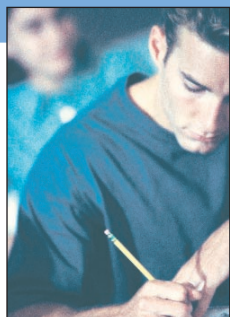




Diversity
and the
curriculum
● page 8



Exam
survival
kit
● page 11



Study
on the
move
● page 14



Reader
survey: win
a DVD/Video
● page 15



Sesame

September/October 2003

Reaching the Open University community worldwide

Issue Number 217



The environmental web ● courses pages 5-6

Picture: Mike Dodd

Letters letters letters letters letters letters

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OU's own goal

THE OU is offering David and Victoria Beckham free places on its new beginners Spanish course, *Portales*, which launches in November. This follows the news David has been signed to play for Real Madrid.

"Apart from the benefits to them personally, the Beckhams could increase the appeal of language learning in the UK and give it a much-needed boost," said Cecilia Garrido, sub dean of the OU's Faculty of Education and Language Studies.

How many students have to go cap in hand, and graft just to get a grant to study with the university?

And now the OU sees fit to offer FREE places to two people whose income is measured in millions of pounds.

To the guilty faculty I say "Own-Goal".

Derek Lincoln

Waltham Chase, Hants

Gary Spink, Head of Media Relations, replies

Derek makes a good point. To explain, the real issue we were trying to address was raising awareness about the low level of language skills in the UK. It is the reason the OU is introducing beginner-level language courses this year.

It's a point we tried to emphasise in the news release and subsequent media interviews. In effect we were asking the Beckhams to be 'ambassadors' for language learning for beginners. We hope their participation would encourage others to consider learning a language or at least realise, because of the media publicity, that it is possible to pick up languages at a university level (even if you didn't study them at A-Level). Widening participation in education is what the OU is all about.

If they agreed to undertake this role it would be a bit rude to ask them to pay for doing us a favour, but perhaps the 'free courses' aspect was emphasised too much in

the release.

However, in the first week after the release we recruited 67 extra people to the course. After a month, the increase was 200!

Shorts change?

WHAT has made my optical mouse screech is the recent discovery I made regarding several 10-point short courses.

Courses such as A174, A175 etc. are, unfortunately, only available in the UK. Perhaps the cost of the course is too low to incorporate mass mailings of course materials, but could we at least be assured that someone will look into it, and perhaps allow us, the equally paying-through-learning-while-working-and-being-good-wives-mothers-daughters-students, to make use of these creative and mind-broadening courses?

If the OU is not about equal opportunities, then my hopes are dashed!

Cardiakou Sapfo

Athens, Greece

Allan Cochrane, PVC (Students), replies

We are constantly reviewing the availability of courses outside the UK. Only a very few courses are unavailable at present in the other countries of the European Union. They include those courses where we have made a judgement either that the cost of doing so would be prohibitive and we would in effect be losing money for each student we recruited, or that the additional fees we would have to charge would simply be unacceptable. However, as already indicated, all of these decisions are subject to review and several 10-point courses are already available in the other countries of the European Union.

IT alienation

I AM in the last year of my BSc studies and until this year have been very impressed with all aspects of my courses. This year

I am studying S216 and getting very concerned that the OU is starting to alienate a large group of potential and current students by the amount of IT involvement.

I chose to study with the OU as I commute to work, five hours a day in total, and work nine hours a day, mostly on a PC. I have always been able to utilise my travelling time with the reading matter and I know I am not alone in this.

I have found this year that the amount of PC work involved is substantial and I am having problems keeping up with it. My sight is already suffering due to PC-related work and I am reluctant to carry on into the evening working on a PC.

Ven Wood

London

Love Lyceum?

Siobain Broomfield's complaint (Sesame 216) about the difficulties of learning Lyceum alongside languages provoked opposing responses.

I FOUND the letter on Lyceum and languages very interesting and I agree wholeheartedly with the writer.

I too am a student on L224 Horizons who opted for telephone tutorials as I am not interested in furthering my knowledge of the French language sitting in front of a computer for long sessions.

I am also the student representative on the Curriculum and Teaching committee and the Board of the Faculty of Education and Languages so am up-to-date with current trends.

Some students enjoy Lyceum; others, having enrolled initially with Lyceum, drop out because they are unable to cope with the technology which often fails.

A survey of students showed, given the choice of Lyceum or face-to-face tutorials, the greater number would opt for face-to-face.

With this in mind, and subject to university approval, all language courses in future will be presented in 'dual' mode, ie via Lyceum and face-to-face.

Val Miller

Durham

I COULD not disagree more with Siobain Broomfield regarding the use of Lyceum and languages.

When I started on L231 Motive (German) I was still at the stage of using the computer as a 'clever' typewriter. A short induction session, along with other students from all disciplines, was the only pre-course help I received.

Lyceum is used as a 'group' medium but an individual student can log on at any time to practise. I did this and found it enormously helpful.

The student computer expertise in my tutorial group ranged from being just about able to send and receive emails to being quite at home surfing the net. The electronic exercises forming part of tutorials absolutely horrified me. With sheer grit and determination I managed them and by the end of the course was quite happily logging on to the internet to find information, sign up for free German language news bulletins and, hey, even shopping on the net!

Help was always forthcoming and always in a clear, easy-to-follow manner. I am now a firm believer in Lyceum and would recommend it to anyone.

Angela Hoare

Ringwood, Hants

European bias

I AM interested in anthropology and international development studies, with a focus on South and South East Asia, and would like to complete my degree with the OU.

However the courses it offers are somewhat limited in a global context as most have a European bias, and even the international studies have an emphasis upon the Western World (mostly North America).

Would it not be wise to introduce a range of courses that have a more global context, firstly to encourage non-Europeans to study with OU but also to educate European OU students about the world outside of the West. The introduction of global history, politics, economics, sociology would make OU more inclusive, multicultural and progressive.

Sarah Burley

Birmingham

Editors note: see special report on diversity in the curriculum on pp 8-9.

See the latest news on the web at: www.open.ac.uk/sesame
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Just a thought

WHAT a super picture on the front of the July/August issue. It depicts the joy of achievement, and all the excitement of an OU graduation day.

Well done Sesame, well done Marion Peak, and congratulations to all this year's graduates. I hope you enjoyed your day as much as Marion obviously did.

Gordon Wright

London

I AM writing to you in the hope you can encourage tutors to link people on the same course to share petrol costs in order to attend tutorials.

I am disabled and, although I drive, cannot manage the lengthy trips to tutorials. I am in my fifth year and it is only this year I have been able to approach another student which has enabled me, in sharing petrol with her, to attend tutorials.

People are naturally shy at the first tutorial and it would be splendid if a tutor could encourage students to get together in this way. It would also aid the environment.

Patricia Aston

Stanion, Northants

HAVING just returned from my A103 week's residential course in Stirling, I would like to say how enjoyable the week was and certainly inspired me towards my ultimate aim of graduation and teaching.

All the tutors were knowledgeable, approachable and inspirational in many ways. My fellow students were friendly and supportive, both the ones in the tutor groups and those I met on the odd trip to the student bar!

Philip Hardwick

Batley

I FEEL I cannot let Laura Richardson's criticism (Sesame letters 216) of the London ceremony stand.

I was amazed by the enduring and warm response that the vast audience accorded to each and every one of the mostly unknown graduates.

I thought it was the most august event I had ever attended. Certainly I felt anything but a mere statistic, especially since the Chancellor congratulated each graduate with a handshake and some personal warm words.

My family and my German guests were overwhelmed by the grandeur of the occasion, by the excellent venue and by the brilliant and smooth organisation of the OU.

Rosemarie Baines

Cambridge

Star letter

I HAVE just read the July/August (216) edition of Sesame. Struggling in this, my final year of a BSc Hons course, I was heartened to read how other OU undergraduates have coped and triumphed, especially those who are disabled or disadvantaged.

I have, over the last six months, coped with moving house, finding new employment following months of rejection due to ageism, and using a Jurassic computer (no email or internet access or funds to update). Having difficulties fitting in study time,

Inspired to succeed



accessing tutorials and in raising the enthusiasm for a misguided choice of final course I was feeling pretty much down in the doldrums.

However my moans seemed scarcely worth mentioning compared to some of the hurdles others have jumped in order to arrive at the finishing post. I felt many of the articles this summer were aimed at people just like me and feel inspired to reassess my progress so far and make sure I finish the course.

Sue Adams

Weymouth, Dorset

OU boost for world health

Doctors in Bangladesh are being supported by OU experts to tackle diabetes treatment and care – one of the country's biggest medical problems.

Last year the same OU Centre for Education in Medicine team helped design and run a similar programme for doctors in India dealing with its HIV/AIDS crisis.

And, they say, the success of both offers huge potential for expanding support to train local medical professionals in other devastating conditions, particularly malaria, which affects 300-500 million people each year.

Following a feasibility study of using distance learning to update and reskill medical professionals in Bangladesh, Professors Janet Grant and Mike Stewart returned to Dhaka this summer to lead a workshop to develop a course in diabetes care.

Working in partnership with Prof Azad Khan, Secretary General of the Diabetic Association of Bangladesh (DAB), and other Bangladesh specialists, the course includes texts and assessments written by the local clinical course team guided by Janet and Mike, as well as clinical placements, project work and tutorials.

It will be presented for the first time in the autumn of 2003, a record for course development by OU standards.

The combination of distance learning and medical education expertise is a rare one

"One of the reasons this work is so important is in showing how developing countries with limited resources but dedicated personnel can adapt their knowledge to the particular requirements of the local situation," explained Mike, who is Head of Biological Sciences.

"The success of the diabetes and AIDS programmes has the potential to be used in a similar style to train local medical professionals on specific medical problems, of which malaria is one of the biggest."

Said Janet, who is Director of the Centre for Education in Medicine: "OUCEM has international expertise in postgraduate medical education and I have been involved in diabetes education in the UK and abroad since the 1970s. But obviously the combination of distance learning and medical education expertise

which Mike and I offer is a rare one, nationally and internationally."

Added Janet: "The main lesson of the HIV/AIDS programme was that we need to recruit dedicated and committed local medical people to help develop the content of the course, based upon their knowledge of both local medical and communication facilities."

Pictured below at the workshop in Dhaka are (from left to right): Prof Azad Khan, Prof Mike Stewart, Bangladesh Minister for Social Welfare Mr Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mujahid, and Prof Janet Grant.



OU degree – just what the doctor ordered

AT the age of 40, OU graduate Louise Heppell has won a place to train as a doctor.

Louise (pictured above) has been accepted on a four-year graduate entry programme at St George's Hospital Medical School at the University of London – and she puts her success down to her OU biology degree.

As she neared the end of her studies she applied to four medical schools and was offered places at three. Said Louise: "That puts paid to any ideas about OU degrees not being real qualifications. I'm staggered but delighted that the OU has opened so many doors for me."

She is due to graduate as a doctor in 2007 – the same year as her identical twin daughters, Wendy and Emma, both qualify as vets. But the road there has often been difficult and painful. She and her former husband were members of a fundamentalist church for 10 years. "I wasn't expected or encouraged to go to work but amazingly, when I decided to study, it was allowed."

Then the cot death of her third daughter, Katy, led to a five-year debilitating illness. "We were also moving around a lot so I started doing an OU course," said Louise. "Later, when my daughters and I left that life, I needed to work full-time so I kept studying with the OU."

"If it wasn't for the OU's flexibility and the way it adapted to accommodate what was going on in my life, I wouldn't have got my degree or this fantastic opportunity," she added.

"Sometimes when I look back I can't quite believe my life. But most of the time I'm looking forward. The world has got a lot more possibilities for me than I thought."

OU mourns founding figure

THE university has paid tributes to its first Vice-Chancellor, Lord Perry of Walton, who died in July.

Walter Perry, who was 82, served as Vice-Chancellor from 1969 until his retirement in 1981 and is widely recognised as one of the most influential figures in the OU's success.

"His initial planning for the OU and his outstanding stewardship during its formative years laid the foundations that made the institution one of the greatest education success stories of the 20th century," said Vice-Chancellor Professor Brenda Gourley.

"He oversaw the appointment of the university's first senior academic and administrative staff; he managed the building of a university campus from scratch; he directed the development of an extensive support

network for students; and he led the successful establishment of an academic structure of course development by teams that remains in place today."

She added: "The news of his death has been met with deep sadness by many people across the Open University community who held him in much respect and great affection."

Following his retirement Lord Perry continued to be active in the field of distance education. Knighted in 1974 and created a life peer in 1979, he watched over the OU's interests from the House of Lords, where he was deputy leader of the SDP. He also maintained his links by establishing an office at the Open University in Scotland. A memorial service is to be held – date to be announced.

New era for Sesame advertising

SESAME has appointed advertising agency McMillan-Scott to handle advertising in future editions of the university's newspaper.

The company specialise in trade and association journals, with a track record in improving advertisement sales for 'membership'-type organisations.

"From a few columns of personal ads, advertising in Sesame has grown to become a vital part of our budget, helping to offset the huge costs of mailing regular issues to the OU community," said Sesame Editor Jane Matthews.

"We hope our partnership with McMillan-Scott will enable us continue to develop the newspaper to enhance its quality and its interest and usefulness to students, ALs and subscribers."

She added: "We hope as many readers as possible will assist us in this by completing the readership survey on p21 of this issue. We welcome all feedback and act on it wherever we can."

Further information for advertisers is on p23.

David's degree disappointment

By **Peter Taylor-Whiffen**

Graduate David Chaddburn has protested to the university after discovering he can have his hard-earned 'BSc' designation stated after his name everywhere – except on correspondence from his own university.

The OU blames the anomaly on its computer database, CIRCE, which it says cannot incorporate the letters.

But elsewhere on campus the university's Alumni Association, which has its own separate database, decided from the outset it would always address OU graduates with their full designations.

Mr Chaddburn, from Leamington Spa, was further irritated by the news in a standard letter from the OU that his personal identifier "will remain the same even after you have obtained your degree".

He told *Sesame*: "Why is it that your personal identifier can follow you into the grave but not the very qualification you have strived to obtain? Can it be that the OU is just another business after all?"

According to Assistant Registrar (Awards and Ceremonies) Tony Barker: "Any title and the designatory letters for any other awards that have been bestowed do not form a part of the (student's) officially recorded name. For the purposes of identifying particular students the Open University uses the name as recorded in the birth certificate, marriage certificate, deed poll or other legally recognised document."

He added: "While the university is able to take account of

individual student preferences in, for example, the name used for the announcement at a degree ceremony, on all official documentation relating to any academic award, including both the formal transcript of academic record and the award certificate, the name as known to the university only will be used."

Jane Connolly, Assitant Registrar in Course Information and Advice could offer Mr Chaddburn no hope. She said: "We will not be looking to enhance CIRCE to include designatory titles after surnames at this stage".

A spokesperson for the Alumni Association said: "The OU's Alumni Association has always recognised OU alumni by using their letters in correspondence. The hard work and commitment that went into obtaining their degree – and in some cases more than one – should be recognised by their own institution.

"As many graduates have said, 'We always know when it's mail from the

Alumni Association as it has our degree in the mail name'."

● If you're about to finish your OU studies – or plan to take a break – you can stay in touch through *Sesame*. *Sesame* is now available to read or download online at www.open.ac.uk/sesame and the website carries news updates between issues.

Or you can take out a subscription to receive *Sesame* by post. An annual subscription (running January to December) to the paper costs £6 (UK address) to cover post and handling and £15 (overseas). Send your cheque made payable to the Open University to: *Sesame* Subscriptions, The Open University, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes MK7 6AA.

Why is it that your personal identifier can follow you into the grave but not your qualification?

Card spreads the benefits

VICE-CHANCELLOR Brenda Gourley has accepted a cheque for £2 million on behalf of the university from Beneficial. The money comes as part of the OU affinity credit card deal between the university and the bank, which has just been renewed for a further seven years. Praising the partnership, which began 12 years ago when the OU became the first university to have an affinity credit card, Acting Director of Development Sue Ball said: "The OU is pleased that an increasing number of students, alumni and staff are showing their support for the university by taking out and using the OU credit card and raising money for the OU in the process."

"Beneficial is a generous sponsor, providing funds for a professorial chair in the Business School and sponsorship of Open Day, graduation ceremony booklets and careers seminars in the regions to name a few."

Pictured: Sue Ball (centre) and Brenda Gourley receive the cheque from Beneficial's Dave Ram and Stuart Beattie (far left and far right) and Adrian Hill, Chief Executive of HFC Bank



Iraq Commander to address OUBS

AIR Chief Marshal Brian K Burridge CBE RAF, commander of British forces in Iraq and OU Business School MBA alumnus, will give this year's OUBS Lecture in November.

A former Nimrod pilot and flying instructor who joined the RAF as a university cadet in 1967, Air Chief Marshal Burridge held senior posts in the Ministry of Defence before promotion to Air Vice Marshal in 1998 and gained his MBA in 1999. He became Commander-in-Chief Strike Command on July 31 2003, and will speak on leadership, drawing on his

wide service experience

The lecture, which is open only to OUBS students and alumni, will take place at the CBI Conference Centre at Centre Point in London on Wednesday November 26. The event will start at 6pm with a fork-buffet and an opportunity to meet with other students, alumni, OUBS staff and guests.

To book a place at what promises to be an informative and lively lecture email: oubs-alumni@open.ac.uk or call Nicola Gray on 01908 652097. Tickets are limited and cost £25.

Computer connection

GET connected (U130), the OU's new short course aimed at introducing students to computing, is featured in the government's key e-learning strategy document for its success in attracting women learners. The government notes that 'nearly 70 per cent of students are female, which is unusual for computing courses: "I was a complete technophobe until I started but I've completely changed now!"' www.dfes.gov.uk/elearningstrategy/strategy.stm

Women in technology

FEMALE and willing to share your experience of studying a technology course with the OU? Technology tutors in region 7 are looking for student contributions to include on a web-site dedicated to demonstrating how studying technology changes lives.

The move comes out of a staff development event held in Leeds for science and technology ALs. Facilitated by Pat Turrell and Rihana Ishaq, who work at Sheffield University, the day's activities included looking at barriers preventing women's recruitment and retention, women's perception of education, making the learning process more relevant and developing an inclusive learning environment.

Contributions should be sent to Wendy Fisher, Technology staff tutor, at R07-Tech-Team@open.ac.uk

Studying the students

THE benefits that students obtain from different types of higher education will be the subject of new research led by the university's Centre for Higher Education Research and Information (CHERI). The four-year research programme, which is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, will also investigate how the learning environment and methods can impact on the student experience.

Project director Prof John Brennan of CHERI said: "This project will ask some fundamental questions about what is really learned in higher education. The findings may well challenge conventional thinking about the benefits that students obtain."

Places for peace

TWENTY-FIVE people in Northern Ireland will be getting free places to study with the Open University Business School this year and in 2004, as part of an initiative funded by the EU programme for Peace and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the Border Counties of Ireland. The aim is to improve skills and encourage flexibility among workers in the community and voluntary sector.

PVC appointment

PROFESSOR David Vincent, currently Deputy Vice-Chancellor of Keele University, is to join the OU's senior management team on October 1. A Professor of Social History, David makes OU history by being the first external academic to be appointed to a Pro-Vice-Chancellor post. His portfolio will cover strategy, planning and external affairs.

Meeting the Minister

INCREASED confidence, getting access to higher education and improved career prospects were some of the experiences a group of students shared with Welsh Assembly Minister of Education and Lifelong Learning Jane Davidson on a recent visit. The group was invited to visit the Welsh Assembly Government to represent the experiences of the university's 6,000 students in Wales. Said the Minister (below, second left with students and OU in Wales Director Heather Graham): "The Open University is an exemplar of best practice in widening access. I am strongly committed to the lifelong learning agenda and adamant that age, disability or family circumstances should not be a barrier."



New course proves a test of character

Which of these statements best reflects your personality? a) I avoid parties; b) my watch is always five minutes fast; c) I'd rather be seen as practical than creative.

If you answered a), congratulations. If you answered b) or c), equally well done. For there are no right or wrong answers – but you've just helped a potential employer make up their mind about you.

Welcome to the world of psychometric testing, a process now used by companies worldwide to test a candidate's suitability – or otherwise – for a position. From just a few apparently uncomplicated questions, a potential boss can assess your experience, knowledge, intelligence and even your emotional state.

On the surface, it seems an ideal, time-saving device to separate the wheat from the chaff. Indeed, so many companies now embrace the practice that it's thought 70

per cent of the British workforce will face at least one example of it during their career. But it also has many detractors – and with good reason.

When it is misapplied, a test legitimises discrimination

"They can work," says Rosalind Searle, who lectures in occupational psychology for the OU. "But it's not just a question of getting someone to do a test. The results have to be applied properly to give a fair assessment."

That's the key word – fair. Says Dr Searle: "When it is misapplied, it legitimises discrimination. When you design such a test, you are naturally defining a realm in which you are interested – but it means that not all the applicants take the test on an equal footing. It's been shown that, for instance, Asian and black people often achieve lower results on ability tests than white people. Findings often also split along gender lines – men think differently from women. Such tests need to be analysed properly by people who know which tests to apply in which context and how to read the results."

There are efforts to bring such assessment into line. In Britain, anyone evaluating results to help a company appoint staff must hold the British Psychological Society's Certificate of Competence in Occupational Testing.

The most recent way to achieve eligibility for this is to complete the OU's new course *Psychometrics: selection and assessment* (D842), which is designed to be accredited by the Society and whose creation was led by Dr Searle. As well as equipping, say, human resources managers with the skills to recruit more fairly, it also paints a fascinating history of psychometric testing all the way back to the Greeks.

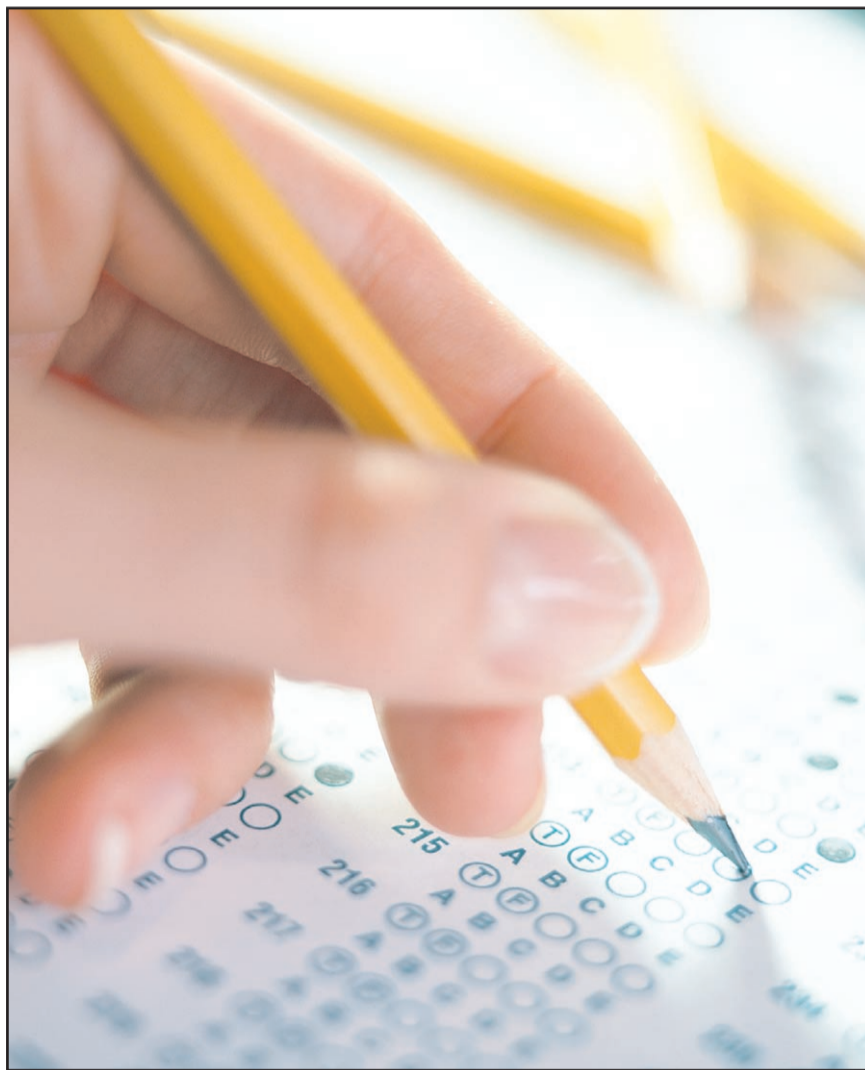
At the turn of the century US authorities devised assessments with the express purpose of keeping people out. Many perfectly able would-be immigrants were refused entry because they failed a citizenship test – and it wasn't until years later that officials acknowledged many of those turned away at Ellis Island in New York had been unfairly tested in a foreign language.

The process continued to evolve over the 20th century – with the satisfyingly ironic footnote that its leading pioneer in America for the Western Electric Company was one Elton Mayo, an Eastern European immigrant who, if he'd tried to get into the country 20 years previously, would have been turned away.

Psychology has now moved on so far that psychometric tests, formerly based on common sense and general knowledge, claim also to assess our "emotional intelligence" and "empathy".

"The tests certainly can have great relevance," says Dr Searle. "For example, work is current devising an empathy measure to aid in the selection of trainee GPs. It's useful because they need to be able to show real concern without becoming too emotionally involved. Assessed properly, such tests can be very valuable tools."

Peter Taylor-Whiffen



Tool or trap? 70 per cent of the workforce may face testing

Picture: Getty Images

Handling death

A PIONEERING course in death and dying has been turned into a study pack for those working in care homes, with financial support from Macmillan Cancer Relief and the Department of Health.

The pack will be available free of charge for use in the workplace to build staff's skills and experience.

The partnership gives a new lease of life to a course – K260 *Death and dying* – first launched in 1993 with DoH funding. It drew on the palliative care approach developed in hospices which specialised in the care of cancer patients. Feedback soon revealed a need for training in care of dying people among all staff levels.

Explained Dr Moyra Sidell, who with colleagues Dr Jeanne Katz and Carol Komaromy from the School of Health and Social Welfare, produced the pack: "It became clear there was a tension in homes between creating a living, homely space and acknowledging that most residents would eventually die there.

Around 32,000 older people die in care homes in England and Wales annually. We realised that research was needed.

"Questionnaires were sent to 1,000 home managers in England and Wales. This created a general picture as well as specific information about what staff knew about palliative care and greatly strengthened our research proposal."

The DoH funded the research into the problems staff and residents face and training needs.

"At the end we produced a draft training pack, which could be used by groups of staff at all grades – many people talk to kitchen assistants as well as to nurses," said Moyra.

"But commercial funding for training is scarce in the residential sector, so on the advice of the DoH we approached Macmillan Cancer Research to fund the pack.

"We feel very optimistic that this will serve the needs of care staff and help improve the quality of care given to dying older people. It is therefore very much in tune with the philosophy of the SHSW and the original *Death and dying* course in its concern to influence practice and improve care," Moyra added.

What's all the fuss about?

In 1998, Tracey Emin's *My Bed* hit the headlines. Apparently just a rumpled bed, strewn with clothes, discarded letters and empty cigarette packets, it caused waves not just in the art world but also in the public consciousness.

But is a knee jerk response to Emin's work and that of other artists such as Rachel Whiteread and Chris Ofili sufficient, or do they deserve serious consideration? writes **Sara Cookson**.

The OU is offering an exciting new course – AA318 *Art of the twentieth century* – to help students make up their own mind.

AA318 has been designed to replace A316 *Modern art: practices and debates*, but doesn't duplicate anything from it and is therefore not an excluded combination. Course chair Paul Wood explains: "Contemporary art is such a rapidly changing field, we needed to re-evaluate the course. And what better time to try to get hold of the art of the last century than at the beginning of the new one?"

Four years in the making, the course concentrates on the main figures such as Picasso, Matisse, Jackson Pollock and Andy Warhol, as well as movements ranging from Dada and Surrealism to Pop, Minimal and Conceptual Art. It comes right up to date with postmodernism.

It's being launched in February 2004, at a time when interest in the visual arts in Britain has never

been higher, stimulated by work from the likes of Hirst, Emin and Whiteread during the 1990s and the opening of Tate Modern in 2000.

Says senior lecturer Gill Perry: "So much has happened in the postmodern art of the last 30 years and it has really grabbed the media and public's attention. One of the things this course is trying to do is to give students a sort of map to follow what has been going on."

"It differs from preceding OU art history courses because it looks not just at paintings but at the whole range of new media – installations, videos, performances – that have become central to contemporary art."

It also moves away from focusing solely on the traditional Western canon. AA318 looks at the increasingly important role of women artists and non-western art, including Australian aboriginal art, as well as the influences of globalisation and multi-culturalism.

A residential school and study days in collaboration with Tate Modern, audio visual aids including a compilation of video art, and four books with more than 1,000 colour illustrations add up to a rich package.

Says Paul Wood: "We are teaching art history as a form of cultural enquiry – a way of getting to grips with the world we live in. It is not about connoisseurship any more."

So much has happened in the postmodern art of the last 30 years and it has really grabbed the media and the public's attention



Retroactive I, 1964 by Robert Rauschenberg © Robert Rauschenberg/VAGA, New York/DACS London 2003

FRONT PAGE STORY

Environment and how IT works

LEARNING equips you to change the world.

That is the thinking behind an innovative new Level 3 environment course U316 *The environmental web*.

The title is particularly fitting for a course that weaves together the knowledge and tools for people to effect change with extensive use of IT and the internet.

Explains course chair Jonathan Silvertown: "We set out to design materials that would allow students to pass two 'tests'. By the end they will be in a position to lead (and correct) any 'pub' conversation on the big environmental issues of the day. Secondly they will be able to take an active part in the quest for solutions at local, national and international level."

He added: "OU environment courses have long been helping people arm themselves intellectually but this course does something more. It places the promises and pitfalls of the worldwide web at its heart, and takes a fresh look at the potential that computing and internet offer environmental learning."

To reflect this, half the study time is based around a course website with web and CD-ROM activities to hone students' independent research skills – including, by the end, the use of a Web Wizard to present their own research findings as web pages.

These activities replace a formal exam, as Jonathan explained: "We thought 'what is the point of teaching web literacy and then testing it with 19th century technology?'"

"But it's important to stress this is a thinking, not a computing course. Students don't need to be computer experts to take it, as all essential software is provided."

A wide range of familiar environmental topics – including climate change, biodiversity and ecosystems, and water resources – are studied through the lens of the course's themes: globalisation, sustainability, uncertainty and governance.

And a range of imaginative activities is employed to ground the learning in students' real lives. For instance, in block two students collect their own biodiversity data for dragonflies, woodlice and birds which they submit to a central database so everyone taking the course can analyse combined data collected throughout the British Isles.

In block three students get the chance to use FAIR – a real climate model developed by the Netherlands' Ministry of the Environment to examine thorny questions around equity and climate change. Stephen Peake of the course team explains:

"FAIR forces numbers to meet philosophy and is good and bad news for students. Bad because they will have to work hard to deal with a tricky model interface. Good because those who want to go on and work in the environment field will have in their back pockets experience that should 'wow' any prospective employer."

Another unique opportunity is the chance to do some training with a leading journalist. Added Stephen: "Students will then go out onto the web to dig up, write and publish their own environmental web news and everyone has the chance to compete for the U316 environmental journalism prize."

A website gives prospective students the chance to try out a few of the activities: www.open.ac.uk/science/env-web



Students will collect their own data on insects and birds Picture: Mike Dodd

How history moved on...

STATUES being toppled along with social norms, a gulf between generations, and political and cultural upheaval.

Many of us have experienced revolution in our lives – but students of the new Level 2 arts course *From Enlightenment to Romanticism* (A207) learn that it has all happened before.

The fascinating course covers a period of intense upheaval which took place from 1780-1830 in music, philosophical and scientific writing, poetry, painting and architecture, across Europe and beyond.

Its constant theme is liberty – political, artistic and personal – with topics ranging from the French Revolution, Napoleon, the "Emperor of Spin", the Lake District, Wordsworth and Byron, the art of Turner, religion, the Olney hymns, the abolition of slavery, exploration, the Brighton Pavilion and Goethe's *Faust*.

Its themes' relevance to every generation means course chairs Tony Lentin and Linda Walsh are expecting interest from a very wide variety of students.

Explained Tony: "We needed to replace the current *Enlightenment* course which has been going for a dozen years or so and it needed extending as a second level multi-disciplinary course. The new course starts where the old one finished and goes on to the French Revolution."

Linda described *Enlightenment* as the cultural movement which stressed the power of reason and science to discover truth and lead to progress, happiness and certainty. The 50 years studied see the transition to Romanticism, developing the cult of the individual; but gentle individuality also grew into violence and revolution.

The course's audio-visual material boasts videos on Rousseau, the Lake District, Byron, the extraordinary women in Napoleonic Times, the trip to Morocco undertaken by Delacroix, Brighton Pavilion, Robert Owen and New Lanark, and the artist Goya. There are also two CD-ROMS (alternative media can be provided), one on Humphry Davy and one on Sir John Soane which incorporates a virtual 360 degree tour of the Soane Museum.

The course is also a great excuse for all kinds of visits to theatres, galleries and museums and students will be able to find out about relevant events on the website at: www.open.ac.uk/arts/a207

It's a world of difference...

...so the OU must ensure its courses and practices are relevant in all cultures. Reports below and right by **Malini Sen** and **Jane Matthews**.

At the start of the third millennium the OU is operating worldwide with students and graduates from a wide range of backgrounds. But do its courses reflect this diversity?

Two seminars held recently highlighted the need for change, as well as reporting on the work of those who are already altering the face of the curriculum.

Among the delegates was Susheila Nasta, Reader in Literature, who argued that diversity needs to permeate the curriculum rather than being found in a few specialist courses.

Ronny Flynn from the Advisory Sub-Committee on Race Equality agreed: "Course teams need to consider all aspects of the curriculum from the perspectives and experiences of those who are not like themselves, and as far as possible to reflect this in the team and the curriculum."

"We need to acknowledge and respect difference and be open about the limitations of our own knowledge and how it can be broadened."

Though broadening the curriculum makes good business sense through its potential to attract new audiences, it is primarily about reflecting more accurately the world in which the OU now operates.

Diversity needs to permeate the curriculum rather than being found in a few specialist courses

Former Professor of Social Sciences Stuart Hall, in an article written for the journal *Wasafiri*, said: "Cultural diversity is not something that is coming in from outside, it is also something that is going on, inside, in relation to Britishness itself... it is specifically designed to shift the spotlight from those folk out there who are challenging, knocking on the door, to those who are inside the well-furnished room itself."

According to Susheila, the OU needs to explore the way it teaches, the way it designs its courses, and the language used.

She said: "We need to be cautious about the values implied in terms such as 'civilisation', 'culture', 'national', 'developing'. For example does 'not European' suggest 'backward' or 'at an earlier stage'?"

Ronny suggests course teams look at how they work and who is doing the work. She said: "Teams should allocate specific planning time to diversity in the curriculum and regularly review their progress."

"For me, it would help to have a much more diverse workforce so we quite naturally draw on different experiences instead of them being an afterthought. Curriculum development is always about selection but may draw from too narrow a pool of expertise."



Diversity in the curriculum requires course teams to "Consider all aspects from the perspectives and experience of those not like themselves" – a route pursued by the course team for U213 *Childhood* (see p8) whose Janet Maybin said: "In a fairly direct way we were guided by the children on content."

Local OU for local people

FUTURE OU students could find themselves working with materials developed for the Arab OU by academics in the Middle East.

That's the view of Dr Brian Beeley, social sciences tutor and consultant for the OU partnership which now offers 20 OU courses in six Middle Eastern countries through the Arab Open University.

Outlining some of the techniques which have been used to adapt OU materials to be more culturally sensitive, Brian argued this should not be a one-way process.

He cited the example of Darwinism covered in DD122 *An introduction to the social sciences* (part 2). "Darwin's theories of evolution are given a good airing in this course but we were aware Islam formally teaches creationism. Our AOU colleagues could see immediately that we couldn't have a respectable social sciences course which has banned Darwin. So after a lot of debate we added a lengthy side note to the text book identifying both the prominence of Darwinism in the West, and the status of creationism in Islam."

Leading on from this, Brian invited AOU colleagues to produce course material on Islamic views of knowledge to be imported into the social sciences faculty in the UK.

He said: "One of the things we might look at in the UK is how far we could bring in some of this experience. We could reassure our Moslem audience in the UK by introducing things that excite them, like family honour. It might make our courses more welcoming and user-friendly to a wider audience."

Interestingly, Brian said adaptation was 'not a major problem' in a partnership where OU academics were working alongside their 'highly globalised' Arab university peers, many of whom had been educated in the US or UK. "They told us they operate in a climate where this is going to be revolutionary and therefore we have to anticipate objections...they were not thinking about students necessarily but about someone looking for something to complain about."

A footnote to the experience is that the Arab OU is also interpreting tutoring differently, placing more emphasis on face-to-face tutorial support and feedback on assignments. www.arabou.org/mainpage



Palestinian Fatima Jaber came to the UK to do her BA but the Arab OU has opened doors for many others

The culture club

BRINGING a broader cultural dimension to the study of art, architecture and design history, is the aim of a three-year project linking the OU with the University of Sussex and Middlesex University.

GLAADH (Globalising Art, Architecture and Design History) was launched in 2001 to promote and disseminate existing good practice in learning and teaching.

"A major spur for trying to broaden the curriculum was embarrassment at being called the 'open' university and still having a relatively closed curriculum in art history, in the sense of being confined to discussing largely Eurocentric issues," said Catherine King, who is with the OU's art history department.

"Belonging to GLAADH has encouraged us to set our goals so that every new art history course will address issues of cultural diversity in some way like the new taught MA in Art History. In this course, I used the work of Erwin Panofsky (early-modern Northern Italian art) and Devangana Desai (Medieval North Indian art) to discuss issues of cultural difference."

"We have also appointed an academic who specialises in modern art and the post-colonial, Niru Ratnam. We plan to include a component addressing issues of globalisation in our new course on *Art of the Twentieth Century* (2004), with Niru's contributions," added Catherine.

Changing places

THE OU's Postgraduate Certificate in Education programme appears to be attracting well above the national average proportion of students from ethnic minorities. Of those stating their ethnicity 26 per cent of OU applicants are non-white, compared to 11 per cent nationally. And of those 12 per cent are black, compared to a national figure of three per cent.

According to the PGCE team, this may stem from the OU's emphasis on finding local partner schools to host locally-based students, who may then choose to remain in the school after they finish their training. A recent report on ethnicity and teachers concluded that 'the combination of family commitments and financial hardship leads most ethnic minority recruits to seek a training place near home'.

Learning from the world's children

Life was tough for anyone born in Britain in 1948: having had to wait until their 21st birthday to reach 'adulthood' they did so at the same time as a host of 18, 19 and 20 year old upstarts benefiting from the 1969 change in the law reducing the age of majority to 18.

The arbitrariness of how different societies in different times and locations define childhood is a useful introduction to a course whose influence on the way childhood is understood extends outside the OU to 'Britain and the world beyond', according to course chair Martin Woodhead.

Clearly a labour of love – and it is likely that anyone studying U212 *Childhood* and meeting, on video, the articulate and engaging spokespeople for the world's children in Bangladesh, Africa, the US and Europe will feel that love too – the course challenges the idea that because we've been children we know what it means to be a child.

While British law may define it as ending at 18, the course team's travels to Chittagong in Bangladesh and Cape Town in South Africa revealed a very different reality. In Chittagong Maya, who is 'about 15', is caring for her own child. "But I don't feel like an adult. I feel I'm a young girl," she says.

She shares her 'adult' responsibilities with the majority of her peers, for whom work is a major feature of growing up. Says Martin: "Most child development textbooks have very little to say about the place of work in children's development... textbook childhoods are constructed as a time for nurture, care, play and learning in the family and at school, consistent with modern Western settings and ideals."

This gap was brought powerfully home when the OU team spent a day filming interviews with three young shoe shine boys. Explains

Janet Maybin, senior lecturer in the OU's Centre for Language and Communications: "We were advised not to give them money but they erupted saying they had lost a day's wages. The producer said it challenged his own assumptions about childhood because they were working and needed reimbursing for their time."

Even back in Britain, some moving footage of 'Kelly and her sisters' included for the course's final block on 'changing childhoods', adds another layer of complexity. All under 12, the children speak to the camera about their concern for their mother Maxine's health. In a revealing moment of role reversal,

Maxine says of her fight against depression. "It was the kids that saved me."

A wealth of material from around the globe introduces a wide range of other debates, refusing to duck what is uncomfortable or controversial – for instance, questions about children's rights, violence, including cases such as Jamie Bulger's murder, and children's sexuality.

Equally problematic have been debates about when childhood begins, which bring with them issues such as abortion and infanticide. "We have been timid in deconstructing the idea of childhood beginning at 0," says OU anthropologist Heather Montgomery, citing the example of cultures who practice infanticide but "do not consider newborns human because their soul has not attached."

"The denial of humanity to the newborn suggests the beginning of childhood is as hotly contested as when it ends," she says.

By tackling the subject from an interdisciplinary and international standpoint, the course team has risen to the challenge of its own introductory statement that "Childhood is now a global issue, forcing a reconsideration of conventional approaches to study."

Childhood is now a global issue, forcing a reconsideration of approaches to study

Honorary degrees: be part of the process

LIKE most other UK universities, the OU makes a series of honorary degree awards each year to people who have made a significant and particular contribution to society. But how does the university decide who it should honour in this way? And how do names get on the list for consideration? It's no secret, says Tony Barker who is secretary to the honorary degrees committee.

The list is compiled from nominations sent in to the committee and all members of the university – students, associate lecturers and full-time staff – are eligible and encouraged to make nominations.

"The awards are conferred at degree ceremonies and the process leading up to it is quite lengthy," says Tony. "We are now entering the period for receipt of nominations for awards to be conferred at ceremonies to be held in 2005 and the closing date is Friday 26 September." Nomination forms are available electronically from the internet (type Honorary Degrees or something similar and the search engine will take you to the right bit of the site) or in hard copy from Jane FitzGerald in the Awards and Ceremonies Centre at Walton Hall (01908 652903 or e-mail j.fitzgerald@open.ac.uk).

Details of the criteria against which each nomination is considered are available, as is the list of those who have been honoured previously, which can be helpful in judging the sort of people the university would wish to be looking at.

Added Tony: "We like to think the range of people honoured represents quite a wide spectrum of achievement and the criteria, that are drawn up by Senate, are deliberately phrased to be as inclusive as possible. But the list that is approved by Senate can only be as good and as broad as the nominations received. So why not become a part of this important university process?"

Apply yourself to succeed

So many applicants, so little time to make an impression. So how can you fine-tune your CV to assist you to get that all-important interview? **Ellen Cocking** of the OU's Careers service has plenty of suggestions.

Writing a CV is never easy: it takes time, concentration and good organisation of the information. But while there is no correct way to do it the following tips should help you make the right impression.

Remember why you are producing it: adapt the CV to the job, emphasising the skills and experience needed for the post.

There are no hard-and-fast rules about how you present the information. But your aim should be to reflect all your best points in relation to the job requirements, while giving the employer a good idea about the kind of person you are.

Your first step should be to gather as much information as you can about the job, then identify the elements of your experience that match the job's main aspects.

If there are specific requirements such as knowledge of a piece of IT software, be precise about your level of expertise. 'Good working knowledge' is too vague – back it up with an example such as 'I have set up an Access database which allows me to produce reports on the level of sales achieved'.

You may be asked for more general skills such as teamworking. Again, give an example such as 'I worked as part of a team of five, which required me to be flexible. When a colleague was absent we would divide up their tasks to ensure no deadlines were missed or customers left waiting'.

Show the relevance of transferable skills, even if previous jobs do not obviously appear to have much in common.

Many skills are transferable such as communication, organisation and planning, time management, leadership, negotiation and team skills. For example, if your experience is mainly of dealing with customers in a retail environment you will have developed communication skills relevant to many other situations. Break your experience down into the skills you have used to carry out your work and this will help you map them onto new situations.

Be concise: try not to exceed two pages as excessively long CVs may be discarded on sight. This often feels difficult, especially if you have a number of periods of employment. You may find you can group these together if the jobs are similar and followed on chronologically.

Something as simple as running your address along one or two lines will reduce the length of the document.

But you may also like to develop a longer, 'master CV' which includes all your experiences and gives you a starting point from which you can edit it to suit each particular vacancy.

Presentation matters: Your CV should be clean and neat with lots of white space so that it is easy to read; word-processed or typed with a standard font 10-12 point size – fancy fonts make it look quirky; have accurate spelling and grammar; should not use capital letters throughout but upper and lower case as appropriate; be printed on white paper with black ink so that it can be photocopied by the employer.

However, there are instances where you may prefer to choose a style to suit the job you are applying for. For example, if you are trying to sell your skills in graphic arts or web development you could turn your CV into a leaflet or website.

Be positive, honest, and not too modest: An employer wants to know what you can do rather than what you can't, and examples always help. For instance, rather than writing 'I suggested a way of raising sales which was used by the company' try 'I suggested sending copies of an advertising brochure to a call centre that had recently opened; as a result our turnover of sandwiches increased by a third'.

More careers advice at: www.open.ac.uk/learners-guide/careers

You don't need to list ALL courses, just those that are relevant.

This can demonstrate that you are focused. However, Elizabeth could have been more specific about her 'helping role': counselling, advocating for, teaching...?

You can keep this brief if including key skills and qualities in your structure. And it's perfectly acceptable to include volunteer work in with your work experience.

Keep this to a maximum of five or six, selecting the main skills required for the job. And give specific examples.

Spelling and punctuation mistakes provide an easy excuse to discard your CV. Don't rely on spell-checker. Ask someone to check it for you.

Provide these if you can to save the employer having to contact you to request them.

ELIZABETH PAGE
5 Hunter's Glen, Edinburgh EH12 5ZZ
Tel: 0131 668 1313

CAREER AIM
Recent psychology graduate, with extensive experience of working with young people and fulfilling post helping disadvantaged young people.

EDUCATION
1995 - 2000
B.Sc.(Hons) Psychology First Class, The Open University
Courses included Child Development (Distinction), Working with Young People and Social Psychology (Distinction)
David Hume High School, Edinburgh
7 'O' Grades
1 Higher English (C)

EXPERIENCE
1991 – present The Silken Umbrella Children's Home, Pathhead
Helping teenagers with additional needs
1992 – 1994 The Everett Project - Volunteer
Organising sporting events for young people
This was an annual event, lasting a week
people there were either in care or were young
1983 - 1991 The Jex Blake Hospital, Edinburgh - Nursing Auxilliary
Helping nurses to feed, wash and dress patients, making beds, serving meals.

KEY SKILLS and PERSONAL QUALITIES
Effective communication skills
In my present job as a car assistant I am responsible for coming to terms with specific difficulties with customers and a sensitive approach to do this. I also plan fun, but include some learning development
Forward planning and ability to prioritise
My Open University assignments had rigorous cut-off dates. I had to plan ahead, so that I was able to give the extra time often required in order to hand in the assignment on time, this involved managing my time effectively around working full-time and running a home which included two school-age children.
Excellent organisational skills
I am responsible for organising outings and activities at the residential home. This involves negotiation with the children about what they would like to do, liaising with staff, planning the outing, organising volunteers to help, ordering the minibus and leading the group.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION
• computer literate, knowledge of Windows 98 and databases
• clean driving licence and minibus certificate
• extensive knowledge and interest in sport

REFEREES AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

Study

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OU? I learned to live with it



OU study is not just hard for the student – it can also take its toll on his or her partner. But OU ‘widower’ **Andrew Guy** (pictured left) found the perfect way to survive – by joining in!

GIVE a view of life as an OU widower in 2003. Justify this view with examples from the last five years (in not more than 500 words).

AIn this article I shall describe the view of an OU widower in 2003, giving examples drawn from personal experience.

I have read all the books recommended for A103 *An introduction to the humanities*, AA313 *Religion in Victorian Britain* and A213 *World religions*. The books for each course arrive in October or November and I begin reading then to get a headstart before the study actually commences in February.

Not that I’m on an OU course, but my wife is and she likes to have someone to talk to about the subject she’s working on at the time. Our children, aged 12 and 14, no longer do essays for homework: they submit TMAs to their teachers and their one dream in life is to Go Away to University.

Many of their friends think we are a one-parent family as they have never seen a mum. Our older children buy me cookbooks and oven gloves for birthday presents. I have my own sewing kit and can dress a fairy princess or discuss ‘women’s things’ with impunity.

If my wife does appear for meals, or at 10pm when I open our nightly barrel of wine (it helps relaxation, not to mention the boost the OU has given the French economy), her head is so full of Picasso, Muezzins, Charles Wesley, Emily Pankhurst, *The Way of the White Cloud*, *The Yellow Brick Road*, Jackson Pollock, musical time signatures and Thomas Aquinas that our conversations bring a new meaning to the word surreal that makes Dali seem positively Renaissance. And then she falls asleep.

I warned her it was a big commitment. I’d heard of people whose houses burned down, marriages broke up and dogs exploded while mum put the finishing touches to a TMA. But “Oh no, it’s only a few hours a week and if I get behind I can always find a little extra time”. This extra time can only be created inside a Tardis (or study as most people call them).

But I wouldn’t have it any other way. I don’t have that sort of dedication, and to say I admire her would be an understated expression of emotion of

which Charles Lamb would be proud. See, it’s catching!

If you are a new OU widow/er, stick by them, cook for them, sew for them, lie for them, clean up after them, love them, and be thankful you’ve got the easy bit.

It’s worth it, believe me. And just think how much you’re going to learn.



Spot the Difference

How can you tell an OU student from the rest of humanity? Here’s **Andrew Guy**’s simple guide to help other NONOUs spot (and avoid?) this strange and gifted breed.

- The stare: when OUs are out walking they stare blankly into space as if they can see something we can’t (their planet, for example).
- The smile: they have a smile which is shared only by Norman Bates and the Stepford Wives.
- De-forestation: a group of OUs – or a tutorial as they like to be called – can make whole trees disappear in a weekend.
- Sound control: this power comes in two forms, the ability to not hear things they decide aren’t important enough for them and the ability to magnify small sounds out of all proportion.
- Materialisation: the ability to appear at a dining table the instant food is ready and to disappear just as quickly at the end of a meal.
- Time control: OUs can make time disappear however hard you try to hold onto it.
- Wine control: see time control.

Study

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Is email easier?

You need an extension on your TMA – do you pick up the phone to your tutor or send an email?

If you’d rather email then you’re not alone, according to a new study into how tutors and students communicate.

The study, prepared by the staff development team in the Open University in the East of England, monitored communications over six months between a group of tutors and students on courses where computing was not an essential element of the course.

To no-one’s surprise, email proved particularly popular when students preferred not to speak to their tutor. Explained author Helen Kaye: “Examples of this included asking for an extension to a TMA, expressing disappointment in a mark and asking what could safely be left out of the coursework.”

“One tutor described it as ‘hiding behind email... on the phone they’d have to have explained themselves’.”

Other ways in which the availability of email has altered the tutoring and student experience included tutors’

feeling that they took a more didactic approach to ‘teaching’ and advising by email, and that its ease of use might make students more passive, “expecting to be spoon-fed rather than learning in

lower costs, compared to phone calls, plus tutors’ ability to deal with queries at convenient times. Email also made it easier to reach and include those unable to get to tutorials, including students with disabilities.

Disadvantages included the realisation that topics that could be covered in a single phone call could extend into a lengthy email trail; some individuals’ reluctance to sit for long periods at a screen in the evenings; and tutor’s perception that the ease of sending an email had raised expectations about getting immediate and frequent responses.

Taken together these factors had definitely increased their workload, OU

tutors reported.

In conclusion the study’s author argues both students and tutors now need proper guidelines to make the most of the new medium and ensure it benefits rather than blights the lives of both groups. In light of expectations that all students will be online by 2005, it has drawn up its own suggestions (see above).

Response time

- Students cannot expect an instant response: 48 hours is an appropriate time to wait for a reply.
- Tutors may decide that a phone call or letter is a more appropriate way of replying.

Privacy and security

- Communications between tutors and students should remain confidential and addresses private, unless people consent.
- Tutors and students are responsible for using virus protection.
- Attachments should only be sent if the recipient has agreed.

Content

- Tutors may give guidance at the start of the course on email communication.
- Emails should be directly relevant to tuition and not, for example, chain letters or jokes.
- Emails should be prepared with the same care as a letter to ensure the content is not abusive or insulting.

Equal opportunities

- Students using email should not expect preferential treatment in terms of turnaround time over those using the telephone.
- Tutors should take care to include those without email when they are distributing handouts.

Do you use email? Let *Sesame* have your views.

a more active way”, said Helen. “One tutor said ‘if it’s written down you’re more answerable’.”

“Tutors also said complex queries by email are time consuming and require planning, whereas comparable phone messages are often about thinking on your feet. This planning time increases workload.”

Advantages were seen as email’s

Decade of eTMAs



ELECTRONIC assignments (eTMAs) may be new to many students, but the team (pictured above) which first created them has just celebrated its brainchild’s 10th anniversary.

From their initial use for overseas students on M205, with two tutors, the uptake has grown enormously. During 2003, more than 110 courses will use the system involving 50,000 students, 4,000 associate lecturers, 230 presentations and close on 200,000 TMAs – about a quarter of all TMAs.

In many areas, eTMAs have led to considerable savings in turnaround time. OUBS has shaved a massive seven days off its average turnaround times on more than 35,000 TMAs, say developers Pete Thomas, Linda (Carswell) Price, Blaine Price, Marian Petre, David Clover and Mike Richards. Faculties also save 17p for every TMA processed electronically instead of by paper.

Said Linda: “eTMAs have been the unsung hero of the OU and changed the face of the way it does things. It was frontier-breaking stuff.”

“We were lucky to have a group of enthusiasts, all with very different skills, and it was always obvious our work was going to have a real impact.”

Among the immediate advantages students and tutors identified 24-hour submission avoiding the postal system, immediate confirmation of receipt, fewer errors in reading scores and faster feedback on tutor’s performance.

Former team manager Pete Thomas, now senior lecturer in Computing, recalled: “Even when it was just a prototype for us, the students were studying for real and we couldn’t let them down. So, big thanks to all those students who volunteered to help.”

Linda said: “There were teething problems, when the modems and connection speeds were a lot slower but students coped very well.”

Survive and thrive – your guide to getting through exams

You've got this far through your course and there's only one hurdle between you and the finishing line – your exam. So here's *Sesame's* guide to getting you there, with advice from other students, and from **Richard Stevens**, a senior lecturer in psychology and chair of the D317 *Social psychology* exam board. By **Lorrie Rickett**.

Q WHY does taking an exam upset some people so much?

FOR some people it's not just about passing an exam. It's about who they are. If they don't do well, it may feel like an indicator that they are stupid. Exam results are also public because friends and family will find out what happened: that's the picture they are presenting to the world so what people feel is a bit like performance anxiety.

Others find it easier to keep exams results in proportion. Just try to think about the fact that the exam is only testing one aspect of your knowledge under very specific circumstances. It is a stage in a process of assessment, not your only chance.

Q DOES having to take the exam in a hall make a difference to the way people perform?

IT can work both ways: it can be reassuring to find other people are also in the same situation. However, watching what other people are doing and whether they finish more quickly or slowly than you can add to the pressure.

Q WHY do some people suffer much worse exam nerves than others?

ANXIETY can actually be very helpful. A small increase is quite likely to improve performance. But people vary a lot in their base

anxiety levels. If you start low, a bit of anxiety can be fine. But if you naturally have a higher base level, then the increase can push you over the top and disrupt your performance. People who suffer from high anxiety need to develop relaxation techniques.

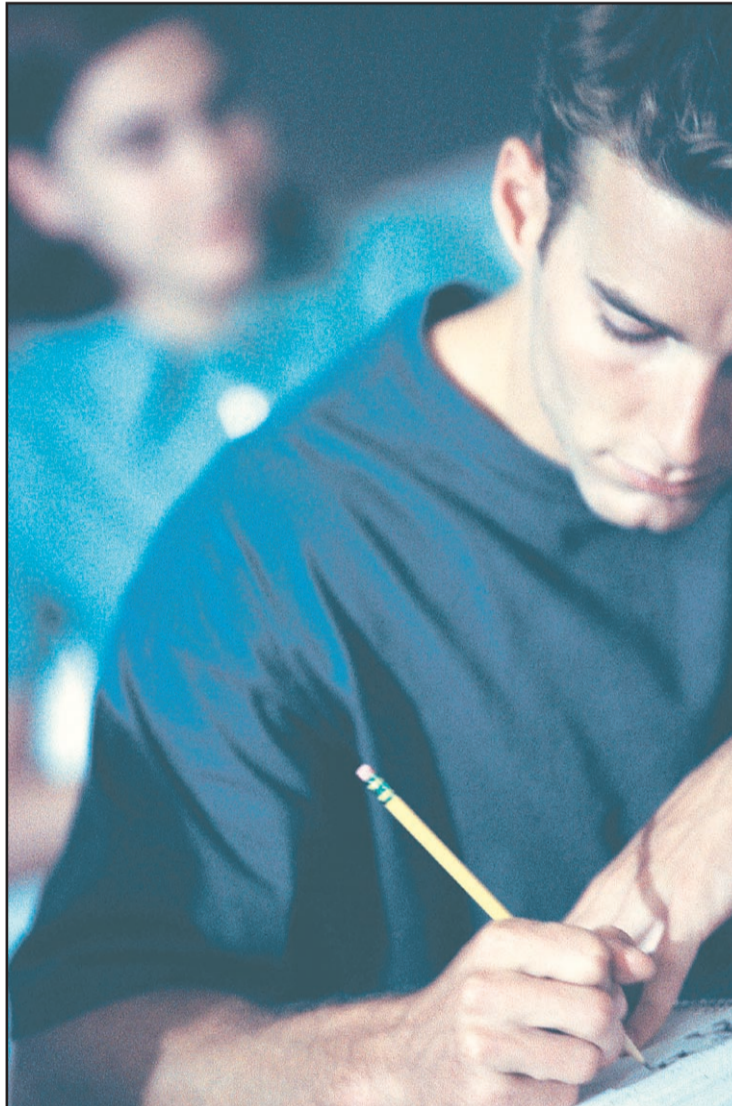
Q WHY have an exam?

TO recognise the level of your knowledge and skill in the subject, under conditions where it is, without doubt, your own work.

Examiners do not set questions which are designed to trip you up. They go out of their way to set fair (albeit demanding) questions which can be answered if you have studied and thought about the ideas and research presented in the course.

Q HOW do you advise people to revise for an exam?

ACTIVE revision is the key. Don't just re-read. Try to remember the key points first and then check your knowledge. A big problem is that the mass of material making up a course can be overwhelming. The answer is organisation and structure. Try to 'chunk' together related material into topics and inter-relate these chunks into a hierarchy. Always try to work from the top down. One strategy that can be useful is to use mnemonics. For example, take the



Exams are part of assessment – not your only chance

Picture: Getty Images

first letter of the key word for each chunk and organise these letters into a nonsense word. If you can remember that word then the rest is likely to come back by association.

When you are revising, try and remember you have a body as well as a mind. Get yourself energised to work by exercising vigorously. Even jump up and down and shout if you want to release the tension.

Q WHAT should students be thinking about approaching the exam?

THINK about the types of questions which might come up. Useful revision clues to content are given in book introductions and conclusions. Chapter headings and review boxes, together with course guides and workbooks, will also point you to key topic areas.

Bear in mind that in the exam you won't be able to write that much. A short introduction is all you will have time for. Most of your answer should be devoted to developing your argument. Write concisely and organise the flow of ideas into a logical sequence. If you have time, you can end with a brief conclusion summarising your arguments/ideas and perhaps commenting on wider implications

and placing ideas in context.

Q WHAT is your advice for doing well on the day?

IF it is an essay type paper which allows you to choose questions, it is vital to give yourself enough time to select carefully which questions you are going to write on (perhaps up to 10 minutes overall). You also need to allow up to 20 per cent of the time allowed for each question to plan what you are going to say. Don't worry if others are busy writing while you are doing this. Far better you organise your answer first so it effectively expresses what you want to say. Keep a careful eye on the clock. If you leave out one question, however brilliantly you do on the others, you are going to lose out.

You won't get marks for waffle, so jot down relevant ideas and information as they come to you and sort these into a sensible argument or sequence, ignoring anything which doesn't then look relevant. Most importantly, make sure you answer the precise question set. Be concise, avoiding overlong sentences, and support your arguments with evidence.

Good luck!

VoxPop

VOX Pop is a chance for you to contribute. It lives on the FirstClass conference system. Look for *Sesame* in the Common Room area of the Open University campus. To post your VOX Pop, simply create a new message and enter *Sesame* VOXPop into the field, enter your views into the body of the message and send the message. If you're not on FirstClass you can still contribute by post, or e-mail to: M.D.France@open.ac.uk

Ron Clark, from Bedworth, studying A354: "All the books are put away about a week before and I re-read all my TMAs with tutors' comments the evening before."

On the day, I drive to the exam centre to be there about 45 minutes ahead, giving me time to sit and relax and have a cuppa. I keep a mental eye on the ice-cold pint that awaits me after it's over."

Martin Phinn, BSc 2001:

"OU exams account for 50 per cent of the course marks, so logically it's worth spending as much time preparing for the exam as in completing TMAs etc. I make time to prepare summary notes for each course I do, which is very useful for learning and revising."

Barbara Jackson, BA (Hons) Lit 2002 and enrolled for AA810 for 2004:

"Practice, practice, practice! Use old exam papers or write your own questions and use them to get used to the type of answers you'll need to produce and also the physical effort needed to write for three hours. One of my tutors said 'You wouldn't try and swim 10 miles without training for it and practising a little every day – so why should you try to take an exam without doing the same?'"

Cheryl Coates, studying three courses to complete a BSc in Mathematical Sciences: "Watch the relevant FirstClass conferences for any advice from the course team/tutors/last year's students/this year's students/ anyone! And try to make the last tutorial (or ring your tutor if you can't)."

Krys Stephenson:

"I study up to the last day, but not the night before. I always take three pens to avoid one running out and the second being faulty. I never leave home without a packet of mints to keep the panic at bay. Then I panic anyway."

Tracey Croft, Cumbria, studying U130:

"My mind goes blank when I start answering questions, so I skim through them and answer the ones I feel most confident about first. Then, by the time I return to the questions I was stuck on, I've calmed down and can attempt them."

Viv Dunstan, Dundee, history/classical studies OU graduate:

"I've found it useful to remember that the exam will be over by a certain point. Remembering that by, say, 5pm, on a certain day, the exam will be finished helps me in the run-up, bringing it down to scale and giving me something to look forward to."

Judith Crompton, London, currently working on modules for the Professional Certificate in management (but with 20 years' experience of OU study):

"Use the specimen exam paper and analyse the types of questions and the structure of the exam. Understand the topics covered – do you need to revise everything? Is there anything you can actively prepare beforehand?"

Do all this as soon as you can, so you can study with the exam in mind. Work out how you would answer the questions. Practise. Then relax! It will all be over in three hours (or less)."

Exam relaxation

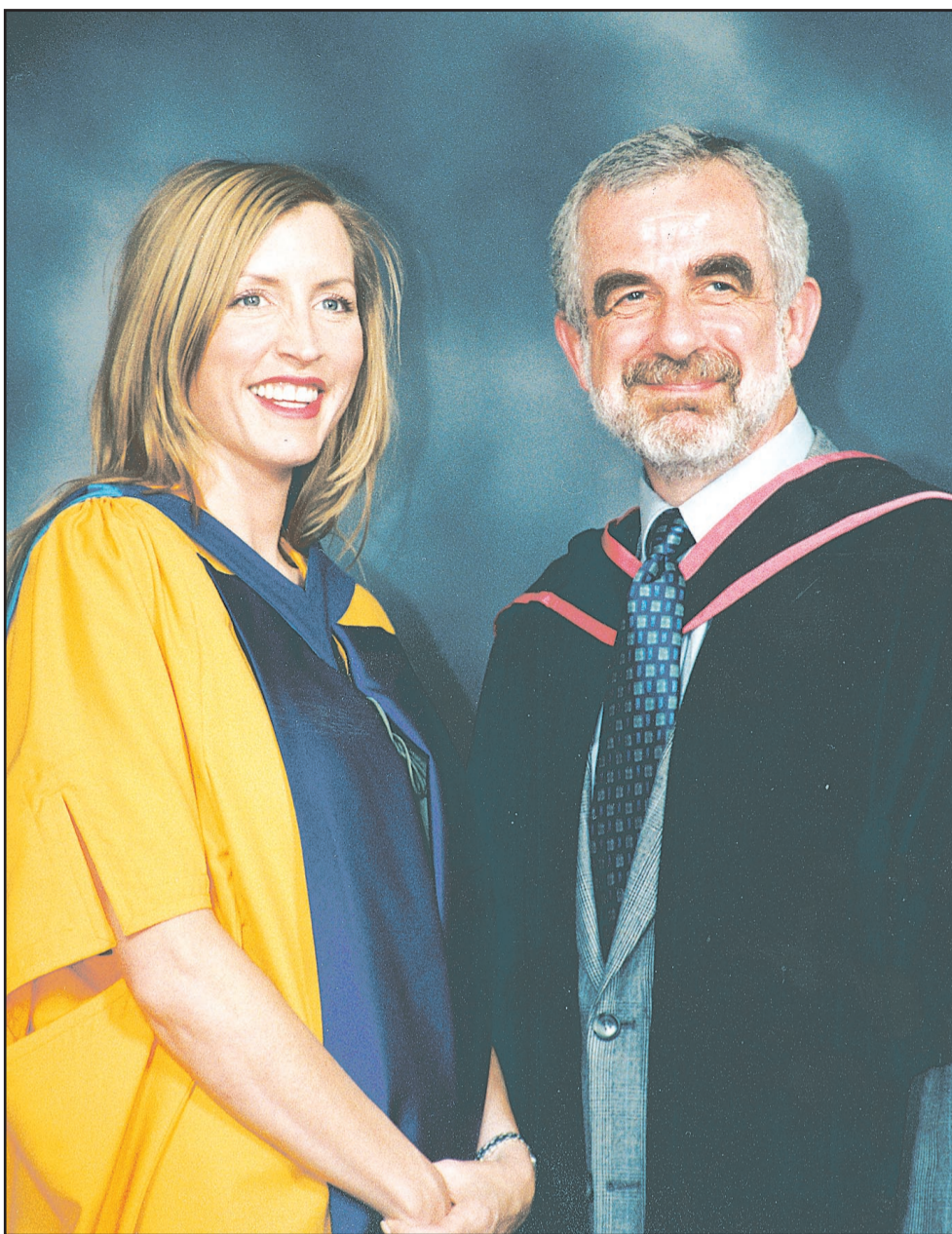
NEVER think you're the only one struggling with exam nerves – being tested is stressful for every student.

But there are lots of tried and tested routes to relaxation which may help you in the days and hours leading up to the examination room. Many of them can be found on the Learners' Guide website www.open.ac.uk/learners-guide, which also has plenty of other advice about surviving exams. For instance, you could try:

- Breathing exercises – these involve breathing in and out slowly through your nose. They slow your pulse and are particularly calming.
- Visualisation techniques – imagine yourself in a calm state taking the examination, feeling purposeful and confident.
- Listen to a relaxation tape or CD, for instance one with chants or sounds of the sea.
- Try acupuncture, hypnotherapy, reflexology, massage, reiki, meditation, tai chi, yoga, or any similar therapy. The OU's Mind, Body and Spirit Club website has useful links to many of these www.open.ac.uk/ouclub/mb.
- Walk through your nerves – a long walk can clear the head and help you put things in perspective.
- Emergency stop – if you panic during the exam itself, say sharply to yourself "Stop!". Then breathe in and hold that breath for a moment before slowly exhaling.

Graduation

graduationgraduationgraduation



Honour for Heather

HEATHER Mills-McCartney joined the list of those who have received honorary awards from the OU when she was presented with a doctorate for her work in campaigning against landmines. She is patron of Adopt-A-Minefield and a United Nations Association Goodwill Ambassador.

"Heather's personal achievements in overcoming her own disability (her left leg was amputated just below the knee in an accident with a police motorcycle in 1993) have been more than matched by her work for and with others who have lost limbs in accidents, through illness or as a result of terrorist activities," said Peter Barnes, Director of the Centre for Childhood, presenting Heather with her award at Portsmouth (pictured above).

Watched proudly from the balcony by sister Fiona who had flown over from Greece and her husband Sir Paul McCartney, Heather said: "I thank the OU for having acknowledged my work. If you set your mind on something, you can achieve it."

See p9 for details of how to nominate someone for an honorary degree.

Celebrations

NEW graduate Julie Gillingwater (pictured right) has found the ultimate way to celebrate her achievement... she's having a baby!

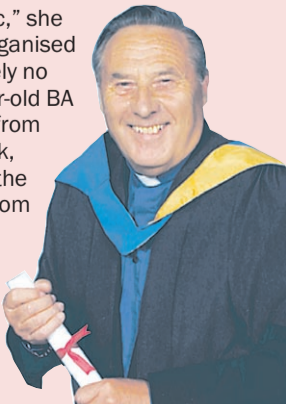
The 38-year-old's nine years of OU study meant she had "neither the time nor the inclination" to start a family. But after finishing her final exams in November, Julie, from Bury St Edmunds, didn't waste any time – and by the time she received her honour at Ely in May, she was already five months pregnant.



Other graduates at the Ely ceremony found different ways to mark their achievement. Vicki Johnson had thought her graduation celebrations would just be a meal out – until a Rolls Royce turned up at her home to take her to the ceremony.

"It was fantastic," she said. "My mum organised it – I had absolutely no idea." The 34-year-old BA (Hons) graduate, from Felixstowe, Suffolk, was chauffeured the 60 miles to and from the Ely ceremony.

Revd Stanley Whiffen (right) was delighted to be watched by his wife and three



Achieving your degree can have enormous significance – as **Sheila Forman** and **Malini Sen** learned from these graduates at the recent ceremony in Portsmouth. While below, **Peter Taylor-Whiffen** finds out how Ely graduates celebrated their success.

Family cheers caring Tracey

It was small wonder that a huge cheer went up in Portsmouth's Guildhall as Tracey Short walked across the stage to receive her BSc Hons in Psychology. For Tracey had overcome more obstacles during her seven years of study than many people face in a lifetime.

Tracey (pictured right), who lives on the Isle of Wight, contracted meningococcal meningitis at the age of four, leaving her with severe headaches which hampered her schooling.

"The traditional path to university was never open to me because of lack of 'O' levels and illness," said Tracey. "I went straight into the workplace, got married, had my daughter and then both my parents were taken seriously ill and I became their full-time carer."

It became important to Tracey to find something that provided a way of looking to the future. Help came in the form of a friend. "She told me all about the way the OU worked and I thought I had finally found a way to learn, around the needs and commitments of my life," said Tracey.

Apart from caring for her parents and family throughout her study, Tracey also had to support her husband who underwent major surgery on both lungs. "The entire seven years of study has been spent around illness, doctors and hospitals," said Tracey. "Yet my books provided me with a release from everything going on around me. The very act of studying provides grounding in something that can be an investment in the future, an alternative to

the here and now," she added.

Tracey's degree has now provided her with new opportunities. "I was recently offered a position on a pioneering initiative by West Hampshire NHS that will start in September," she said.



Degrees prove just the job

MORE and more people are now studying with the OU to enhance their employment opportunities. Both Eileen Frampton and Michael Edwards, who received their BSc degrees at the Portsmouth Guildhall on June 21, said their studies with the OU were a stepping stone to professional development.

"After a break of nearly 20

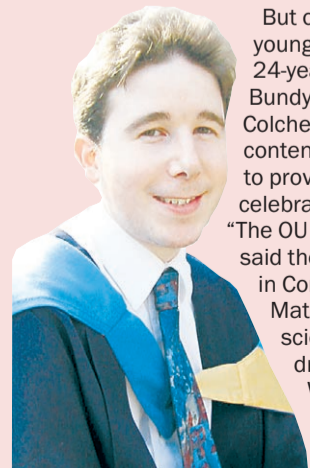
years, I returned to studies. Initially it was for the pure joy of learning, and then I thought it would help me to get a job," said Eileen. Studying with her sons Clive, 19, and Robert, 12, was fun and inspiring. "I hope I was a good role model, and I hope it will encourage them to go for further studies."

Michael, who works at the

Alstom Power's Shorchem power station, said his employers were very supportive. "They paid for my course and I have already got a promotion thanks to my OU studies." Ten members of his family spanning four generations, had travelled from different parts of the UK to be with Michael on his graduation day.

sons as he collected his BA (Hons) in Art History. Said the 69-year-old retired URC minister from Kettering: "I drove us all over here. It's 30 years since we were all together in the same car. There was a lot more room then!"

Gary Hazelden (right), a 34-year-old nurse from Norwich who was picking up his BSc, had enjoyed a champagne lunch with his wife and said: "Both of our children were born during my studies so it's been a long time since we've had the time to enjoy a day out as a couple. That's a lovely way to celebrate."



But one of the day's youngest graduates, 24-year-old Stephen Bundy (left) from Colchester, was content for the OU to provide the celebratory feast. "The OU was fantastic," said the BSc graduate in Computing and Mathematical sciences. "I had to drop out of Warwick University because of medical

problems. But I couldn't have asked for better courses."

His father, referring to the packed tea included with tickets for the cathedral, chipped in: "To celebrate we're having some prawn sandwiches. We know how to live..."

People peoplepeoplepeople

Study on the move

An OU qualification may well be a passport to going places in your career – but for some students going places figures heavily in the route to their degree, as, ‘trolley dolly’ **Ruth Woodbine** explains.

I have worked as cabin crew for a major airline since 1997 and, although I absolutely love my job, it’s fair to say it doesn’t require me to use my brain to full capacity. After school I went to university and got a degree in biomedical science: I love learning so joining the OU four years ago was perfect for me.

It is very rare for me to make it to tutorials because of shift patterns. Our season starts to get busy around April – just when the OU wants me to be studying.

Nor can I register for courses with residential schools because I can’t guarantee I will be allowed the week off. My job dictates greatly how, when and what I can study – and that’s before the jet-lag!

So how do I cope? Well, I use the free time that I do have very productively. Most of my days off fall in the week, which is perfect for getting the shopping done quickly and then getting

back home. And of course the library is open.

I also make little prompt cards to carry around with me to glance at when I get a few minutes. I’ve been known to get the other crew to test me in the back galley.

Every now and then I get a long haul trip and get to sit by the pool or on the beach for a week. I always take my books with me and get a few funny looks when I’m busy with my pen and paper between applying suntan lotion.

One down side to long haul trips is that I can be away when a TMA is due, so I can’t

I happen to think I have one of the best jobs to do while studying with the OU

leave it until the last minute and drive it to the letter box myself. Forward planning and time management are very



Ruth Woodbine

important: the study calendar hangs next to my roster and I know exactly when I should be doing everything, and what country I’m doing it in.

Another thing I couldn’t do without is an understanding tutor. When the tragic events of September 11 occurred there was great uncertainty and disruption. Our work patterns were completely changed. I was given a much-needed extension and the help from my tutor saved me from wasting a whole year’s work.

Finally, I think the biggest key to keeping going is to

pick courses that really interest me. When choosing the next course I know it will be hard enough to balance it with my career. It would be worse if I had no interest or understanding of the topics and had to force myself to spend my free time working on it.

I happen to think I have one of the best jobs to do while studying with the OU, and I’m not the only one among my colleagues who thinks so. So please remember, next time you fly, some of the trolley dollies do have a brain.

Degree is lifeline for Ray

WHEN Ray Jeffery was given five years to live he was determined to find something to do that would last longer... so he started an OU degree.

It’s now eight years since the doctor gave his prognosis and not only can Ray (pictured right) proudly show off his BA in Social Sciences – he’s just collected a national adult learner’s award for his efforts.

“When I tested HIV positive and the doctor suggested I wouldn’t last long, I instinctively thought: ‘Right, I’ll show you’,” said the 32-year-old from Manchester.

Ray drew up a 10-year plan, with his academic aspirations “right at the top”.

“I didn’t want to die not having at least tried to get a degree,” said Ray, who left school with CSEs. “Because I hadn’t got the qualifications, I turned to the OU. It was the best thing I could have done. The textbooks were great, the tutors really inspiring and there was the flexibility. I would often have bad days when I felt really ill – I still do – but studying with the OU meant I never had to work when I didn’t feel well enough.

“And it helped me in other ways. I’ve also suffered from depression and really didn’t want to learn around other people. But then I went to summer school and had a fantastic time, and that really picked me up and inspired me.”

Ray is now keen to carry on learning. “I want to do a postgrad certificate and

then a masters,” he said. “And I’d really like the opportunity to go into lecturing. I want to teach people who, like me, want to learn, rather than youngsters who sit in a classroom because they have to.”

“Thanks to the drugs my health is, if anything, slightly better than it was in 1995. And while you never know what the future holds, more advanced drugs are coming on the market every day.”

Added Ray: “I think setting myself goals for 10 years had a hugely positive influence on my physical health. I’ve done what I most wanted to do so I can go to my hole in the ground satisfied I’ve achieved something. But although I’ve come to terms with my own mortality I don’t want to die – nobody does. I’m planning things to keep me occupied for a few years yet.”



surveysurvey**survey**survey**Readership survey**

Time to have a say on Sesame

It's 18 months since we last asked for your views on *Sesame* and in that time we've tried to incorporate many of your suggestions.

Now we'd like your feedback again, to see what more we can do to ensure *Sesame* remains an interesting and useful part of your OU life.

If you'd rather not cut up this copy you can complete the survey online at: <http://elsa.open.ac.uk/sesame.survey>

As a way of saying thank you, all those who supply their name and address will be entered into a prize draw to win a DVD/Video Player.

Please return completed forms to: *Sesame* Readership Survey, The Open University, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes MK7 6AA.



Currently *Sesame* appears six times a year. Do you think:

- ☐ This frequency is about right
☐ I'd like more copies
☐ I'd like fewer copies

How long do you spend reading each issue?

- ☐ Less than 15 minutes
☐ 15-30 minutes
☐ More than 30 minutes

How many people read your copy of *Sesame*?

Below is a list of features which appear regularly. Please help us get the balance right by telling us which you'd like more or less of:

	more of	about right	less of
University news	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Study support articles	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Courses information	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
OU research features	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Careers advice	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Articles by students/tutors	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
People stories	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Readers' letters	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fifth Column	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Open Line	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Books	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
TV previews	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Is there anything not on this list which you would like to see in *Sesame*?

***OU Student* appears inside each issue of *Sesame*. How useful/interesting do you find it?**

- ☐ Very
☐ Fairly
☐ Not at all

Would you be interested in taking a *Sesame* holiday?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

What type of holiday would you be interested in? (eg short breaks/cultural/course-related/family/budget etc.)

***Sesame* has its own website. How often do you visit it?**

Which of the following is true for you?

- ☐ I prefer to receive *Sesame* as a printed newspaper
☐ I would like to see *Sesame* making more use of its website as an alternative to print
☐ I would prefer to receive all news and features online

Please rate the following statements:

	Strongly Agree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly Disagree
<i>Sesame</i> keeps me up to date with what is happening at my university	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<i>Sesame</i> helps me feel part of the OU community	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<i>Sesame</i> helps support me in my studies through relevant articles	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Overall I am happy with <i>Sesame</i> 's quality	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

For students of the Open University Business School and School of Health and Social Welfare only.

As a trial, *Sesame* has handed over the back page of this and the previous issue to your school for its news. Have you found these special editions:

- ☐ Very interesting
☐ Fairly interesting
☐ Not interesting

Would you like to see a page in future editions devoted to your school?

- ☐ In every issue
☐ Occasionally
☐ Not at all

Finally, *Sesame* has just appointed McMillan-Scott to handle advertising. Our shared aim is to ensure it is useful and relevant and to use revenue to make further improvements. To help us please tell us:

What types of advertising would you like to see in *Sesame*?

- ☐ Study aids

- ☐ Other institutions' courses
☐ Holidays/travel
☐ IT and computing
☐ Financial services
☐ Lifestyle (leisure, books, music etc)
☐ Recruitment
☐ Mail-order services

In which age group are you?

- ☐ Under 25
☐ 25-34
☐ 35-44
☐ 45-60
☐ over 60

Please indicate your approximate annual income.

- ☐ Under £10,000
☐ £10-£19,999
☐ £20-£29,000
☐ Over £30,000

How many cars in your household?

Do you run a home computer?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

How would you describe your occupation?

Are you studying with the OU for:

- ☐ Personal development
☐ Career enhancement
☐ Both

Have you ever purchased goods or services promoted in *Sesame*?

Prize Draw Entry

Name

Address

Postcode

Email address

Web war and peace

Travellers tales is an occasional series, featuring reports from readers whose travels help their OU studies. £50 for those we use.

OU computing student **Marijke Keet** is webmaster of the Irish Peace Society, which has just won university awards for both its campaigning and fundraising work and for its website. The judges made special mention of the Society's fact-finding visit to Lebanon, described here by Marijke.

Like the vast majority of OU students, I'm no different in having full-time activities next to my IT and computing studies. One of these is as chairperson and webmaster of the Irish Peace Society, and it was in this capacity I had the opportunity to go on an educational journey to Lebanon.

The main aim was to experience first-hand the situation of post-war Lebanon, including

Palestinian refugees who have been displaced in this region; to visit the Toulain Literacy Project – a programme which aims to open education and training opportunities for adults, mainly women, deprived of them by years of war; and to interview politicians and meet the webmaster of the resistance organisation Hizbollah, Hussein Naboulsi.

Since my return I have been verbally

attacked for the mere fact I've spoken to Hizbollah members. But this report of our meeting is meant to be a factual and informative account of an extraordinary experience, no more or less.

Given our common interest in the role of webmaster, Hussein Naboulsi and I exchanged ideas on what he referred to as the "media war", where he felt Hizbollah's presence on the internet was important for two reasons.

First, it is important to have the freedom to publish information on what you want to tell the internet community, and about what the organisation stands for, as opposed to being confined solely to the label 'terrorist organisation'.

Like any other website, Hizbollah's is under continuous construction and will, in time, include more information on topics such as its agricultural projects (for example Jihad Al Binaa), academic papers, an explanation of the theological background for self-sacrificing (suicide) operations, and translations, besides English and Arabic, into French, Spanish and Hebrew.

Whereas I just develop a site to suit my clients and myself, Hussein pointed out that for him it is important to re-design the layout of the site "to suit the Western psyche". (For example, removing the Kalashnikov on the start page – though to date this is still your first greeting on the entry page of the website).

Second, knowledge of IT gave Hizbollah the opportunity to become engaged in a cyber war after the liberation of most of South Lebanon



Lebanese-Israeli border



Peace Society on tour – Marijke is second row, second left

from Israeli occupation in May 2000. They placed a "simple button" on their site with the text 'defend resistance' with a (hidden) onclick resulting in the crashing of Israeli government websites. It makes one think twice about randomly surfing and clicking around on websites – as well as about the programming code that could make that happen.

I'm also curious about the hardware and software used for Hizbollah's web server, as most US companies have a blacklist of countries and organisations they're not supposed to be dealing with.

All in all, it was a highly informative meeting, and struck an interesting balance with the other activities that were organised by our field co-ordinator Victoria Firmo-Fontan, like an interview with former Prime Minister Salim Hoss, who is very much focused on trying to implement democracy in Lebanon, and Abass Awala, head of the Toulain Adult Literacy Programme in South Lebanon.

Irish Peace Society: www.peace.ie. Discussion of cyber-war: www.hir.harvard.edu/articles/index.html?id=905

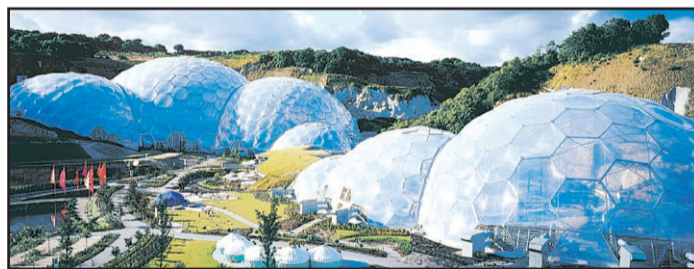
Reader holidays Cornwall

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THIS value for money self-drive holiday in a superb central location staying at the Tregurrian Hotel or Apartments in Watergate Bay is offered to readers of *Sesame* by Travelsmith Holidays Ltd. If gardens aren't your thing, there are many other activities on offer in the area such as golf, walking or just sitting in a garden pub enjoying the warmth of the Gulf Stream. This offer is a special discounted one to readers of *Sesame* and these special prices can only be made with Travelsmith Holidays on 0870748 1000 or 01621 784666 quoting **C170/OU**.

Bruges and Lille Christmas markets

3 days – £129.

Departing December 19.

JUST across the Channel are the enchanting medieval cities of Lille and Bruges, hosts each year of two small but most enjoyable, magical Christmas markets.

Lille is one of France's best kept secrets and during the festive season its picturesque streets and squares are transformed into a delightful market where beautifully decorated stalls offer excellent seasonal gifts. The festive fare continues in the "Venice of the North" – Bruges, perhaps Europe's most perfectly preserved medieval city and world famous for exquisite handmade lace and those wonderfully rich Belgian chocolates and pralines! Its picturesque network of canals, cobbled streets, historic buildings and

wealth of culture take on a magical feel at Christmas time with the much celebrated Christmas Market.

With two nights accommodation with continental breakfast in four star accommodation in the heart of Bruges, as well as two fantastic Christmas markets and a visit to see the production of the handmade chocolates, this weekend is a great opportunity to complete your Christmas shopping in the most wonderful of atmospheres!

For further details of this holiday contact: Diamond Holidays, Overstone House, Kettering Road, Market Harborough, Leics, LE16 8AW. Tel: 01858 467200 or fax 01858 434030, quoting reference code: **SE6778**.

Legacy for a better world

TECHNOLOGY students have been given financial help towards their degrees after a grant-giving body offered the OU thousands of pounds worth of scholarships.

The Comino Foundation, launched because its late founder Demetrius Comino wanted to encourage people to leave the world a better place than they found it, is halfway through a three-year agreement to donate a total £18,000 to help students with their studies.

So far 12 students on T402 *The open technology project* and T801 *MSc dissertation* courses have won contributions of up to £1,000 towards their studies, and there's still time for more to be nominated for the final batch of awards to be given next year.

The scholarships have helped students in a number of ways. Peter Broadbent from Southampton, who used the money to build and test a jet pump, said it was "hard to imagine how the project would have developed without this practical element. The sponsorship has allowed me to concentrate on the demands of the project and reduce the associated financial concern."

Jane George of Pinner used her award to research how effectively environmental issues are taught in schools, adding "as a full-time mother the scholarship allowed me to concentrate on the research rather than worrying about the cost".

The scholarships are awarded to commemorate Norman Bailey, who worked closely with Demetrius Comino to establish the £multi-million Dexion Group of companies. The OU and the National Extension College were chosen by the Foundation because both men believed passionately in lifelong learning.

To be eligible for the final batch of awards students must demonstrate persistence in their studies to date, explain what they aim to achieve by studying a particular technology course, and how an award would help. The closing date is November, with successful candidates given the good news in December.

Students on the relevant courses will automatically be given further information on how to apply.

Write deal for Karen

Novelist Karen Sainsbury has tangible proof of the value of an OU degree – the writing skills she learned gaining her BA landed her a £70,000 book deal.

The 32-year-old says studying authors improved her own writing – and the discipline of having to pen assignments trained her to stay focused when writing fiction.

“I always enjoyed writing but studying with the OU really sharpened my skills,” said Karen, who was paid the advance for two novels after Orion Books outbid seven other publishers interested in printing her work.

“To be a good writer you have to be a good reader, and my studies introduced me to so many excellent authors. Through the OU I also became interested in French literature, which has proved an enormous influence,” she added.

The OU also taught Karen about determination. She explained: “We lived on a mountainside in Scotland and most of our village was regularly without electricity. I didn’t mind, though – it

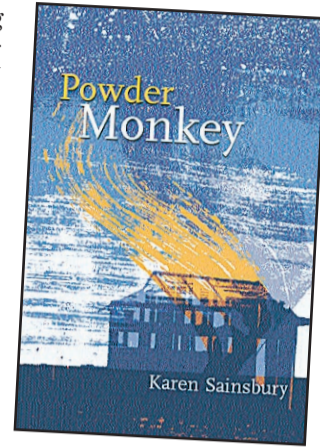
actually brought my studies to life knowing I was reading about 19th century writers with a little understanding of the conditions under which they used to write.”

I always enjoyed writing but studying with the OU really sharpened my skills

Things became bleaker during her final year, when her son was born at just 24 weeks and Karen spent three months with him in intensive care – continuing her studies as a distraction from the severity of his condition. “Thankfully, he came through and is now like any other healthy nine-year-old,” said Karen, who moved to Somerset.

“I’m now doing tours, and waiting to see how the first book (*Powder Monkey*, about the trials of a Scottish teenager) fares, as that’s just gone into paperback. I’ve finished writing the second book and Orion are looking to publish that early next year.

“It’s fantastic to have a job that pays you for something that you absolutely love doing,” added Karen. “I’m very lucky, but it all started with my studies. I’ve got the OU to thank.”



Here’s your chance to write 300 to-the-point words on an OU subject that gets right up your nose – and we’ll pay you £50 for the privilege.

Fight the age bias

argues
Suzanne Lockyer



I am surprised that the OU cannot do more to challenge ageist views.

I started with the OU, having completed a degree at a ‘conventional’ university and subsequently having had a bad experience on the job market due to ageism. At my first tutorial I was the youngest student but since then I have done several courses with the OU and found a good mix of ages. But what is really striking is the number and ability of people at the higher end of the age category.

I have also done a postgraduate course at the same ‘conventional’ university and although some lectures were timetabled for two hours most ended after about 40 minutes as this was the limit of the students’ attention span.

Age discrimination is currently being debated and the OU should be playing an active role. It must have many statistics supporting the abilities of ‘older’ people.

A *Sesame* article on ‘Action on race equality’ stated that the OU advocates ‘promotion of equal opportunities for all our students no matter their ethnicity, social, economic or educational background’. Does the OU no longer support equality on grounds of age?

I maintain that ageism is as much a problem as racism in this country, and in some ways worse because it is so insidious. It is accepted even by its victims. Consider the following, which if used against ethnic minorities would be illegal and unacceptable:

- Taunts, name calling and derogatory comments such as ‘wrinkly’, ‘granny’, ‘olds’ etc;
- Basis for advertisements (‘even granny can do it’ etc);
- Sports commentary always mentions age: if someone does something when young it is exceptional – ‘only 17’ – if when old it is considered a miracle they are still standing;
- Having to declare age on the front of most application forms, therefore used as a filter;
- Having to declare honestly – most equal opps monitoring forms ask for the racial group to which you FEEL you belong. I FEEL 20 so can I put this down?

Suzanne is currently studying Oceanography with the OU and hopes to complete her degree in Natural Sciences next year.

Bookshelf

● EXPERIENCE of teaching at colleges and universities throughout England and Ireland, and in Nigeria and South Africa, has enriched the books published by OU tutor Professor Robert Crawford.

Robert, who now lives in West Sussex, has been an associate lecturer with the OU for almost 30 years and currently teaches on A213 *World religions*, in both Brighton and Southampton.

With seven titles already to his name, Robert’s latest book *What is Religion?* is dedicated, he says, “to the many OU students taught over the years”.

As well as offering an introduction to different belief-systems the book considers how the boundaries of faith might be drawn now and in the future, with an exploration of key themes such as ritual, ethics and salvation.

Said Robert, whose book is being translated into Greek and Portuguese: “It is intended to help students embarking on religious courses understand the basics before coming to the set books and units.”

***What is Religion?* is published by Routledge price £13.99 (ISBN: 0-415-22671-6).**

● AN MBA graduate has had a poem accepted for an anti-war anthology which will benefit the children of Iraq. Hillary Taylor’s work *I Have A Label* is among a collection of stories, poetry and artwork for children that features in *Lines in the Sand: New Writing on War and Peace*. Sales will raise money for a UNICEF emergency appeal.

The book features thoughts on conflicts in the Falklands, Afghanistan, Nigeria, the Gulf and Kosovo, as well as the Spanish Civil War and the two World Wars, the second of which is the theme for Hillary’s poem, written through the eyes of an evacuee.

“I’ve always written, short stories mainly, and I wanted to do something more with my writing when I had the time,” said Hillary, who trained as an electrical engineer. “I even enjoyed writing my TMAs!”

***Lines In The Sand* was published in June by Frances Lincoln (ISBN: 0-7112-2282-7), priced £4.99.**

● ASSOCIATE lecturer Richard Read’s book *Data Communications and Computer Networks* has just been updated for a second edition. The book, a broad introductory text for computer scientists and engineers, is co-written with training specialist Mike Duck.

Richard, who teaches T327 *Radio frequency engineering* and T305 *Digital communications*, has updated the work to include reference to modern networking issues and a new chapter on TCP/IP.

The book costs £29.99 and is available at www.pearson.com (ISBN 0-13-093047-4).

Clear and clever

SOME philosophy students will tell you a clear, easy-to-read book about the subject can exist only in the imagination. Don’t believe them.

The reality is that Francis Roberts’ *The Philosophy Workbook* is a well structured introduction to the discipline and is as jargon-free and clearly written as even the most

doubtful critic might imagine.

“The hallmark of a philosopher,” explains the OU associate lecturer early on, “is the ability to formulate and assess his or her own theories of morals, knowledge, beauty, truth and scientific progress.”

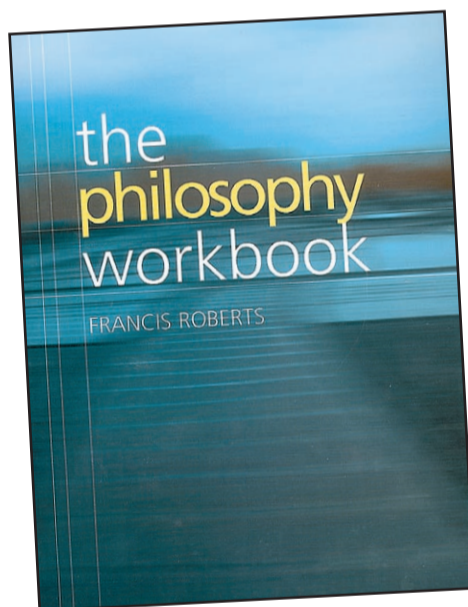
Having established what he wants to achieve, Roberts carefully and gently guides the reader through such heady stuff as consequentialism, epistemology, empiricism, falsifiability and the cosmological argument.

These are weighty subjects that challenge the mind, and the author certainly doesn’t underestimate his readers. But his skill is the clarity with which he presents the information, and the deliberate ploy of making most of the chapters self-contained, enabling the reader to dip in to any subject – usually without needing knowledge of what has gone before.

Another strength is Roberts’ attempt to make a heavy subject easier with occasional light humour. He wisely doesn’t overdo it – although I’m sure all philosophers would love a good Ethics Girl joke now and again.

The Philosophy Workbook by Francis Roberts is published by Edinburgh University Press (ISBN 0-7486-1696-9) priced £17.99.

Peter Taylor-Whiffen



Susan recalls a historic life

SUSAN Tolman’s autobiography is not just a personal memoir; it is also a family and social history.

Its first section tells the story of the author’s childhood years. The personal tale is, as is the minutiae of many people’s lives, often routine, even humdrum. What makes it remarkable is the dramatic geographical and historical setting in which the story unfolds. It is set in Vienna in the period of financial and political upheaval leading up to the Anschluss – the union of Germany and Austria in 1938.

This strange juxtaposition of extraordinary and banal events is what makes the book so readable. Dramatic tales of the Nazis marching into Vienna and of the author’s father having to burn his books are set against some charming anecdotes. Such reminiscences are seldom found in the literature of the time: the fog of great political events tends to obscure the simple stories of everyday life.

Susan Tolman is an expert linguist and a graduate of the Open University. Her book affords a valuable



personal insight into the turbulent times through which she lived.

Scenes from Yesterday by Susan Tolman is published by The Book Guild, priced £16.95. ISBN: 1-85776-683-0.
Roy Henderson