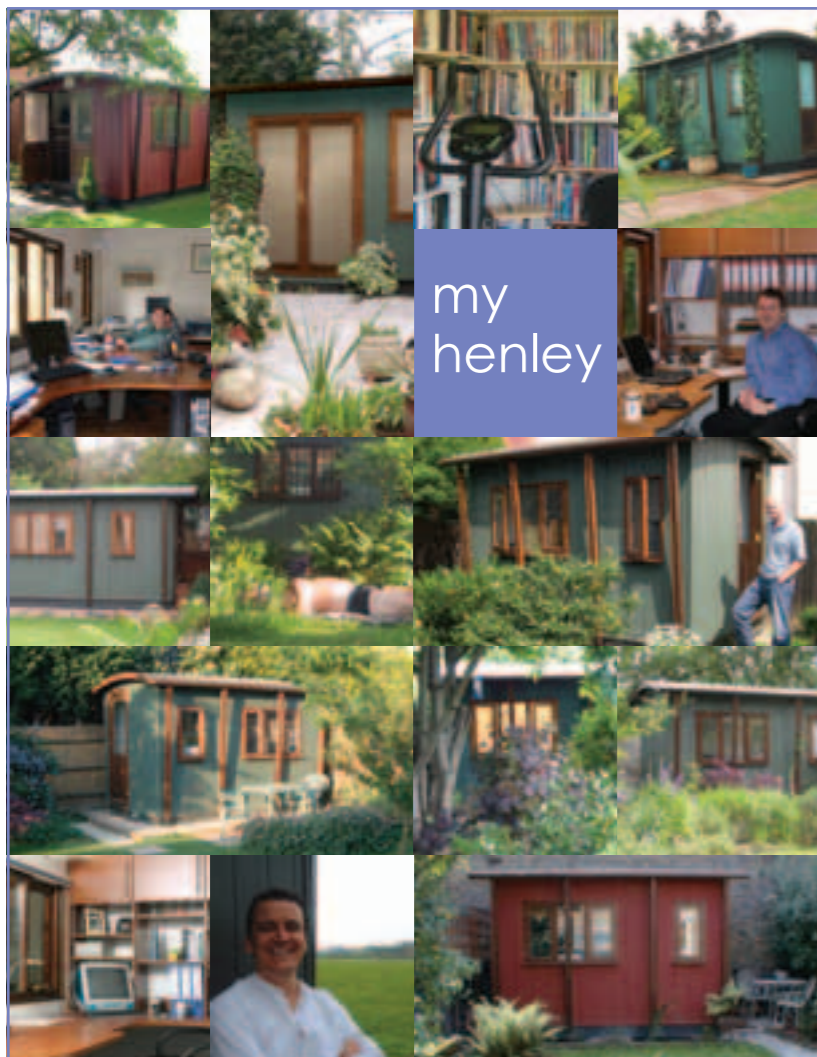
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Results of sesame's READER SURVEY

Thank you everyone for taking part in our reader survey – we received nearly 2,000 responses! This is your magazine and we are striving to make it as interesting and accessible as possible, so we need to know what you like (or don't)

What you like

FIRST, we asked how you use **sesame** and were happy to find that more than three-quarters (81 per cent) of those responding to the survey read most, or all, of it.

There are currently four issues of **sesame** each year, which seems to be the right frequency according to your responses. We gave the publication a massive overhaul at the end of last year and we're happy to hear that you find the magazine size more convenient and the new design more accessible and inviting.

The Letters and Courses sections are the most keenly read parts of the magazine – 85 per cent found Letters 'interesting' (3 on the survey scale) or 'very interesting' (4), 88 per cent said the same for Courses. Without your views, we cannot know what you are enjoying and what you think might need changing so please keep those letters coming! We also welcome stories about how you are getting on with your studies; your experiences are very helpful, not only for your fellow students, but for the lecturers and administrators who develop, teach and run the OU's courses.

Seventy-two per cent said they would like to see more contributions by students. We would be interested in hearing from students who think they could write a regular column for **sesame**. If you think you could write for the magazine, please send your details and examples of your writing to us at sesame@open.ac.uk, entitle your email 'Writers'.

Eighty-eight per cent said they would like comprehensive information about new courses. **sesame** is planning to extend its course coverage with a special 2006 'new courses' supplement, which we plan to mail out with the Spring 2006 issue, and which will list all new undergraduate and postgraduate courses. In the meantime, for an ongoing review of new courses, you can go to www.open.ac.uk/courses on the OU website; click on Search Courses & Qualifications, then scroll down until you get to the NEW button.

Could do better

Your survey responses indicate that the online service **sesame** eXtra (www.open.ac.uk/sesame/) has not been well publicised, although we are pleased to hear that many of those who were aware of it have been finding it useful. We have been reviewing the design and content of the website for a major relaunch in the New Year.

Please note that we have no intention of phasing out the core, paper version of **sesame** – **sesame** eXtra is simply a way for us to provide our readers with more flexibility and convenience. Electronic publishing does have well-recognised benefits, particularly in terms of immediacy, and we are hoping that **sesame** eXtra will increasingly be able to offer content and facilities that complement the printed version. Meanwhile, the survey has revealed considerable demand for

an electronic newsletter and we will be introducing this facility for those who want it in the New Year. Look out for details on FirstClass.

Use of the OU Life Screensaver is 'frequent' in under half of OU students who participated in the survey. New software, developed using feedback from Screensaver users, was introduced in November. The software eliminates two of the most frequently reported user frustrations: it will now be possible to click on the links provided on the pages; and you will be able to scroll manually through slides instead of having to wait for those you are interested in to roll by again. We hope this greater functionality and interactivity will see the number of users rise from the existing 23,000. If there are features that you would like to see in a future redevelopment of the Screensaver, please send your comments to Oulifescscreensaver@open.ac.uk or phone +44 (0)1908 653636.

Once again, many thanks to those who took the time to complete our survey. We take your views very seriously and we will be continuing to incorporate your recommendations into our ongoing programme to make **sesame** as interesting and useful as possible. The winner of the Survey prize draw is J.A. Bakker, who gets a three-night break for two in Cornwall courtesy of Travelsmith. And finally, here's a selection of your comments and suggestions.

What you said

"I really enjoy reading **sesame** – it makes me feel part of the OU family and, often, proud to be an OU student."

"Hearing about how becoming an OU student has dramatically changed people's lives [and] how people have overcome difficulties to further their studies... would help students realise that there are others out there in the same position."

"I would very much value practical information about studying – research methods, computer techniques", "tips for writing good essays", "pointers about how to make academic arguments" and "exam and revision advice". "Many students are put off reading the OU and study support books as their workload is already very heavy."

"I would like to hear students' reasons for choosing particular courses, how they got on" and "how they have used their new qualifications, either to advance their career or within a whole new career structure."

"It would be good also to read articles written by tutors about their backgrounds, the courses they teach and career opportunities they feel might be available afterwards."

"A good number of us are out in the community working away and **sesame** gives me the opportunity to see the OU from a wider perspective."

"It would be great to hear ideas about how students might meet up."

"I would greatly appreciate more information about local OU student social organisations, societies and events, both in the UK and overseas."

"As the OU prides itself on creating a global student community, it would be nice to see some of the global community reflected in **sesame**."

"I always find articles on current OU research activities and achievements very exciting."

"It would be great to have more articles from department heads involved in research

projects" and "details of how to get involved in projects."

"Perhaps it might be possible to have news from particular faculties – I like to feel up to date with what's going on in my 'area.'"

"I enjoy research news from other faculties."

"I would not like to see the magazine turn into a general topics magazine – the reason I enjoy it so much is it is exclusively related to the OU and there's no value in covering material that's already available elsewhere."

"I like to see the course results tables, including broad information on numbers doing courses, drop-out rates."

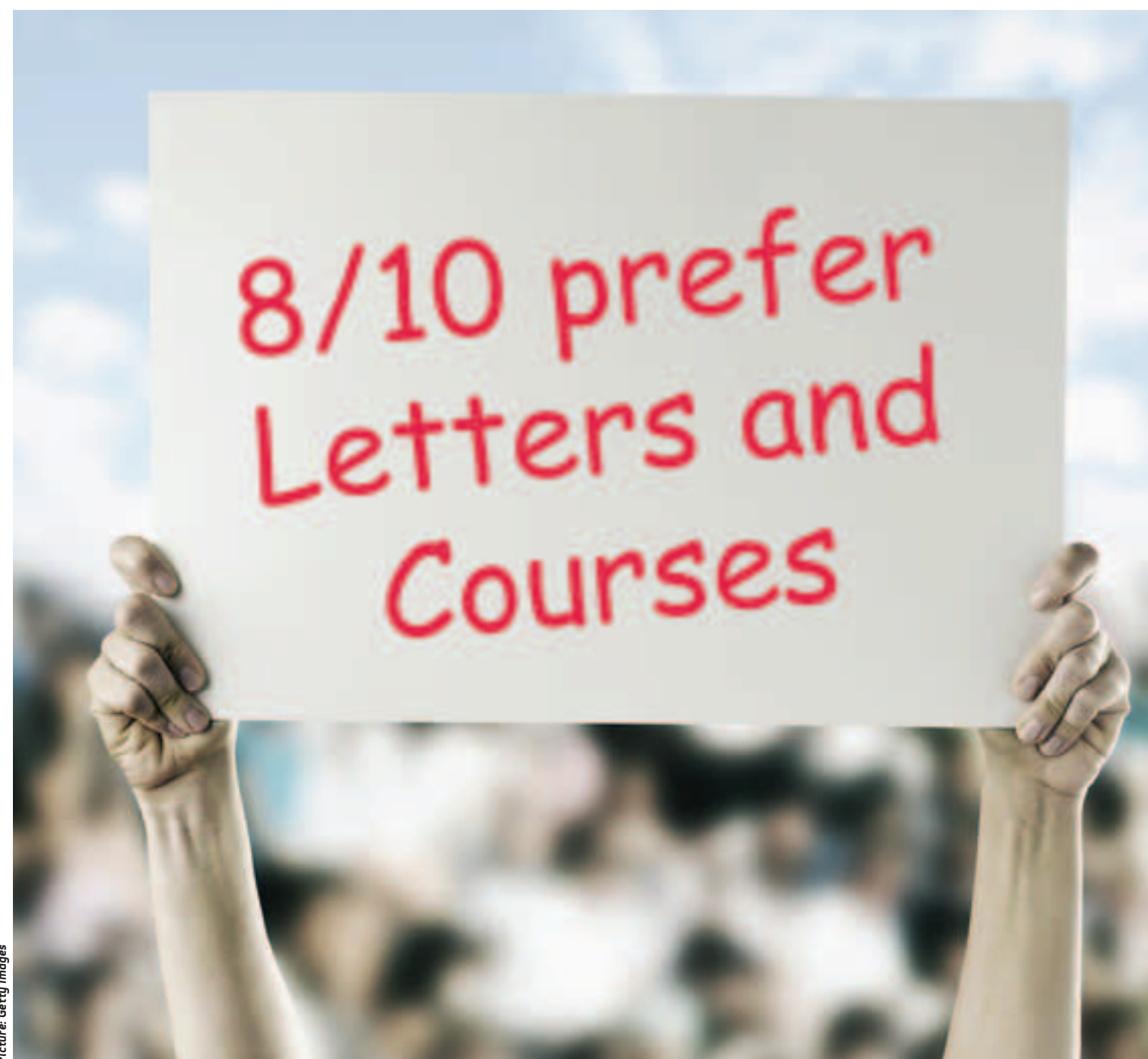
"Widening coverage to all courses and both

of the examination sessions" would be useful and perhaps "some intelligent analysis of the results would be more valuable than a simple listing."

"It'd be good to have more light entertainment" – "crosswords (non-cryptic!), quizzes, puzzles and competitions", "something comical" and "please bring back the cartoons". "It's great to have something to take the mind off one's studies!"

"I have to spend too much time in front of the computer as it is. It's a nice change to have the magazine to read, when and where I choose."

Report compiled by Graeme Ginsberg



Picture: Getty Images

More exam feedback

New web pages giving students more information on their examination performance have been developed. The university's Student Services department explains

STUDENTS on most courses will be able to get feedback on their performance in exams held at the end of this year. Ideally, the university would provide detailed individual feedback to all students on their examination. However, this is not feasible for an institution of the size of The Open University. So a system has been developed which makes use of the score information recorded by the examiners for each student's script, and presents it on a personalised Performance Profile web page, linked to their OU StudentHome page. The Profile should be available as soon as you are able to access your course result via StudentHome.

The system was piloted on a small number of courses from the July examination period, and will be implemented for most of the courses which have exams at the end of this year. It has not been possible to link all courses to the system this time round, but the university expects to be able to make it much more widely available within the next six months.

How does the system work?

You will need to have access to your OU StudentHome page at www.open.ac.uk/students. If there is a Performance Profile for you to view, a link will be displayed immediately below your course result. Clicking on the link will take you directly to the Performance Profile system.

Performance Profiles will only remain available for viewing for 28 days so if you wish to keep a copy, either print it off or save the page. The profiles are not available in hard copy, and are not available after the 28-day period has ended.

Which courses aren't included?

Level 2 and 3 language courses and modules within the Accountancy programme have particular features that have prevented them from being included in this initial implementation, but work is in hand to allow them to be included in future. The system is also not yet available for courses which have a project, end-of-course assessment or dissertation instead of an examination.

However, most of these courses already provide some form of feedback.

What information will be available?

The Examination and Assessment Board for each course is responsible for the content of the Performance Profile, so the amount of information available to students may vary from course to course. Each board has the option to provide its students with information about: their own performance in the examination as a whole; their own performance on each question (or group of questions) answered; and how performance at examination and question level varied across all students who sat the examination so that you can see how you did relative to everyone else. Boards may also provide a brief 'free-text' report on relevant aspects of the examination.

For more information about Performance Profiles, including some sample screenshots, visit the university's Assessment website at www.open.ac.uk/assessment

OU Angels

The OU Centre for Education in Medicine's research programmes are highly valued by the medical profession and the government, so much so that the Centre's work is now influencing the structure of health provision in the UK. **Peter Taylor-Whiffen** reports

DOCTORS' training is being completely revolutionised in a major shake-up of education in medicine, with the significant input of The Open University. The restructuring programme, Modernising Medical Careers, affects every NHS Trust and general practice involved in training in England and Wales, and will enable junior doctors to enter specialist training much earlier in their careers.

But involvement in the foundations for such monumental changes in medical education are nothing new for the OU's Centre for Education in Medicine, which is regularly commissioned by government to evaluate its ideas and help put its thinking into practice.

Its research programmes are so

highly valued that they will impact on the future of how overseas doctors work in Britain, prompt improved training in radiology and histopathology, and lead to more effective quality assurance of training for junior doctors.

"We're proud to make such a contribution," said team leader Professor Janet Grant, who is the OU's Professor of Education in Medicine.

OUCEM's research covers such wide-ranging aspects of postgraduate medical education as design, delivery, management, organisation, funding, workforce issues and quality assurance. It produces materials and publications to support medical teachers, doctors in training and managers in work and training environments.



£4 million to make room for Moodle

The university has embarked on a £4million programme to develop its VLE – Virtual Learning Environment. OU students are accessing many learning materials online and are increasingly using the web for activities such as registering for courses, communicating with the university and with each other, submitting assignments and checking their exam results.

The new system should be fully operational for February 2007 courses, and will see the largest use of the Open Source software package Moodle in the world. Moodle is a freely available course management system used by educators to create online learning communities. At present, you might start off at StudentHome, then go into FirstClass to take part in a discussion, exit to the Library's web pages to search for a book and later submit an assignment using OpenMark. You could end up using 20 or 30 different systems without knowing it during the course of your studies.

Seamless virtual environment

The VLE Programme will link all these together in a single, seamless interface and add new features, such as online interactive calendars. Everyone likes to work in different ways, so the aim is to allow

students to customise their OU home pages to provide the learning tools most useful to them.

The three-year VLE Programme will have an impact on almost every aspect of the university's business, from planning how new courses will be delivered online to producing e-portfolios of students' work. Niall Sclater, the Programme Director, said:

"The virtual learning environment is increasingly important to OU students who are finding the internet invaluable for learning, communication, research and almost every other aspect of their studies. We have embarked on a major programme to give students the best possible online learning experience."

Advantage

Dean Taylor, the programme manager of the OU's VLE, added: "We see the development of Moodle applications, along with involvement of the Moodle Open Source community, as giving our students a great advantage in e-learning. Plus, the innovations added by the OU will be available to the entire Moodle community. It's a two-way creative street."

For more information see <http://moodle.org/>

Diverse routes to Higher Education

REFUGEES and asylum seekers are among black and ethnic minority groups targeted by a new OU-led information pack and website designed to attract more students to higher education in Scotland.

The initiatives are designed to alert adults from a diversity of ethnic backgrounds to the possibilities of study, through information which will include an overview in their first language.

The pack will complement the work of the Scottish Refugee Council, New Roots Scotland (which focuses on work placement for refugees and asylum seekers) and initiatives such as the Scottish Executive's Fresh Talent policy to encourage the integration of asylum seekers and refugees in Scotland through education, employment, enterprise and training.

Support

The initiatives, which will be aimed at black and minority ethnic people

who have settled in Scotland, as well as new migrants, are known formally as the Diverse Routes To Higher Education Project. The pack will give generic information about "what Higher Education can do for you" including financial support, credit transfer, professional development, and routes into higher education and ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) courses.

"After all, we don't want refugee teachers cleaning tables at McDonald's"

The pack and website will be disseminated in spring 2006 through a series of workshops/day schools for those who work with minority ethnic groups and potential students. "This is an OU pack and an OU website, but it has involved a large amount of collaboration with other educational institutions and support agencies within the regional forums," said Dr Lindsay Hewitt, Widening Participation Co-ordinator for the OU in Scotland, who will officially launch the initiatives early next year.

"After all, we don't want refugee teachers cleaning tables at McDonald's."

FROM MINOR TO MAJOR EDUCATION

From ex-mining areas to Muslim communities the OU's Wider Participation Projects have made a hugely positive difference to people's lives in Yorkshire, **Peter Taylor-Whiffen** reports

If your dad was a miner, and his dad was a miner, and his dad was a miner, higher education doesn't tend to loom large in your thoughts. You might reasonably expect to have your career pretty much mapped out.

However, the pre-emptive closure of Britain's coalmines and the downturn of its other once proud industries forced many people to do what had seemed less than a generation ago to be unthinkable – find another way to earn a living.

In many cases this has meant retraining – and many have turned their bitter experience into an opportunity to learn something new, thanks to The Open University.

One of the challenges of the OU's Widening Participation Projects is convincing prospective students of the value of an academic education they never thought they'd need. But Nick Berry, regional director of a team running a huge variety of initiatives across Yorkshire, says the message is getting through.

"Widening participation is a long-term project because some of the work we're doing is about changing mindsets," he said. "In some parts of this region lads grew up expecting to go down the pit, because that's what their father and grandfather did. Now the pits are gone, but because they were always there, people need a bit of time to see the alternatives."

Opportunities

And there are opportunities for retraining and rebuilding lives are there – and the OU is showing the way.

"There used to be a lot of work in Yorkshire that didn't require higher education," said Rebecca Moore, who is employed by the OU to work alongside other higher education institutions in West Yorkshire, under the government's Aimhigher initiative. "In this area of the county only about 20 per cent of school pupils currently progress to higher education. It's not that much lower than the national average, but it is lower, and there are pockets, such as Leeds, Bradford and Wakefield, where it's lower still. Historically people didn't go to university because they simply didn't need to."

But in a world where higher education is valued more highly by employers than ever before, academic achievement, or at least the application to it, is increasingly the key to finding a decent job. And because most people simply do not think of "jobs for life", such qualifications are a valuable tool to help those in the job market to climb ever higher up the ladder.

Through Aimhigher and the OU's Widening Participation Project, Rebecca gives presentations and works one-to-one to show prospective learners from 13-30 how they could get into higher education and which courses and ways of learning would be right for them.

"In this area of the country only about 20 per cent of school pupils currently progress to higher education"

"I work with a group of people from HE institutions across the region collaborating to provide information and guidance about the full range of HE opportunities available," said Rebecca. "We don't just talk to prospective students, but also to anyone helping them plan their future – such as school staff careers advisors, employers."

Her advice often comes as a revelation, even to HE and careers advisers. "The OU is often not seen as a local option," she said. "Prospective students and those advising them have a view of it as a distance learning option but don't realise they can have tutorials at local colleges and meet fellow students who are local. We're changing that."

And part of her remit is impartiality – which means there are instances where she is trying to get someone into HE, but not necessarily through the OU. "All the Aimhigher staff, although we come from our own HE institutions, give impartial advice and talk to each individual student about the HE option that is best for them. When it seems it would suit them better to go to a bricks and mortar university, I'll tell them that – but I make sure the OU is presented equally alongside all the other options."

Richard Kemp has the same role in South Yorkshire. "We represent HE rather than just the OU, giving general and specific advice and ensuring those who advise prospective students are giving them up-to-date information," he said.

"We do this with information events, full-day events, workshops and one-to-one meetings which cover subjects including HE finance and application procedures. The project is for learners aged 13 to 30 but most of it is aimed at those 19-plus.

"We're working towards a change of mindset. This region has a very low history of progression to higher education. Parents can be reluctant to encourage their children in this direction and students can be reluctant to travel."

Promoting the message

He said promoting the message with other HE providers worked well for the OU. "We have good links with the other institutions involved in HE in this area – Sheffield University, Sheffield Hallam University, Doncaster College, Rotherham College of Art and Technology and the local careers service. Sheffield University wrote us a brochure (Pathways to Higher Education for Adult Learners)."

In North Yorkshire, the challenge is helping people to access higher education in one of the country's most rural areas. "This is England's



In North Yorkshire the OU, along with other educational institutions, is helping people living in rural areas to access higher education

largest county and more than 90 per cent is sparsely populated," said Jane Pinner, who also works with Aimhigher to provide impartial advice for adult learners. "Somebody may be very keen to study a course at a college, but in rural areas it can be hard to find enough people to make a course viable, so there is often isn't the choice. That's where the OU offers an alternative."

Jane chairs Scarborough IAG (Information, Advice and Guidance) Network and works with similar bodies across the country to promote learning opportunities and share information. Organisations such as education and training providers, libraries, the voluntary and business sectors, and Connexions are represented. "It's a two-way process," she said. "We make sure that they're getting up-to-date information, but I'm also looking at existing programmes to see if OU courses can plug into them, as a form of progression."

And it's not just schoolchildren and those who have had to rethink their careers that the OU is helping in Yorkshire. In Halifax, Ann Milne has forged links with one of the local initiatives promoted by the government's SureStart scheme.

This project has opened up the possibility of OU study to parents

and SureStart workers within a predominantly Muslim area of Halifax. "I refer parents and other interested Asian learners to OU study as part of the university's Understanding and Increasing

Diversity Project," she said. "Most women in these communities historically have had to leave school to marry and have children, but they are very keen to study, and SureStart is able to

fund them."

Some of the new students are so enthusiastic about their new-found learning possibilities that they are now promoting the OU. As you'd expect from any widening participation projects, there are targets for raising the number of people entering higher education. For example, Aimhigher's goal, set in 2004, was to increase participation in higher education by five per cent over the next five years.

Yorkshire is only one area where the OU is helping to bring more people into higher education. The OU's widening participation programme is currently running across the UK in places such as Belfast, Blackburn, Nottingham, the east end of London, Stockton-on-Tees and Scotland.

"In rural areas it can be hard to find enough people to make a course viable"

A fly on the wall

The Open University is working with the BBC on Sir David Attenborough's current TV series, *Life in the Undergrowth*. **John Windell** talks to Sir David about filming the creepy crawlies that hold together the web of life



Damsel fly

Picture: Alamy

IF HUMAN beings were suddenly wiped off the Earth – well, the Earth could carry on very nicely without us, thank you. Probably without the mammals too. It's the invertebrates (literally, the creatures without backbones) that keep things ticking over.

"If you lost ants and millipedes and earthworms, the ecosystems would collapse before you knew where you were," explained Sir David Attenborough, whose new series uncovers the hidden lives of these little creatures which too often inspire fear and revulsion in us.

"They pollinate the flowers, they provide food for a great number of vertebrates (reptiles and mammals and so on), they fertilise the soil, they turn over the soil, they get rid of dung, they are the basic foundations," said Sir David.

Over the last 20 years Sir David has made TV series about birds, mammals, the oceans, plants, fossils and man. So why has it taken so long to get round to the invertebrates? Because, he says, they are hard to film.

Fascinating sights

"If you are trying to get any depth of focus on, say, a spider, you may have to throw so much light on it that you fry the poor thing. You certainly don't allow it to behave in a normal fashion. But new optical gear enables us to film them better than we've ever done before."

At the end of each of the series' five programmes, there is a 10-minute section, co-produced by the OU, which explains how some of the amazing images were captured.

Emerging butterflies, courting damsel flies, ants milking aphids and what earwigs get up to at night, are just a few of the fascinating sights uncovered by the hi-tech cameras.

And it's fascination that is the key to Sir David's extraordinarily successful approach to making wildlife programmes over the last 50 years. "The reason I make natural history programmes is because I am fascinated by the natural world. I think for a lot of people one of the great pleasures of being alive is trying to find out about the natural world and understanding the way it works," he said.

Subtle approach

It's also the key to Sir David's subtle approach to conveying environmental messages to the viewer. "My own view is that it would be a disaster if every natural history programme was a conservation programme. Of course there must be, and there are, programmes about ecology and about climate change and the loss of species in general. But if they were all like that, you would be throwing out the baby with the bath water.

"I'm not grinding an axe, I'm doing it because I think it is one of the great pleasures in life. Nobody is going to save whales unless they know what whales are and why they are amazing."

Life in the Undergrowth is a five-part series which was due to start on BBC ONE at 7.30pm on 23 November. Check listings for details.

Gifts of the Greeks

If you haven't chosen your course for next year, it's still not too late. In the next three pages **sesame** looks at a selection of new courses coming on stream in 2006, starting with the classical world

THE ACHIEVEMENTS of the Romans and the Ancient Greeks continue to have an enormous influence in the modern world – a fact evidenced in a fascinating new OU course.

A219 *Exploring the classical world* covers topics as varied as poetry, drama, history writing, art, architecture, archaeology, inscriptions and philosophy to build a picture of what made particular places and times culturally distinctive.

After a broad introduction to the periods, the four main blocks of study begin with Homer and the Greek Dark Age, which draws from the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* to build up a picture of Homeric society.

Students then move on to Classical Athens, looking at the city in the fifth century BCE through four sources: Aeschylus' tragedy *The Persians*, arts and buildings on the Acropolis, oratory and Aristophanes' comedy *Lysistrata*.

The second half of the course focuses on the Roman Republic, beginning with the physical remains of Greek colonisation of southern Italy, before exploring the power and politics of Rome and how literature contributed to a distinctive Roman culture.

The final block explores Rome's social history – what daily and family life was like, as seen through the letters of Pliny the Younger, Cicero and Seneca.

For further details visit www.open.ac.uk/courses and key in A219.



NEW CORE COURSE FOR ICT FOUNDATION DEGREE

HOW does an email reach the other side of the world in seconds? How are we able to access the internet through a wireless computer? How are we able to see news events on television as they happen? And where will this technology take us next?

These are the themes of a new 30-point course about the nature and development of ICT in our homes, work and public places. T175 *Networked living: exploring information and communication technologies* looks at living in a networked world, how ICT affects us and how we can add our voices to the debate about its future.

"Society has moved from computing into networking, and this course reflects that,"

said Karen Kear, a lecturer in the OU's ICT department. "The course looks at how such communication works, and at how it affects our lives – the health service, road charging, shopping. The technical and social issues of networking are equally relevant to T175."

T175, which offers a choice of February and October start dates, replaces the hugely popular T171 *You, your computer and the net*. Like its predecessor, it will become the foundation course for those wanting to take a degree in ICT but, unlike T171, will not be taught entirely online.

"T171 had been around for quite a while and was introduced when the internet was less familiar, and people wanted to learn

everything about it," said Karen. "T175 takes a broader view of the technology and includes less of the historical element. There's a lot of computer-based work and some of the teaching is via a website, but T175 is not principally an online course the way T171 was."

For more details visit <http://T175.open.ac.uk/> and www.open.ac.uk/courses/

T175 is a core course in the OU's new foundation degree in Information and Communication Technologies. The degree combines academic, practical and professional components, and is designed to meet the needs of employers and industry. For more information see <http://ict.open.ac.uk/courses>

Why religion can't be left to the religious



An elaborate Hindu temple top in Bangalore, India

A COURSE focusing on six major faiths should also give students a whole new perspective on world affairs.

A217 *Introducing religions* takes learners through some of the beliefs and practices of Buddhism, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Sikhism and Christianity – and how and why religion is so often entangled with politics.

It is not designed to help students 'do' religion more effectively or become more, or less, spiritual. "We neither ridicule religion nor promote it," says Course Chair Dr Marian Bowman, adding that "this is an academic course which aims at better understanding and knowledge of the ways in which religions hang together".

A217 students will learn such things as why Sunni and Sh'ia Muslims have such different views about how their faith should be practised; the fundamental beliefs of Sikhism; why some Jewish people wear distinctive clothes and hairstyles while others do not; the difference between Hinduism and Buddhism; and why Christianity has so many apparently diverse denominations. "It offers students the equipment for living life in a plural society. It gives them a broad understanding of how, say, a Hindu sees the world, or a Sikh," says Marion.

"Religions don't exist in neat little boxes. There are a lot of fuzzy boundaries. For example, the story of Adam and Eve and the Garden of Eden features in Christianity, Judaism and Islam but it's interpreted in three different ways. I must say that for obvious reasons I particularly like the Muslim version, where it's Adam who gets tempted!"

The course is also of professional use to a wide range of people including teachers, health professionals, social workers, personnel workers, those in the food and catering industry – in fact anyone dealing with the public in today's multireligious environment.

Marion says: "We ask only that students bring an open and enquiring mind to their study. They do not need to 'be religious'. But because many people will have a view of some sort already, this course is also useful in giving students an ability to understand certain beliefs even if they don't agree with them – which is a very useful life skill."

"Religions don't exist in neat little boxes. There are a lot of fuzzy boundaries"

Public is no longer a dirty word

You don't have to have a Masters in Business Administration to get on. Many managers are now seeking a qualification tailored to the public sector. The OU Business School's Masters in Public Administration aims to enhance the skills of those working in the public and 'third' sectors. By **Rob Paton**

I NTERESTING things – albeit confusing, contradictory and always controversial – are happening to our public services. Sometimes it is due to the introduction of new technologies and processes; sometimes it is through an accumulation of gradual improvements; often it is by innovation and entrepreneurial challenges from outside the established systems or at their peripheries; but change is happening. Britain may be the most centralised state in Western Europe, but both government and opposition are finally recognising (at least on good days) that the minister cannot decide everything. Even the government's steamy love affair with the private sector shows signs of turning into something more restrained and discerning. Heavens, more public money is being spent!

New realism

Of course, marvellous things were being achieved in places, even during the worst years – just as awful patches of stasis, demoralisation and under-funding remain. But I detect a new air of confident realism among public and third-sector managers. They are neither bemoaning their fate, nor mindlessly echoing New Labour policy-speak. Something has shifted. The shape of a new settlement is emerging through the fog: it is based on new service systems that are more pluralistic and adaptive, where necessary elements of hierarchy are contained within a web of other strong connections – to

clients, to communities, to other services; where expectations are higher, with a greater willingness to challenge rather than excuse low standards (either of service or public behaviour); where planning processes and decisions are more permeable and distributed.

You can make a difference

The work of public and third sector managers is more demanding than ever – no wonder many of them are returning to learning. Leading universities – Warwick, Nottingham and The Open University among them – have been developing new Master in Public

Administration programmes around leadership and enterprise for public and community purposes. Clear and creative thinking – to read the trends, and to acknowledge, contain and weave together the conflicting pressures – is at a premium. But it is possible to make a difference. Optimism and a commitment to public service are no longer character defects. Your country does need you. And you don't have to have a Master in Business Administration to get on. 'Public' is OK again.

Rob Paton is Professor of Social Enterprise in the Open University Business School. He is currently leading development of the OU's new Master in Public Administration programme. For further details visit www.open.ac.uk/oubs and click on Courses and Qualifications.

"Optimism and a commitment to public services are no longer character defects. Your country does need you"

NEW BUSINESS STUDIES CERTIFICATE IS A STEP UP THE LADDER

A NEW qualification and an introductory course at undergraduate level are on offer from the OU Business School. The Certificate in Business Studies, and its core course, B120 *An introduction to Business Studies*, are extensions of the successful BABS (BA in Business Studies) programme. B120 starts in November but students can study for the Certificate from February.

It comes in response to calls from students for a more relevant introduction to their BABS studies than the current broadly based level 1 courses, and for the inclusion of motivational 'way-marker' awards en route to achieving a full degree. Some students are expected to aim just for the Certificate, which will take between 12 months and two years to complete.

The six-month *An introduction to*

Business Studies makes up half of the Certificate in Business Studies and forms its compulsory element. It introduces students to the study of business organisations and the way they function, starting with the question 'What is a business?'

Clear introduction

From there they will go on to explore the diverse nature of business organisations and activity; examine the importance of structure, culture and the business environment to organisations; and reflect on the influence of ethics and enterprise on business behaviour. The course also provides a clear, straightforward introduction to each of three key functional areas of business – human resources; accounting and finance; and marketing; it

also helps to improve learning skills in readiness for the next stage in a qualification and career.

The optional half of the Certificate will help students address any gaps in their business knowledge or skills. Students can choose from a range of courses already offered by the OU in a variety of business-related topics such as financial management, using information and communications technologies and applying mathematical thinking. While the combination of core and optional courses provides the perfect platform for further OU study – for instance students can use their study credits towards a BA in Business Studies – the achievement of an OU Certificate in Business Studies on its own will provide a firm foothold on the next rung in anyone's career ladder.

Those who can, tutor

You don't need to be a university lecturer or a highly experienced teacher to become an Open University tutor. If you have the potential, the OU will train you. By **Yvonne Cook**

WHAT we are looking for is an appreciation of how adults learn," says Angela Schofield, director of the OU's East of England region, whose responsibilities include supporting the tutors on her patch. "Someone who is prepared to impart their expertise to others and has the enthusiasm to keep people interested in their subject."

There are between 7,500 and 8,000 people working as Open University tutors (officially known as Associate Lecturers), mainly in the UK and Ireland but also further afield. Tutors' backgrounds are many and varied, and they include a fair number of former OU students.

Day job

Some carry out OU teaching in addition to their 'day job' as lecturers at other universities. In the more vocational subjects, such as law, business, nursing and social work, tutors are liable to be

As well as marking TMAs, tutors must be ready to deal with students' queries



"What attracts many tutors is the flexibility of the work"

practising professionals in these fields. A minority make a full-time living as OU tutors, teaching several courses simultaneously.

What attracts many tutors is the flexibility of the work. Retired people and those with family commitments, as well as those with full-time jobs, find teaching with The Open University fits very nicely around the rest of their lives. Workload varies from course to course; but the bulk of a tutor's activity will be marking students' TMAs and conducting tutorials. And between times, they have to deal with students' queries.

The university provides tutors with a thorough induction into its methods. "They need the right sort of academic or professional background for the course they want to teach – how high a

qualification depends on the level of the course. The minimum would be a degree or equivalent professional qualification," said Angela.

"Even if they have taught somewhere else, teaching at the OU is not quite like teaching anywhere else. We take them from square one and tell them what they need to know for the type of tuition they are going to do, whether it is online or face-to-face."

Tutor mentors

"They also have to learn how to support students who come from very diverse backgrounds. We don't expect the tutor to resolve every student problem – just to be aware when there is a problem and, if they can't deal with it, to let us know at the centre and we will sort it out."

"Every new tutor has a mentor, who is very often an experienced tutor on the same course, for the whole of their first year. And the OU provides a whole lot of resources to help tutors with ideas for teaching."

Many OU tutors find that they benefit from contact with such a broad range of students. But there are other rewards too, as Angela points out. "People come to us to gain teaching experience and training. Lots of Associate Lecturers tell us the staff training they got from the OU was better than they got anywhere else."

"Another of the rewards is being part of The Open University academic community, being able to engage in debate, not only with students, but with fellow tutors. Tutors also gain a lot of IT skills and access to electronic conferencing facilities."

For many tutors, though, the greatest rewards are intangible, she said. "For me, the highlight was having students who really want to learn. If you enjoy your subject and want to impart it, that's wonderful!"

The Open University is always keen to hear from people who are interested in becoming a tutor. You need to apply to teach on a particular course. Currently there is a particular need for tutors in law and youth work. To find out more about teaching with the OU and current vacancies, visit www.open.ac.uk/employment/associate-lecturers

"Lots of ALs tell us that the staff training they got from the OU was better than they got anywhere else"

CASE STUDIES

Eulina Clairmont has a sociology degree from Goldsmith's College, but it was while studying international development with The Open University that she decided to make the switch to being an OU tutor. She says it's a move any student who enjoyed their OU course should consider.

"I felt I could do the job because I had a substantial background knowledge of the subject and prior understanding of the OU," said Eulina, who teaches DD100 *An Introduction to the social sciences: understanding social change* to a group of 15 students in her home town, London.

"I thought that DD100 would be enjoyable to teach as it analyses a broad range of cultural issues. Social sciences are about everyday life, but it gives a whole new perspective to analyse it."

"Tutors are the key people in students' lives and act as their support. The course I teach has much face-to-face contact and it is interesting to talk to such a wide range of students."

"You can get involved in heated topical debates. All tutor groups have a diverse range of students – people from different religious and cultural backgrounds, from refuse collectors to top lawyers – but in the tutor group all are on a level playing field."

"Becoming an AL means I combine a social life, everyday office life and teaching. This is very valuable on a cv, as it shows significant time management skills and motivation."

"Just as the ALs themselves support their students, The Open University supports its ALs, giving them highly experienced senior ALs as mentors and many regional centres spaced across the UK which they can visit for advice."

"You don't need to be a trained teacher, I only had some informal teaching experience. The OU is more interested in how you are going to relate to the group: can you equip them to learn independently, not just stand up and lecture them?"

"Any student who enjoys the experience of doing an OU course should consider becoming an AL, as the job is much easier when you know at first hand what it's like being a student. If you enjoyed your time with the OU, you can help other students. You meet really nice people, which gives you a new perspective, it's good to get away from the office... and you get paid!"

"I think I must be the northernmost tutor in The Open University," says Brian Joyce, who tutors from his home in Nokia in Finland, on the same latitude as Iceland and Siberia.

The midwinter daylight lasts only three hours and temperatures drop below minus 20 degrees in this small town 180 kilometres north of Helsinki, but Brian could be basking in the Bahamas for all that his students can tell. Because the course he teaches, H802 *Applications of information technology in open and distance education*, is part of the Masters programme in Online and Distance Education and is totally online. His class is scattered across the globe: in China, Peru, Ireland, North Africa, the UK; none currently in Finland. He has calculated that to visit them all he would have to travel more than 90,000 kilometres.

Brian became a tutor after being a student on H802 in its first year of presentation in 1997/98. The role fits in well around his working life running a business teaching English communications to Finnish companies.

"I say 'my shoe size is 42, but my footprint is global,'" says Brian, who won an OU Teaching Award for excellence in teaching in April. The award citation praised his ability to create dynamic group engagement and to respond to his students' diverse needs. His students are mostly busy professionals who are involved in teaching and learning themselves – he has taught OU doctors and a professor – and want to be able to use their skills online.

CASE STUDY

Joce Rakower-Butelet – Service Manager, Business Process Solutions Engineer

Why did you choose IT?

I had worked full-time for 22 years within the city producing reports and large documents. I started studying French with the OU because I needed some educational evidence that I knew how to speak and write French (I am French and fluent). I then started studying maths and IT courses because they interested me. I never expected an upper second degree but after four years I was there!

It wasn't possible to be redeployed within my existing company and at 40-something I landed a graduate position with LogicaCMG in the outsourcing department. The pay was less than I was used to, but I was promised promotion. The company does a lot of project work, so staff tend to move about a lot; during the first 18 months I worked on development projects, carried out some security work, then became a desktop engineer and after a promotion was involved in software development.

Current Job?

I was one of three people who made up a new team which now comprises 17 people. Our team develops software solutions for any repetitive activity. I manage the team, sort out problems, identify functional specifications for others to write technical code, attend meetings, visit customers and evaluate their needs. I don't have a desk as I work in whichever office I happen to be in or at home. My working day is from 8am–1pm then 5pm–8pm.

Best and worst parts of your job?

Best – seeing a new system for a client work. A recent example is where staff now get a lunch hour where previously they had no real break and had to work late. Humour is key and I work with some very bright people in a culture where you are encouraged to voice your opinion. I seldom have a bad day.

Worst – the growing pains of the company when there were mergers followed by redundancies.

What skills do you use?

Technical skills in software design; I need to understand this to get others to write code. Project management skills are also necessary because a lot of IT work is project-based. The main skill I use is advanced negotiation techniques. Learning to manage people takes time, IT people tend to be fairly independent-minded. The ability to fit in also helps.

World wide web of opportunities

Information technology isn't one career, but many. Management and people skills may be as important as technical know-how

INFORMATION technology is a dynamic and forward-looking industry with a wide range of jobs, which can be divided between those in IT companies and those in end-user organisations. The following categorisation of activities and occupations is taken from material produced by the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services and Graduate Prospects (see the Prospects website in the Useful Links section below).

Jobs in IT Services include IT consultants, systems analysts, network engineers, software trainers; software product development jobs include software engineers, technical authors; IT sales and marketing jobs cover sales, technical, marketing executives; in-house IT jobs include programmers, systems analysts, database administrators, helpdesk support, software trainers.

Entry routes

Some employers specify a particular IT degree, especially for highly technical jobs; others require a numerate degree like mathematics, engineering, or science. Many have no preference for degree discipline and will train motivated students for roles as diverse as software development, consultancy, sales and marketing. Check company websites to identify individual requirements. There are a number of postgraduate IT conversion courses for those with degrees in other disciplines. It is advisable to research carefully the area in which you are interested before embarking on a course. The OU offers a wide range of IT and computing courses, from those which update your IT skills to much more specialist postgraduate courses. Find out more at www.open.ac.uk/courses

Computing experience of any kind is useful. If, for example, you want to get into web design you may already have designed web pages, so a portfolio of work would be an asset.

Which is the role for you?

Don't be too set on a job title as these vary between companies. Talk to people already employed in the field; read job adverts in the vacancy columns of newspapers and specialist journals; send for job descriptions to broaden your understanding. Register for the OU Career Links scheme if you are an OU student, and would like to be matched with someone who is already in an IT role who will talk to you about their experiences and knowledge of the industry. Go to www.open.ac.uk/careers and look in the A-Z for Career Links.

In such a fast-paced industry employers are looking for staff who understand the business environment and have a passion for IT. Early responsibility is the norm so evidence that you are self-reliant and have the ability to communicate complex issues is important. Any experience that demonstrates you have these skills, even from a different environment, will be an advantage.

As this is a knowledge industry, you can expect to completely renew your expertise every three years, if you want promotion – so keeping up-to-date is essential.

What's current?

The IT industry is now becoming more established and more formalised. For example the British Computer Society offers Chartered Engineer status for those

with proven experience. Technical producers within the sector such as Cisco, Microsoft Oracle and Sun offer courses, some of which are presented in partnership with universities, to develop competence in their products.

Security is an issue of increasing importance as more business is conducted online. This involves everything from individual users of online payment facilities through to top secret government records. As systems become more sophisticated, so do those attempting to compromise them, and an increasing amount of resource is being dedicated to reducing the success of hackers.

As information technology and computing are truly global, you could be employed anywhere. There is a growing trend towards 'offshoring', where work is being outsourced internationally, particularly to India. Management of this work is carried out mainly by staff in the UK; this implies a demand for staff with the skills to be able to manage teams at great distances.

To keep up to date, read *VNU Network* www.vnunet.com for current issues and vacancies and *Computer Weekly* www.cw360.com for industry news.

Useful links

- Careers Advisory Service website – www.open.ac.uk/careers
- Graduate Prospects – (www.prospects.ac.uk) includes a wide range of information on the IT industry, specific job roles, vacancies and postgraduate courses.
- British Computer Society – www.bcs.org.uk, includes comprehensive careers resources.
- Institution of Analysts and Programmers – www.iap.org.uk
- E-skills UK Ltd – www.e-skills.com
- Institute of IT Training (IITT) – www.iitt.org.uk/
- Irish Software Association – www.software.ie
- Irish Computer Society – www.ics.ie



CASE STUDY

Simon Hargrave – Information and Data Manager

What has been your career path to date?

I left school with minimal qualifications and spent five years doing a succession of jobs, like being a kitchen porter. I read that there was demand for computer programmers so I decided on that. A careers adviser said I'd need a qualification so I did an HND. I couldn't get a job because employers wanted experience so did some temping for a year and then got a permanent job in technical support. After a year I became an Analyst/Programmer for several companies over a period of eight years. I then worked as a Business Analyst for five years.

Current Job?

I now work for an adult education college, managing the database and producing management information. Our main database contains information on

students, courses, enrolments and staff. My duties include ensuring that data is accurate and that it works. I generate reports on college performance and the accuracy of the data.

In adult education we have to show we are achieving targets. As the person responsible for generating the data to do this, I have a lot of pressure. I manage a team and a lot of my time is spent sharing the workload; teamwork is crucial.

What skills do you use the most?

Good organisational skills; the ability to analyse user requirements and project manage the implementation of any solutions; technical knowledge, although I'd argue that's less important. You need to communicate with other people to understand their requirements and have good negotiation skills.

Best and worst parts of the job?

Best – when I am able to provide what

people need and meet their requirements. Seeing a project through from conception to implementation and knowing that something you helped create has made things better. There's also a surprising amount of creativity involved in effective IT work.

Worst – pressure, people invariably want something that will take weeks done in a day! But through negotiation they're usually more than happy to wait.

What advice would you give to someone wanting to get into your area of IT?

Get a qualification, but you'll need to get experience as well. Try getting any job in IT and studying part-time. Make sure you get a wide range of experience to see what you enjoy.

Ask for advice and don't be put off by the jargon. It's important to be able to work with people, to be able to see the big picture and how the changes being proposed might impact on other areas of the organisation.

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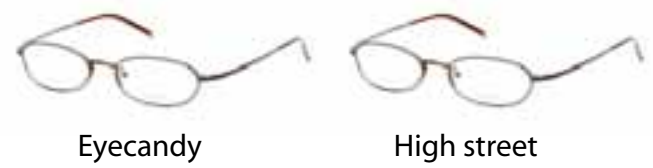
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interview

Ross Sutherland



Ross combines his interests in health and music in his role as a hospital radio presenter

Skye's the limit for Ross

Name: Ross Sutherland.
Age: Just turned 31.
Family: Married and expecting first baby in February.
Describe yourself in three words: content, optimist, caring.
Where do you live? Aberdeen.
What are you studying at the moment? I've just finished K302 *Critical practice in health and social care* the penultimate course of my Health and Social Care degree. For my free choice, I'll be studying DA204 *Understanding media* next year.
What's the best thing about OU study? For me, it has to be the quality of the teaching and materials. I have covered a very broad spectrum in the last six years and almost all of it has been relevant to my practice.
And the worst? It's quite often a very solitary way to study, so when we do meet face to face, it's really a letdown when people don't want to contribute to tutorials.
What do you do for a living? I'm presently a civil servant, working with the Food Standards Agency.
What would be your ideal alternative career

- and why? Ideally, I'm looking to get into the media in some capacity. I enjoy writing a great deal, and studying has really helped me develop a style. As a music fan, I also enjoy presenting, and working on hospital radio has really convinced me I could develop this.
What newspapers/magazines do you read? Newspaper-wise I enjoy the *Guardian* or the *Scotsman*. I like to relax with an intelligent music magazine such as *Record Collector* or *Q*.
What are your hobbies? For the last year I've had the pleasure of serving as Press and Publicity Officer for my local hospital radio station. Next year is our 25th anniversary so this takes up a lot of my time. Despite its unfair reputation as an 'old man's game', playing bowls really helps me unwind after a busy week at work.
... and your favourite film and/or book? *High Fidelity* by Nick Hornby was the first time I'd read a book and found a lead character I really related to. The original *Star Wars* trilogy is both a great piece of cinema and nostalgia for me.
What makes you switch off the TV? Daytime TV - I hate it! Having spent the largest part of my career on shift work, I find it the visual equivalent of elevator muzak!

How would you spend your ideal evening? With wife, bump, family and friends. Good food, good music, good conversation and looking forward to the future. The evening would of course, be sponsored by Talisker [Skye whisky].
Where do you hope to be 10 years from now? Ten years from now, I hope to have a regular column in the *Guardian* and a weekly show on Radio 4 discussing pertinent health issues of the day! Failing that, having a good career in journalism will suit me nicely.
How would you spend £1 million? I'd develop my own property in Skye and invite my favourite bands to play on the lawn for the grand opening!
What's your greatest regret? I should have put things in place to change career sooner.
Complete the following sentence: The OU would be better if...people didn't keep asking, "didn't you want to go to a proper university?"

If you would like to be featured in the interview please email your contact details and a brief description of the courses you are studying with the OU to sesame@open.ac.uk

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sesame Christmas crossword

Win **£100** cash plus a copy of a **Chambers Dictionary**

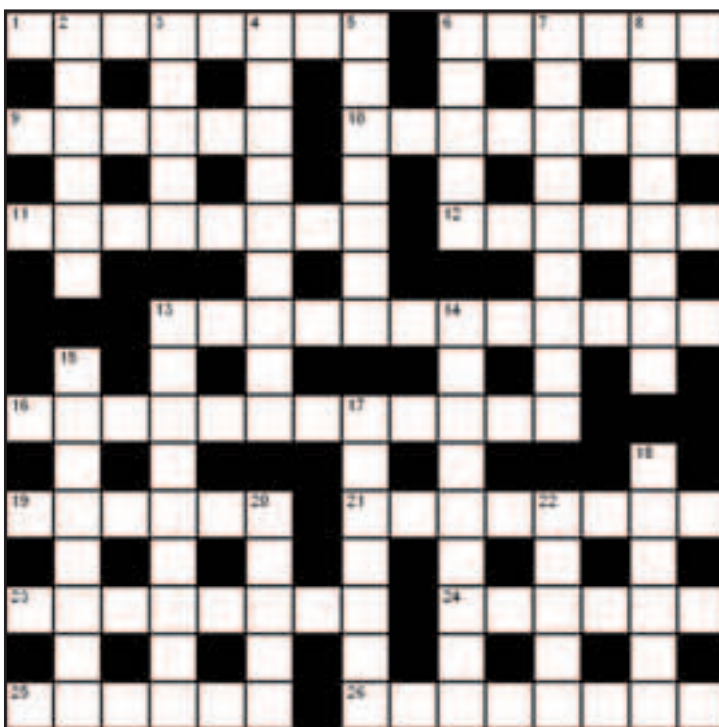
YES it's that time again! The **sesame** Christmas crossword is back, so take some time out from that course work and have a go at winning yourself £100 in cash.

Chambers has once again generously donated four copies of their dictionary.

The senders of the first four correct solutions drawn out of the hat on 27 January 2006 will receive a copy of the dictionary.

In addition, the sender of the first one drawn will receive £100 courtesy of **sesame**. Winners will be notified by phone or email.

Details of Chambers dictionaries can be found at www.chambers.com



SESAME CHRISTMAS CROSSWORD ENTRY FORM

Send your entry with the completed coupon to:
Cullen Crosswords, 19 Cyncoed Place, Cardiff, CF23 6SG
Closing date 27 January 2006. Only one entry per person.

Name: _____
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Across

1. There's nothing in the North Polar region but snow (8)
6. We take pains to please him (6)
9. Tired man's breakfast (6)
10. Stopped doing wrong? (8)
11. The King of Sparta turned melancholy one Christmas (8)
12. What can you do with straight hair? Pass (6)
13. Whether or not you can find the right mate? (5,7)
16. 'Halt please' – an odd order to give a goddess (6,6)
19. Soup and cut of lamb or schnitzel (6)
21. Never-to-be forgotten model car abandoned outside (8)
23. Force studies of cattle with some muscular spasms (8)
24. Wrong to catch up in this game? (6)
25. Port Vale right half gets behind the kick (6)
26. Steps for which I apologise (6,2)

Down

2. Remarks players ignore as the team comes in (6)
3. US gangster doesn't finish the chicken (5)
4. Residents suffering from fatigue (9)
5. Sets about girls (7)
6. Throw away a fight? (5)
7. Braised chops the French find very appetising (9)
8. Sample mince pies I left out after cooking (8)
13. Symptom of fear in veteran after start of conflict (4,5)
14. Stiffness of the joints? Throw cure at him! (9)
15. Friend threatening to dispose of American horse (8)
17. Street winding round one Italian city (7)
18. Group of drivers is seen on motorway showing unlawful prejudice (6)
20. As a poet he was about number one in his country (5)
22. They can be costly calls (5)

Autumn crossword winners

The winner of our autumn crossword was Anne Braithwaite from Pickering who wins £75 plus a copy of the *Chambers Dictionary*. The two runners-up were Ian Whittaker from Weymouth and J. James from Bristol who each receive a copy of the *Chambers Dictionary*.

Answers - Across:

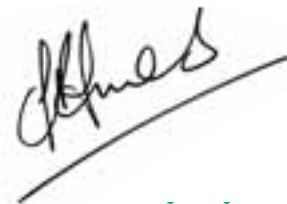
1. Clan 3. Recognise 9. Adar 10. Hoity Toity
12. Eyeholes 13. Consul 14. Firm Foundation
18. Castles in Spain 20. Lather 22. Tetragon
24. Daisy Chain 25. Hair 26. Novelette
27. Aske

Answers - Down:

1. Claret 2. Academies 4. Erogenous 5. Oath
6. National Park 7. Swiss 8. Hyaline
11. Formaldehyde 15. Non-sexist
16. Isinglass 17. Occlude 19. Untrue 21. Taino
23. Ghee

OU STUDENT

Edited by



The official publication of the Open University Students Association

Joan Jones

Mixed blessings

I HAD some fantastic news in July, my daughter presented me with my third grandchild. I had a problem though because I was halfway through my OU Residential School course and I desperately wanted to be at home with the newest member of my family. Having been reassured that was not necessary though, I did stick the course out. It made meeting Nathan even sweeter on the Friday when I got home and as I have seen him almost daily over the past weeks I have noted his understanding of the world around him changing day by day.

I always find it wondrous watching a child learn. They have no fear of what they might not be able to do, or what others might think of them, they soak up knowledge like a sponge and with the guidance and support of those around them they grow. For me there is just too much out there I want to know more about, but like many adults, learning can become for me a bit of a trial sometimes. Will I be able to

understand the concepts? What is the best way to find out about a particular topic? Will I have the time and commitment while balancing all the other parts of my life? What will it cost me in time and money and what value will that studying bring to me and the people around me? So learning can be a mixed blessing. When we are born the only

"I always find it wondrous watching a child learn. They have no fear of what they might be able to do"

knowledge is that carried in our genes, our instincts; we are completely receptive to learning and stimuli from our environment, but as we grow we also learn about fear, worry, self-worth and all the horrors in our world.

I was privileged recently to be able to talk to new OU students at an induction meeting in Birmingham and could see with many of the participants that even though they were excited about the journey they were about to embark on, they also showed signs of fear of failing to reach their goals. My advice was: "Keep going because anything worth having you usually have to work hard for, and don't be

afraid to ask for help – the OU is proud to offer supported distance learning"... and if you are not sure where to ask for that help contact OUSA. There is sure to be a friendly volunteer with answers in your region or, if you prefer online, our FirstClass Peer Support facility could be just what you are looking for.

In early September I received my NUS-OUSA membership card and I have been having fun seeing where I can use it; and I am sure I will have saved the subscription by Christmas just by using it in my normal day-to-day life. Mixed blessing? Well I have suddenly got an interest back in shopping and leisure activities when I should be doing other things! If you have not got your card yet get your application form from www.ousa.org.uk (and follow the path through News and Feedback to Bulletin) – why miss out on an opportunity to save money?

In late September we were delighted by the news from the National Student Survey that placed The Open University top of the league for overall satisfaction. It is thanks to your replies that our university did so well in this survey. I believe that we are fortunate that the OU listens to its students via your elected OUSA representatives. It must not be forgotten though that it is the very commitment and dedication of those representatives, who volunteer their time to gather the opinions of their student peers and put forward arguments for improvements by the university in all its various facets, that has helped the university to this top position. The mixed blessing? Many universities will be attempting to topple the OU from its perch in next year's survey and OUSA will have to work extremely hard to make sure its recommendations for improvements are sound in order to help keep the OU at the top of the league.

As I write this, I have just heard that Ruth Kelly, Secretary of State for Education and Skills, has announced a new package of



Lifelong learners: Joan and Nathan

turn to page 38

Mixed blessings

from page 37

funding for part-time students, to include a 25 per cent increase in grant levels payable towards fees for those qualifying for assistance. This will mean that maximum support for fees will rise from £590 to £750 for those who study 60 points and rise from £885 to £1,125 for those studying 90 points. The government expects 85,000 of the half million students in part-time higher education to benefit from this financial package (so probably around 25,000 OU students). Also more money will be available from the hardship fund, which universities can allocate to students facing particular financial difficulties, which will rise from £3m to £12m.

These changes will bring real benefits to students of this university and of course I am pleased that, after so many previous

efforts, I can finally see some reflection of the issues that I raised with Bill Rammell, Minister for Lifelong Learning and Higher Education, in this announcement. I also believe OUSA's association with the NUS has already played a part in persuading the Minister that part-time students are a significant force to be reckoned with.

However, the battle is a long way from won for part-time students for there is a sting in the tail. The government is using this increased support to reinforce its call to universities to solve the remaining funding gap by increasing fees for part-time students, which unlike those for full-time students, remain uncapped. This will affect many students especially those who do not qualify for assistance and are not sponsored by some other means.

Far from being complacent I am well aware of how much more hard work OUSA

needs to do to ensure that none of our students are disadvantaged now or in the future because of rising course fees. We are The Open University and we must not only be open to those poor enough to qualify for support and wealthy enough to absorb significant fee increases. We particularly need to hear from YOU if you are one of the many students who fall outside the threshold for financial support and are worried about your future. What will you do if fees are put up significantly? And my final mixed blessing? OU students have always had to fight for their rights – but they have their own organisation to do that. Contact me at ousa@student.open.ac.uk

JOAN JONES
PRESIDENT, OUSA

Masterclass for the General Manager

It is six and a half years since I took up the post of OUSA General Manager, and unfortunately I have made one of the classic errors for managers and senior staff in all types of organisations – despite being in the bosom of a lifelong learning culture – I have not undertaken any substantial training since I arrived. How does such a situation come about? Is it a belief that one knows it all? Or a fear that there is so much more to know, it would be safer not to find out? It's difficult to say really but I am unlikely to be the first

manager who is totally committed to staff development for everyone else, but unable to justify finding the time and space for some self-development.

Collaboration

Lucky for me then that the current OUSA President knows a good deal about such dilemmas and was happy to provide the right measure of pressure and support to jolt me out of my stagnation! Even better, I decided to take a leaf out of Joan's book, following her important initiative to open OUSA up to productive collaboration with our colleagues in NUS. I am now forming some productive, collaborative relationships myself having embarked on a course tailor-made for General Managers of students unions.

The course is part of a series of offerings in Leadership and Management, which are presented by John Windle and Di Boston, who between them have an extensive range of experience both within and beyond students unions. It is spread over eight months, and involves a variety of projects

centred around a number of residential units.

Distinctive

I attended the first unit in October and was really quite bowled over – as much as anything by the shock of fully realising the extent of my departure from everything I thought I knew and was committed to, in terms of the process of learning. OUSA and its parent university are so large and distinct that one can perhaps get into the trap I found myself in – there is so much to know about OUSA/OU and it is so different from what you might have thought you knew about universities and students unions, that you really need to immerse yourself in it for years, close your eyes and ears to the rest of the sector – and when you 'know it all', that will be time aplenty to go out taking in new experiences... Ooooppps!

When I found myself sitting in a room with 12 other General Managers of student unions/associations, some big, some small, but all different and distinctive, and heard the issues they were grappling with, some

of the solutions they had found and some of the questions they were raising, the penny finally dropped about how big an idiot I had been not to make a much earlier effort to tap this rich seam of knowledge, experience and adventure. I have absolutely no doubt that the relatively small amount of time I am spending out of the office, the projects we will be undertaking individually and in collaboration, and the opportunities for peer discussions and exchanges will repay both OUSA and myself at least tenfold. I feel as if there really ought to be a moral to this story – and I have to say that the one that springs to mind is 'no fool like an old fool' but I think I will be a little kinder to myself and say that 'you learn something every day'... even if sometimes it is what you thought that you had already got filed away in your psyche but had forgotten to take out and examine lately... Hope when you get your exam results you find that you too managed to pull this trick off!

TRUDI DE HANEY
GENERAL MANAGER, OUSA

OUSA Conference 2006

A CONFUSION of American-style grid roads, an obstacle course of perplexing roundabouts, together with a herd of wild concrete cows won't prevent hundreds of OU students from finding the Open University's campus in Milton Keynes for the annual OUSA Conference in 2006.

Around 300 delegates and observers from OUSA's units and societies will come together over the weekend of 7 to 9 April to participate in the debates that establish OUSA policy on educational, organisational, representational and student support issues for the forthcoming year. Elections for officers of OUSA take place and reports are presented on the work undertaken during the previous year.

All OUSA members have a right to be represented at the annual Conference and a right to determine what is debated. Your Association is organised as a network of branches and by attending your local branch meeting, you can help to decide just what the current issues and concerns are for students and what matters OUSA should be debating at Conference 2006.

Interested in finding out more? Contact your local OUSA branch or email or call the OUSA Office for further details.



Walton Hall Campus, Milton Keynes

EDUCATION MATTERS

Opportunities within OUSA

OUR team of Central Representatives sit on university boards and committees on our behalf. Their much valued role is important in communicating student views to the heart of the university, while using the opportunity to improve their own skills. Central Representatives can find themselves extending and improving their own skills in areas of committee representation, professional performance at committee meetings, public speaking, dealing with and using academic committee papers, producing reports, supporting others, teamwork and self-development. Becoming a Central Representative produces an opportunity to produce additional elements for a curriculum vitae as well as the increased confidence and self esteem that many of our representatives experience.

Diversity is a key element of our Central Representative Team and so we welcome students from all walks of life and backgrounds. Training is provided annually, but for those who do come into the team a little later in the year and miss our face-to-face training, we do offer an alternative training package tailored to individual needs. Ongoing support is provided throughout the year by both myself and key members of the team, and meetings with OUSA are arranged prior to each Committee meeting to provide the representative with adequate support and guidance where needed. No special experience or qualifications are needed, and each application is considered individually. Why don't you get involved and find out more about your university by representing your fellow students?

We have several existing vacancies at the moment, so please get in touch with us at the OUSA Office, where we will be able to answer any queries that you have, and send you an application form.

Qualification Changes

We review many curriculum changes that happen within the

university. One particularly important change at present being considered involves the History Degree (award code B01). The most notable changes are the removal of the 'compulsory' element of the residential school and project course, and 60 points of free choice is to be introduced, together with an increased number of 'option' courses. While the university is usually reluctant to make changes with such a short lead time (this one is effective almost immediately), this change will bring the programme of study to an appropriate level compared with similarly structured degrees within the Arts Faculty. While not only increasing the academic credibility of the programme, it will also offer students increased flexibility in the courses and curriculum areas they wish to include in pursuit of their degree.

The university has endeavoured to contact as many affected students as soon as possible, in particular those already linked to the award. Another important move forward is the consideration of allowing some third level credit to count towards postgraduate awards. This is consistent with practice in other universities and can be achieved without in anyway devaluing the relevant awards while again allowing more flexibility for students pursuing such study. Keep an eye on the relevant Courses and Qualifications page on the university website for updates, or contact your Regional Centre for advice.

REBECCA ROSENTHAL
VICE-PRESIDENT,
EDUCATION, OUSA



Frequently asked questions

Got a burning question about the way the OU works? Want to know more about OUSA? Send your questions to Rebecca Rosenthal at the OUSA office

I have an idea for a new course that I feel the university could develop, who or where should I send it to?

The university is continually developing new course ideas, as well as updating existing ones. You could send your ideas to the Dean of the relevant Faculty in the university. Alternatively, let us know in OUSA what your ideas are, and we will be more than happy to pass them on for you.

How long before a course idea becomes an option for study for students?

This will usually depend on how drastic the change is, or how new the idea and how it affects existing programmes of study. For example, a course may need to be updated in order to keep its credibility within a particular programme of study. To enable the programme itself to remain relevant, the revised and updated course may have its code changed in order to exclude the irrelevant information from the previous course being included in a relevant qualification. This produces some of the

excluded combinations involving 'previous courses' in named programmes of study. Some courses may also involve reference to current legislation; in this case, it is important for the change to be made as soon as possible. But generally the university tries to leave a three-to-seven year lead time on the changes becoming active, in order for the relevant students to be informed and documentation to be changed. This way, the least possible number of students are affected, and students have enough time to adapt their planned study route.

Why are TMA questions not allowed to be discussed in OUSA course conferences?

There are several reasons for this. Firstly, there is an issue of copyright in reproducing TMA questions on line. Secondly, the decision on whether to discuss TMA questions lies with the university, and so we take the general stance not to allow the discussion of TMA questions unless we are instructed otherwise by the relevant course

team. While we understand that we provide our course conferences as a 'social forum' for discussion, we are also keen to maintain the university's philosophy of independent study. However, Conference 2005 created a policy which asks for clearer guidelines for our moderators, and in turn the students that use the conferences, and this is something we will seek to achieve this year.

I received a newsletter from my OUSA Region which informed me about the Student Academic Links in my region. The post sounds interesting, but I am not sure why I would contact one or how a student becomes one.

Student Academic Links (SALs) are elected within each region and sub-region. We currently have the capacity of one student per faculty, per region. Students don't need to have any special qualifications or experience. SALs act as a link between the students within the region, and the OUSA Executive Committee. They are supported by both their own Executive Committee Member and Vice-President, Education. They primarily deal with academic and curriculums-based issues, and are able to respond to queries and point students in the right direction, as well as being able to feed information from and to our representatives on central university boards and committees. If you would like to contact your SAL, or would like more information on how to become a SAL, then please get in touch with the OUSA Office.

Why do OUSA not provide FirstClass course conferences for every OU course?

Some course teams will be providing their own course conference, and they have the added benefit of being able to place the conference on the desktop of every student studying the course. Our course conferences are provided as a 'social forum' and so are there for students to seek them out themselves, and contribute while being supported by other students. These conferences do not necessarily receive academic input from the university itself. We do endeavour to honour every request for course conferences from students wherever possible.

REBECCA ROSENTHAL

Dates for your diary

If you would like to see your event advertised here, please contact the OUSA Office. Deadline for the next issue of *OU Student* is 2 February.

National Events

25th M500 Society Winter Weekend on Euclidean – style geometry. 6 - 8 January 2006, Nottingham University. Application forms from www.m500.org.uk

Local Events

Bournemouth & Poole Branch First Thursday of every month, 8.30pm, Grasshopper Pub, Poole Rd, Lower Parkstone, Poole. Details Neil Walkling: neil.walkling@ntlworld.com Web: www.bournemouthpoole.co.uk

Bristol Branch First Wednesday of every month, 8.30pm, Horts Tavern, 49-50 Broad Street, Bristol and Third Tuesday of every month, 8.30pm, The Cornubia, Temple Street Bristol. Details: Kate: 0117 955 1992. Web: www.ousabristol.org.uk

Cheltenham Branch Second Wednesday of every month, 8.30pm, The Somerset Arms, Leckhampton. Details Alli: Alli12177@aol.com

Chippenham Branch Second Monday of every month, 7.30pm. Pheasant Public House, Chippenham. Details Pauline Lock: paulinelen@pau-lin.freemove.co.uk

Devon South Branch Second or third Wednesday of every month. The Ship, Preston, Paignton. Details Peter: Petergibbo9@aol.com

Exeter Branch Third Wednesday of every month, 7.30pm. Mill-on-the-Exe, Exeter. Details Margaret: margaret@margaret35.wanadoo.co.uk

Glasgow & West of Scotland Branch First Tuesday of every month, 7pm, Bon Accord Pub, North Street, Glasgow. Details Catherine Macmillan: 0141 339 7906.

Gloucester Branch First Thursday of every month, 8.00pm, The Fountain Inn, Westgate Street, Gloucester. Details Paula: 01452 750416.

Haverfordwest Branch First Thursday of every month, 7.30pm, Haverfordwest Cricket Club, Dale Rd, Haverfordwest, Pems. Details Mair via FirstClass: gmk64@student.open.ac.uk

Kendal Branch First Tuesday of every month, 7.30pm, Brewery Arts Centre, Kendal. Details Brian Wright: 015396 21567.

Oldham Branch Third Saturday of every month, 3.30pm, Toby Carvery (Chadderton Park Inn) on Broadway, Oldham. Families (including children) welcome. Details: Gary: 0748 112 7017.

Plymouth Branch Third Tuesday of every month. Winifred Baker Court, Addison Rd, North Hill, Plymouth. Details Pat: ousaplymouth@yahoo.co.uk

Portsdown Branch First Tuesday of every month, 7.30pm. Toby Carvery, Copnor Rd, Hilsea. Details Keith: keith.2.grant@bt.com

Southend Branch First Thursday of every month, 7.30pm. The Royal Navy Association Club, 73-79 East Street Prittlewell, Southend-on-Sea. Details Albert: albert.beaven@blueyonder.co.uk

West Cumbria Branch Last Sunday of every month, 7.30pm. The Howgate Inn (on the A595 between Whitehaven and Workington). Details Tony: parkerstbees@aol.com

IN BRIEF

Race Equality

AS part of its strategy to achieve race equality the university has a commitment to increase the diversity of the student population by drawing in students with a wider range of minority ethnic backgrounds. The current target is to increase the proportion of undergraduate students with Asian, Black or mixed ethnic backgrounds to 11 per cent by 2006. There is also an important target to improve the retention rate of such students.

OUSA supports the university's commitment to race equality and its related objective of widening participation. We believe that increasing the diversity of our student population is of positive benefit to all students and to our university in general. We also believe that the Students Association has its own distinctive contribution to make. That is why OUSA is setting up a FirstClass conference so that this issue can be aired and OUSA can better advise the OU on future recruitment and retention policies. **We'd like to hear from students who feel they could make a contribution to this discussion and we would be particularly keen to hear from students of minority ethnic backgrounds who might be interested in helping us to moderate this conference and help to ensure that it is focused, constructive and productive. Contact us at ousa@student.open.ac.uk quoting 'race equality' in the title of your message, either for more information or to offer your support.**

Coming Soon

OUR exciting Presentation Gifts 2006 brochure offering a range of prestigious products from crystal and bone china items to commemorative jewellery and clothing will soon be mailed to individuals receiving awards next year. These items feature the OU coat of arms or the OU logo. New items for 2006 include an executive decision-maker, a 24 per cent lead crystal champagne flute and a Waterman Pen set.

If you are looking for a Christmas gift for a work colleague or a student friend, don't wait for the brochure, please visit our website at www.ousa.org.uk (clicking on OSL online) for our full range of merchandise.

Donations from the profit of sales are made to OUSET (the Open University Students Educational Trust), OUSA's students' charity.

Rise to the Challenge

ARE you up for a real challenge? Do you love meeting people? Are you well organised and capable of working under pressure? Do you have a week available during July/August of 2006? Would you like to become a member of our dedicated band of OUSA Residential Schools Representatives covering the schools planned for Heriot Watt (Edinburgh), Durham, Nottingham, St Mary's (London), Brighton and Bath?

Challenges include: organising social events for students to enjoy after their hard days' studying; marketing OUSA, including selling OU branded goods; and fundraising for our charity the Open University Students Educational Trust (OUSET).

If you are up for the challenge contact the OUSA Office for more details and an application form.



Calling all Republic of Ireland students

OUSA is keen to hear from any student from the Republic of Ireland who would be interested in becoming part of the OUSA Regional Forum, which will meet online around five times a year using the FirstClass Conferencing system. The first formative meeting is planned for 8 - 20 December 2005. The purpose of the Regional Forum is to ensure that OUSA's functions of representation, support and social interaction are provided within the region and that local branches are formed and fully supported. There are many interesting roles on offer including: running the business of the Regional Forum; providing support to students needing help with knowing where to start with educational, academic and disability issues; providing representation on OU regional and central committees and groups.

A newsletter has been sent to all students within the Republic, but for more details and to register to have the FirstClass Conference available on your desktop contact ousa@student.open.ac.uk quoting "RoI" together with your personal identifier and your preferred server number.



OU Student, the publication of the Open University Students Association, is edited by the OUSA President. Most of the articles are written by students of the University. It is produced on OUSA's behalf by The Communications Group of The Open University. Editorial enquiries and contributions should be addressed to: Als Ryan, Open University Students Association, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes MK7 6BE. Telephone: +44 (0) 1908 652026 Fax: +44 (0) 1908 654326 Email: ousa@student.open.ac.uk OUSA website: www.ousa.org.uk

IF YOU WANT INFORMATION ABOUT OUSA PLEASE COMPLETE THIS FORM

MEMBERSHIP CARDS

Discounts for the OU Student

The OUSA Membership Card will help gain you discounts and student concessions on goods and services. You may also get discount rates for theatres, cinemas, museums, leisure centres etc. It has also been accepted for rail travel in Europe (although not yet in the UK unfortunately) and in many European venues. The card can be used as proof of OU student status when using student union facilities of other universities where OUSA has a reciprocal agreement and for OU exams. All OU students are eligible, so apply for one today. Remember, it's free! We will need one passport size photograph, proof of student identity/correspondence with student number and a 2nd class stamp for return of your card (or include 20p designated for the purpose if you send a donation for OUSET). Documents will be returned with your card.

OUSET DONATION

OUSET, The Open University Students Educational Trust, is a registered charity, administered by OUSA, and is designed to help Open University students in financial need. Its funds are almost entirely generated by donations and fundraising activities of fellow students. Any donation is welcome.

REPRESENTATIVES ON CENTRAL COMMITTEES

If you are interested in representing your fellow students on Open University central committees and boards, please tick the box.

SUPPORT LINKS

Tick the box for further details about becoming a Student Support Link, Disabled Student Link or Student Academic Link (circle area of interest).

REPRESENTATIVES AT RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS

If you are interested in being a rep at residential schools in the future, please tick the box for a recruitment pack and application form.

ENABLED STUDENTS GROUP

This group is open to all those disabled students interested in helping OUSA to achieve its equality policy. Please tick the box if you are interested in receiving details of how to register with the Enabled Students Group.

GRADUATION CEREMONIES

Tick the box for details of how you can represent OUSA at an OU Graduation ceremony.

Please allow 28 days for delivery of all OUSA Services.

ORDER FORM

OUSA information is recorded on computer. OUSA is registered under the Data Protection Act.

Name _____ Student Number _____ Region _____ Catchment Area Number _____

Address _____

Postcode _____ Daytime Tel No _____

Signature _____

Date _____

I include a donation to OUSET.

Please send completed form and enclosures to:

OUSA Office, (SESAME 228) PO Box 397, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes MK7 6BE Fax: +44 (0) 1908 654326.

READERS' HOLIDAY OFFER

A TASTE OF CORNWALL

Prices for this four-star, self-drive break for three nights, self-catering (fourth night FREE), including one dinner at the Brasserie (AA 1-rosette) in the Watergate Bay Hotel, start at £59 per person.

BEACHCOMBERS Apartments, recently nominated as a finalist in the Cornwall Tourism Awards for '2005 Best Self-catering of the Year', is situated just two hundred yards from the mile-long sandy beach. Many of the one- and two-bedroom units have sea views and all have a patio or balcony. **Holiday offer C190/OU**

CORNWALL GOURMET GOLF

THE holiday offer above can be booked together with two rounds of golf, one at Newquay golf course and one at Perranporth golf course. Other Cornish golf courses can be booked on-site, many with a discount. Prices including the Taste of Cornwall offer start from £109 per person. **Holiday offer C191/OU**

CORFU IONIAN EXPLORER 2006

The charming village of Arillas on the northwest coast of Corfu makes an ideal

holiday resort perfect for couples and families.

THIS special explorer holiday includes private airport transfers to/from Arillas, self-catering in the privately owned Elena-Stella apartments, a full-day boat excursion to one of the offshore islands, a half-day excursion to explore Corfu town or Sidari, plus one Greek evening meal (three courses with wine). Charter flights are available from most UK regional airports and prices start from £335 per adult for seven nights based on four sharing a two-bedroom apartment. **Holiday offer C151/OU**

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A fabulous six-night two-centre holiday! Two nights at the two-star Atlantic Hotel in Hugh Town on St Mary's followed by three or four nights at the family-run Tregurrian Hotel at Watergate Bay near Newquay.

THIS special tour commences 27 February 2006 and includes rooms with private bathroom or shower, dinner, bed and breakfast throughout, return flight Newquay-St Marys, admissions to the Eden



Newquay Fistral

Picture: Paul Watts, VisitCornwall

Project and the Lost Gardens of Heligan plus the boat trip to Tresco and admission to the sub-tropical Abbey Gardens. All this from £399 per person. **Holiday offer C152/OU**

For further details contact ABTA and ATOL bonded operator, Travelsmith Ltd. Telephone +44 (0)1621 784666 quoting the holiday offer number. ABTA V1290. ATOL 1917.

OU Life Screensaver

Stay in touch

www.open.ac.uk/oulifesccreensaver



SOCIETIES & CLUBS



OU Travel and Study Society

Alix Mackay, 64 Buckingham Rd,
Brighton BN1 3RO
Eve Tel: 01273 775077

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RAF Hut, Walton Hall,
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Telephone (01908) 653316 / 655997
Email: AOUG@open.ac.uk
<http://www.ougrads.org.uk/>

SMALL ADS

Computer Software

Students and others to whom the University distributes computer software as part of their course materials are reminded that the University only confers upon the original recipient of the computer software a NON-TRANSFERABLE licence to use it in conjunction with the University's materials. The licence specifically states that the original recipient of the computer software MUST NOT in any way transfer the computer software package(s) or the use thereof to any other person or body by means of sale, loan, sub-licence, lease or any other method. Any unauthorised use, copying, distribution or adaptation of computer software package(s) issued by the University is an infringement of intellectual property rights and is illegal.

Care should be taken when replying to small ads. Readers should be aware that no vetting or screening is carried out on the persons who place these ads.

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ARE: Sweden's premier mountain resort; lake, stunning scenery – luxury apartment from £300 per week. Call owner any time. Tel: 01536 416448.

CYPRUS, LIMASSOL, private bungalow. Larnaca, new flat. Both 2beds and fully equipped. Near to beach / town. From £200 per week. Tel: 020 8505 6855. Email: dmc28peel@tiscali.co.uk
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Travel Organiser? Look under Societies & Clubs for more information. www.ectravel.com
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THE REAL SPAIN: Gorgeous Andalusian mountain cottage/s 10 kilometres from coast, £140 per week or £220 per week for two houses. Fly to Almeria, Granada or Malaga. Details: kate.danziger@care4free.net or telephone 020 7733 5006. www.casacatalina.co.uk

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For Sale

A LARGE SELECTION of OU second-hand course material / set books are available at: www.universitybooksearch.co.uk
A103: A206, A216, AA303, AA312, £45 each; A220 and A221, £30 each. Set books not included. Collection preferred. Tel: 01744 735 226. Merseyside.

A103, A207, course materials, very good condition. £25 each + p&p. Tel: 01834 844 700.

A103, A207: Spiral bound and universal sets, £25 each plus postage. Tel: 0131 225 3099.

A103, A220, A221, AA312, course materials, 40 euros per set. Seller based in Dublin. Buyer collects if possible, otherwise + p&p. Tel: +35 312 896 544. Email: ljjcap@eircom.net

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A425, M.L. Kekewick (ed) Princes and Peoples, King Richard 11, tel: 07960 595 220.

AA309 COURSE BOOKS: Three videos, 4 tapes, 3 set books, very good condition. £50 + £10 postage. Tel: 01257 422 837.

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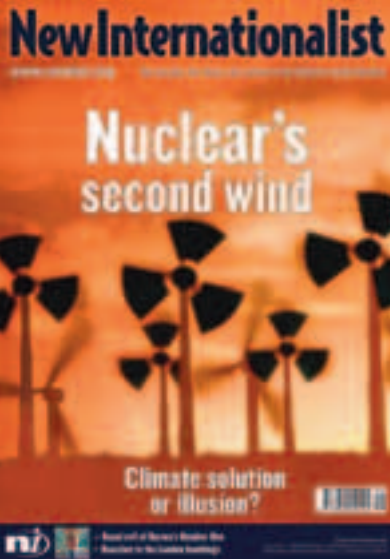
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