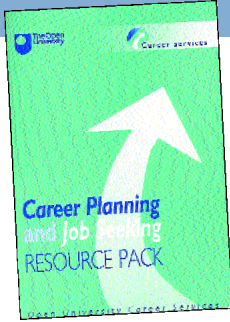


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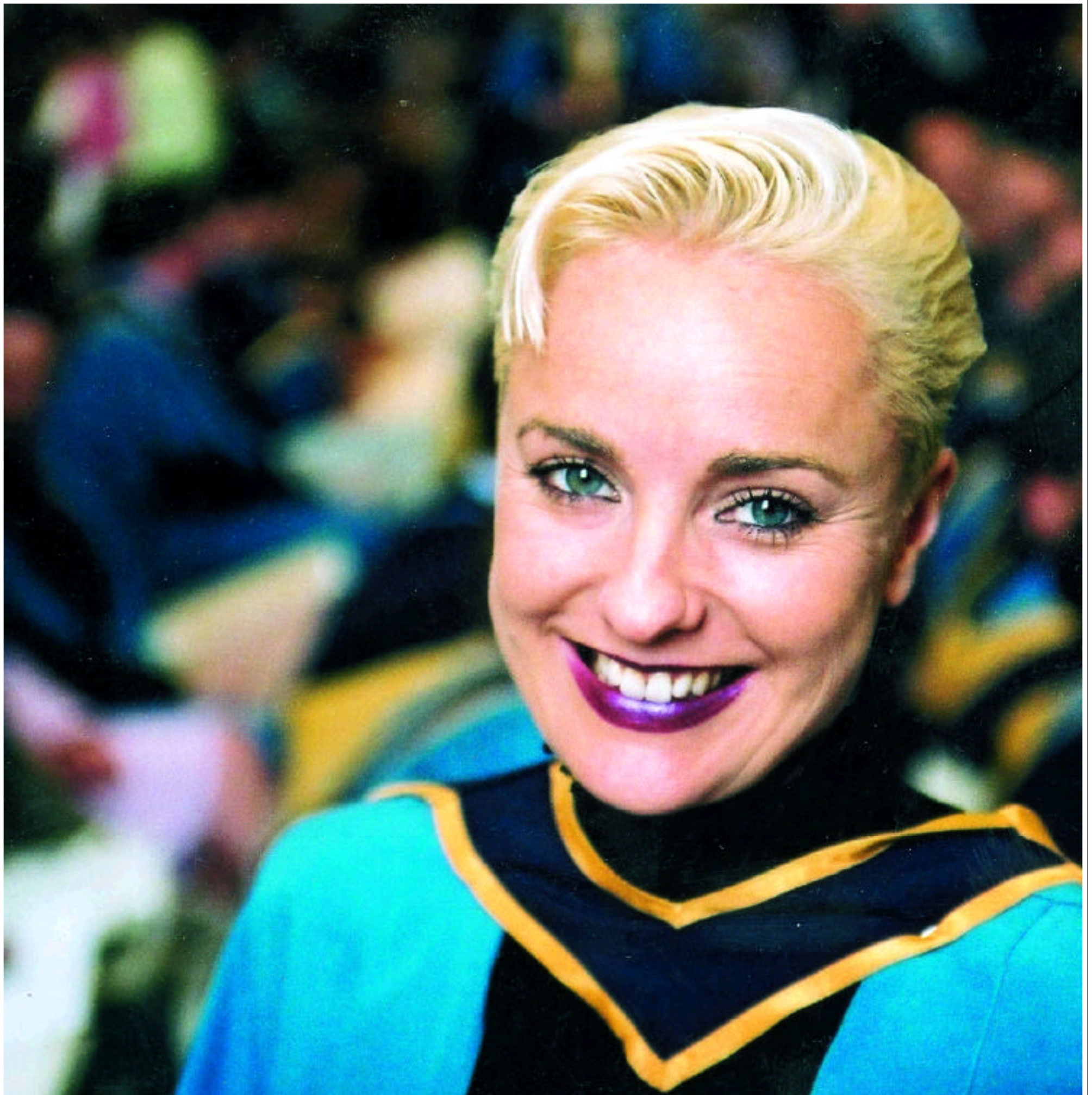


Sesame

June/July 2002

Reaching the Open University community worldwide

Issue Number 209



Round-up of this year's graduation news ● pages 11-12

Chantal wins approval for OU degree

By Peter Taylor-Whiffen

Belgium-based student Chantal Alenus has opened up opportunities for students throughout Europe after campaigning to get her OU degree recognised in her home country.

Chantal began studying nine years ago knowing that her BSc (Hons) would count for nothing with Belgian employers, who insisted that only a Masters matched the country's Licentiaat qualification.

So all the time she was taking her biology degree, she consistently campaigned to government departments and Belgian universities to recognise the OU standard – and after years of hard work, finally won her battle last month.

"I am delighted," said Chantal, who lives and works in Antwerp. "I had had a couple of unfortunate experiences with Belgian education and the OU suited me perfectly, but it didn't carry any weight here.

"So before I began, I told the authorities what I was doing and then I had to go to the Ministry of the Flemish Community. The people there told me to photocopy everything I had done, which they would send to four top Belgian universities to be assessed. They told me if three of them approved, I would get my recognition."

But even that wasn't straightforward – only three universities were contacted and, while two recognised the course and Chantal's work as of an exceptionally high standard, the other returned it saying it wasn't good enough.

"It seemed very odd

that two had given me such glowing reports and the other had turned me down, so I queried it," said Chantal. "It turned out there had been a mix-up and when the university looked at it again, it approved it."

Chantal, who was born in the Congo and brought up in Burundi before going to a French-speaking school in the Ivory Coast, learned about the OU from her sister, who heard of it while she was at university in Liverpool.

"The OU is fantastic," said Chantal, who is fluent in English, French and Dutch and can also speak Swahili. "In Belgium and Holland if you want to do a particular degree, you strictly study only that subject all the way through. With the OU you can mix and match so you're always doing aspects that interest you.

"I think the education system in Belgium is probably much better now than it was when I tried to learn here, but I remember passing an exam was seen very much as a privilege which wasn't open to everyone. In contrast, at the OU I found the tutors really encouraged me, really wanted me to pass."

Chantal's flexible study time also attracted a lot of interest. "I would be reading text books on the bus, or I'd get them out, say, in the park, and people would ask what I was doing. They were very surprised to learn I was doing a course at a university in Britain."

Now Chantal, who currently works in her husband's medical practice, is preparing to use her newly approved degree to gain other employment and hopes her experience will help students in other parts of Europe.

"Qualifications should be recognised in different countries," she said. "We live in a European Union. It just makes sense."



See Muddles Youth Theatre Group at Open Day

Come along to OU Open Day

Is the Open University just a machine for churning out courses, or does it have a heart and soul? Open Day, Saturday June 22, is your chance to find out, when the Walton Hall campus opens its doors to all and lays bare the inner workings of the university.

The whole-day event, which takes place in and out of doors, is a family-friendly mix of entertainment, intellectual stimulation and information about all aspects of the OU, from research and study opportunities to services for students. It's also a great opportunity to meet fellow students – for the 140,000 students now using the FirstClass conferencing system, it may be the chance to put a face to what was just a name on a computer screen.

If you're not sure what course to do next or what is available, the Student Services team from the OU in the South will be on hand all day in the Berrill Coffee Shop to talk to you, along with staff from the faculties, and educational and careers advisors. You can also find out about new technology for supporting students from the Student Services Planning Office. And you can hear new Open University Students Association President Alison Ryan talking about OUSA's role in the university in the Old Lecture Theatre at 2.15pm.

From 11am to 5pm displays from all university faculties and departments will be open, and the emphasis is on fun as well as information. So as well as sampling courses and resources you can enjoy opportunities for hands-on exploration in all the disciplines: play musical instruments and handle

excavated objects from classical times in the Arts marquee; have a go at gold-panning and extract DNA from plants courtesy of the Science faculty; try out the graphics calculator and do the self-assessment quiz to find out which maths course suits you best; and experiment with different operating systems, internet browsers and educational websites for children in the Technology Faculty's internet cafe.

The latest on the mission to Mars project, Beagle 2, will be on display and the BBC production centre will be open to give an insight into the making of OU TV programmes.

And there's a chance to join a workshop on getting the most from FirstClass.

A programme of more than 20 lectures runs throughout the day, with contributions from all faculties. Entertainment highlights include a brass band and folk group from Switzerland; Muddles children's theatre open air performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; morris and Scottish country dancing; the Mahogany Hall Jazzmen and, for those making an evening of it, a juggling workshop and a Caribbean Dance Band and disco. There's lots for children, including face-painting, circus skills, Postman Pat and a range of other activities organised by individual university departments. A variety of refreshments is available and bars are open all day. Overnight camping facilities are available but must be pre-booked, email est-openday@open.ac.uk or phone 01908 65399. More details including full programme on the Open Day website at: www.open.ac.uk/open-day



From Russia with LINK



A decade of partnership was the toast when the OU's Russian partners, LINK, visited the UK in May.

The aim of the 27-strong delegation (pictured above) was both to celebrate 10 years of delivering Open University Business School courses throughout Russia,

Latvia and the Ukraine – and to look forward.

Their two-day programme also included a chance to hear Professor Rob Paton talking about the impact of management education on the transitional economies of Central and Eastern Europe, plus a visit to the OU in the South

regional office at Oxford where they heard presentations on student recruitment, student support and the differences between Russian and UK tutoring.

Over the 10 years LINK has delivered OUBS programmes at more than 90 study centres across eight time zones.

News

Reform is way forward, tutors hear

Students need recognition of achievements they demonstrate throughout their OU study in areas such as self-direction, action planning, creativity and networking.

That's the view of Peter Knight, Director of the Centre for Outcomes-Based Education – which grew out of the Vocational Qualifications Centre.

Speaking to an audience of course teams and tutors at a recent Learning and Teaching Day, Peter argued that changes in the employment market mean students are far more likely to need evidence of creativity, independence and skill at making a presentation than they are to need proof that they can write essays or solve routine problems.

Throughout their OU careers students notch up 'fabulous achievements', he said and the university needs to look at ways of helping them identify and supply evidence of these – whether for work, for going into postgraduate education, or simply 'for life'. He said: "Often students don't realise what they have learned. We need to ensure that programmes are designed to give them a chance to gain evidence of the achievements in these areas – which are extremely marketable."

He also argued for 'assessment reform', which was more important than ever in view of the national drive to bring more people into higher education. Said Peter: "Many people get test anxiety. Impending assessments can encourage people to drop out and poor assessment results can dishearten. There is some evidence that people from groups less used to higher education are more vulnerable to test anxiety. Assessment reform is needed, partly to ease test stress, but also to steer learners towards slow and complex learning achievements."

What are your views on recognition for key skills and assessment methods? Let **Sesame** know... send any comments to: **Sesame**, The Open University, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes, MK7 6AA or email: sesame@open.ac.uk



Language learners gathered in Cambridge recently to receive certificates celebrating their achievement. The 35 students from the East of England had all gained a Diploma in French, German or Spanish. Said staff tutor Lina Adinolfi: "To know another language is a means of appreciating difference, for extending our vision and understanding."

Effects of debt uncovered

HOW much does the fear of debt influence which courses students take? Does the thought of owing money influence whether they study full- or part-time? And where they study?

These are just some of the questions being asked in an OU-based survey to find out the impact of debt on higher education in the UK. The study, commissioned by Universities UK, is being conducted by the OU's London-based Centre for Higher

Education Research and Information (CHERI), which is trying to discover whether being in the red – and working to pay their way out of it – have an effect on current students' academic performance.

Project manager Brenda Little, John Brennan and research assistant Alejandro Duaso are also trying to determine whether, as a result, students with particular socio-economic characteristics are inclined to follow particular methods of study.

Openings attracts award

The OU's Openings programme has won a national award for its work in attracting more learners, particularly those with low educational qualifications, into higher education.

The programme has attracted nearly 10,000 learners in 16 months, studying one of five short, pre-degree level courses in arts, social science, maths, science or technology.

Part of the OU's strategy to widen participation in higher education, Openings offers free places for lone parents, students with disabilities, students from ethnic minority groups and those on state benefits.

The New Learning Opportunities award was one of ten presented by the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE). Openings won the "progression onto HE category."

Universities UK, which sponsored the OU's award, said: "The Openings programme at the OU provides a valuable example of the imaginative projects that are being developed so that a wider range of adult learners can benefit from the opportunities which today's higher education system has to offer."

Update

Women ALs beat gender barriers

By **Malini Sen**

Part-time employment as an OU Associate Lecturer and the professional development offered in that role have helped to overcome some of the career barriers met by women in higher education.

That is one of the findings of a major national report produced for the UK's ATHENA project commissioned to look into the problem of retaining women staff in higher education.

Gender barriers are particularly acute within science and technology academic careers: evident in the workplace directly through pay and conditions and indirectly through constraints imposed on women by the commitments of primary childcare, including the detrimental impact of career breaks.

leaky pipeline

According to the report, the Open University 'mops up' women who have been siphoned off from higher education careers through the so-called 'leaky pipeline'.

"The 'pipeline' approach has been used frequently to provide an analogy to the supply of female scientists. However, the multiple hurdles that women have to face results in a leak through the pipeline rather than a smooth flow down an ever-narrowing pipeline," said Elizabeth Whitelegg from the Centre for Science Education.

The Associate Lecturers in Science Report

was commissioned by the UK's ATHENA Project and the OU as part of a national drive to improve the recruitment, retention and progression of women in science, engineering and technology in HE careers. The report's findings demonstrate how the OU, due to its flexible employment patterns, restores women's confidence in their abilities, and assists in actively developing their careers.

routes

For many women this part-time AL work has been a way to remain in HE while taking a career break or has been a route to (re-)enter conventional HE careers. "An obvious attraction of AL work for many women, particularly those with childcare responsibilities, is the flexibility the hours offer and the fact that most of the work is based at home," said Barbara Hodgson from the Institute of Educational Technology. "Role-based training, professional and personal development is offered so that ALs can develop as higher education teachers," she added.

"A challenge for HE institutions – if they are serious about increasing the number of women they employ in science, engineering and technology – is to devise strategies to retain or re-employ these women," said Elizabeth.

The full report is available on the IET research website: <http://iet.open.ac.uk/research/projects/index.cfm>



Teams rise to challenge

HERE'S your starter for ten – which higher education institution won both the student and staff trophies at a recent University Challenge competition?

OU representatives on the Isle of Man scooped top prizes in both categories in a contest which featured teams from all seven HE institutions on the island.

Tutor counsellors Bob Smith (social sciences), Margaret Burrows (maths) and Jill Quirk (humanities) and Isle of Man OUSA chair Claire Cooper are pictured above (right to left) on their way to claiming the staff prize at the Douglas event, which was covered by Manx newspapers and the local radio station.

The student section saw an all-OU final, with Tim Kenyon, graduate Sue Peers and husband and wife Karl and Nicki Gaskell defeating David Allwood, Donald Brown, Donald Quick and his (non-student) wife Mavis.

The other OU student team could raise only three players, but that didn't stop Vicky Hurst, John Walmsley and Phil Older claiming the third spot in the preliminary round.

News

Have your say at Earth Summit

An individual can't change the world alone, but the OU is launching a website to give voice to people around the globe who want to influence the UN's World Summit for Sustainable Development. When world leaders and an expected 60,000 delegates meet in Johannesburg in late August to negotiate a global plan of action, the agenda may have been shaped by online discussion on the 'Earth Summit for All' website created by OU Technology Senior Lecturer Gary Alexander (<http://earthsummit.open.ac.uk>).

"Earth Summit for All is an educational web portal to enable the general public to participate in and learn about the Jo'burg summit – the first one of the internet era," explained Gary.

Unlike the 1992 Rio Summit where the emphasis was on treaties between governments, the outcomes of the Johannesburg event will include partnership projects bringing together the non-governmental interest groups.

Said Gary: "Most of the delegates will come from organisations like development agencies, trade unions and environmental groups. The Earth Summit for All site can help

them formulate their projects with a coherent voice."

The chance for people across the world to 'meet' online and join debates on topics such as emergency aid, fair trade, initiatives for peace and schools for sustainability is 'too important an opportunity to miss', given our failure to arrest climate change and the increase in poverty since Rio, he added.

"This is a great example of active democracy. It can present the views of a schoolboy in China alongside those of the housewife in Manchester or the academic in Milton Keynes.

Other features of the OU-funded project include software allowing contributors to vote on issues and rate the quality of comments.

Said Vice-Chancellor Professor Brenda Gourley: "We cannot all be at the World Summit. A great many of us, however, can participate in discussion and polling that will help develop proposals for the Summit to implement.

"The internet gives us a really powerful tool to co-ordinate ideas and present a case from a much broader base. It is a forum for expressing views, sharing information and playing a part in world affairs."

Awards honour students' efforts

A student who was awarded her degree as she lay in a coma has been honoured with a special OU award.

June Davies was days away from the deadline for her final dissertation when she was rushed into intensive care with a life-threatening, flesh-eating disease – having already battled breast cancer and skin cancer during her studies.

Knowing how hard she'd worked for her BA (Hons) Humanities, her husband John asked the OU if assessors would accept her 6,000-word draft and her notes instead of a finished TMA.

They did, she earned her degree and now 68-year-old June from Torquay is the recipient of one of the annual Sir John Daniel Awards, set up in 2001 to acknowledge the special efforts OU students make in their studies in

difficult personal circumstances.

"My studies helped me enormously," said June. "They really kept me going. It was either that or flounder in self-pity and I certainly didn't want to do that.

"There are thousands of OU students with thousands of stories," she says. "I have a husband who has supported me every step of the way. What about single mothers who look after their children, have to go out to work and are still able to do a degree? I take my hat off to them. They make my efforts pale into insignificance."

Fellow recipient Ann Selley hopes her story will encourage people to look beyond someone's disability. The planning department office manager at Shropshire County Council, who has a facial disfigurement as a result of a

tumour and surgery, says her BSc (Hons) in Social Sciences has given her enormous confidence in all aspects of her life.

"The course itself helped me to understand people's reactions to me, and I learned that the more confident I was, and the more in control of my life I appeared to be, the more they would see me just as a person and the less they would notice my disfigurement.

"But I have really felt, while I have been achieving my degree, a great boost in my general self-confidence and self-belief – it's had a really positive effect."

A further Sir John Daniel Award, presented to the person who attained the highest marks in the online course T171 *You, your computer and the net*, was won by Cardiff student Catherine Kennedy.

Shakespeare at summer schools

Students Paul Gladwin and Sarah Knight are once again bringing their distinctive version of Shakespeare to this summer's residential schools.

The duo, who when they are not studying with the OU run The Principal Theatre Company, were one of the highlights of last year's AA306 *Shakespeare* school with workshops demonstrating how actors and directors get to grips with roles and interpretation.

This year they will be bringing animated sessions on *Twelfth Night* and *Macbeth* into OU classrooms, giving participants the chance to contribute their ideas and see them translated into action.

For those not attending the Shakespeare residential schools it is still possible to catch the action when Principal takes *Twelfth Night* to the grounds of Grovelands House at the North London Priory Hospital for a spectacular open air performance. The performances run from July 25 - August 10 with half price previews on July 23-24.

Said Paul: "Everyone knows this is the Queen's Jubilee Year but not many people realise this is also *Twelfth Night's* 400th anniversary. Our production is set in the rip-roaring 1920s and incorporates plenty of comedy, song and dance."

Box office Tel: 020 8807 6680, or visit: www.principal-theatre.org.uk



News in brief

Lottery cash boost

LOTTERY cash will help researchers discover how online learning can help disadvantaged groups take part in education. The Open University in the East of England and the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education joined forces to secure a grant of £396,199 from the Community Fund for a three year study into 'Overcoming Social Exclusion through Online Learning'.

Flexible route to top

NINETY per cent of students who achieved an MBA with the OU this year reported at least one work-based promotion during or on completion of their studies.

More than 1,500 people from 17 countries completed the course with the University's Business School, which attracted 40 per cent of all distance-learning MBA students.

More than 60 per cent of those who graduated were sponsored by their employers. OUBS Dean Roland Kaye said: "Students come to us because we offer a flexible route to a top, accredited management qualification."

New OUBS course

A COURSE to develop leadership skills in the workplace is to be launched nationwide by the Open University Business School.

Leading For Results aims to "develop individuals into leaders who can create a cohesive, motivated, well-managed and well-led workforce where all employees are striving for the same ends".

Pilot schemes encouraged 60 staff at the Newcastle City Health Trust and the 3Ns Mental Health Trust to relate theory and concepts of the course to aspects of their own job and organisation. Students reported that the 12-16 week part-time course left them better able to motivate staff, gave them more confidence and taught them how to achieve objectives.

David Hicks, 3Ns' head of education and training, said: "There was a huge learning curve. People adopted new styles of working and feel more comfortable in their job."

For more details, contact Nicci Carr at the OUBS Corporate Development Unit on 01908 659196.

Language winner

LITERATURE student Michelle Allan has been awarded this year's Sue Roseveare prize for her 'immensely perceptive responses to language' and essays that 'are a real pleasure to read'.

The prize is awarded annually in the West Midlands region in memory of Sue, who was an inspirational tutor on arts foundation courses until her death in 1991. Many former students contributed to help fund the prize, given to the arts foundation student showing the most promise in writing about literature.

Misplaced in OUSA

APOLOGIES to Amanda Ryan, Assistant Registrar (Examinations Operations), whom we wrongly placed in OUSA in our story 'OUSA member card identifies you in exams' (*Sesame* 208).

Study guide success

HIGH street book store Waterstones have named the OU's *The Good Study Guide* in its top 500 titles. The accolade means the book will feature prominently in each of Waterstones' 200 bookshops. It also confirms the experience of suppliers Open University Worldwide, for whom the *Good Study Guide* series has been its bestseller, both through its web shop and telephone sales.

Opening your Eyes

CATCH up on news of OU graduates, latest research, and a range of special offers exclusively for the university community, in the latest *Open Eye* magazine. Produced for the university's alumni, the magazine is also available free of charge to interested students. Write or ring for your copy to: Alumni Relations Office, Open University, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes MK14 7AJ. Tel + 44 (0) 1908 653815.

See Sesame online

MORE of your favourite features, plus the latest news and views appear on *Sesame's* website: www.open.ac.uk/sesame – which aims to keep you up to date between issues. You can also click on the site if you prefer to read your *Sesame* online.

Spotlight on OU Societies

A forum to discuss development and environment issues is the aim of the **Open University Development and Environment Society**. The club also provides a place for students to share any study difficulties. Trips are a popular part of the programme and the club always welcomes new members and ideas for events. Below, club member **Janet Sharp**, reports on OUDES' latest study tour – to South India in January.

Led by two OU tutors, we were a group with widely ranging interests: from development management, the environment, health care, education and culture right through to photography and birdwatching. We learned a great deal from each other's areas of expertise, and the various enthusiasms were infectious.

We began at Chennai, formerly Madras, in the state of Tamil Nadu, where on the day of arrival, wrestling with jet lag and bewildering first impressions, we held intense intellectual discussions with a society of Indian graduates from British universities. Next morning some of the group travelled for an overnight visit to an integrated rural development project, some on a field visit to a village environmental project, while others visited a village project undertaken by members of Chennai's St Andrew's Church. The day was rounded off by a lively evening discussion with local novelist Shreekumar Varma.

This hectic pace set the tone for the following days. At Bangalore, in the state of Karnataka, we found a planned and ordered city, its smart buildings, swept streets and flowered boulevards a contrast to the rubbish strewn Chennai. India's growing IT industry is based here, and we found many signs of prosperity, not least in the ultra modern technology park where we visited a call centre servicing US companies. However, there are stark contrasts in Karnataka between the haves and the have-nots, with large city slums and only 30 per cent literacy statewide.

Kerala, we discovered, provided yet another of the multitude of surprising contrasts we encountered throughout our trip. With an impressive 97 per cent literacy rate, and much less obvious poverty and inequality, its success is linked to a succession of democratically elected communist and left-wing State governments, building on an enlightened matrilineal tradition of the maharajas of Travancore. However, its teetering economy relies heavily on the fragile tourist industry, and we found government austerity measures such as education cuts and power rationing were already in place, so it is debatable whether its current success will be sustainable.



Our second base in Kerala was beside the sea at Kovalam, then to a remote tribal area to see photovoltaic cells bringing solar lighting to isolated communities. The high-tech solar panels seemed incongruous on the palm thatched mud huts, furnished with nothing but a few cooking pots and, in pride of place, two low energy light bulbs. But this technology had made a lot of difference with the opportunity to generate income through weaving during the evenings.

My own personal highlights of the trip were the opportunities to talk to an impressive array of authors and poets, whose works filled in for me so much of the background and explanations for what we were seeing and experiencing. Meeting Kamala Das, the controversial Kerala poet and writer who was nominated in 1994 for the Nobel Prize in Literature, was a different experience. Her playful manner camouflaged her courage in flouting convention by writing about feminine sexuality. The most rewarding cultural experience for all, however, was on our last evening, in a garden strewn with garlands of marigolds, lit by clay lamps and filled with the scent of jasmine, where the poet Ayappa Paniker gave an enchanting reading of his poems.

I had not expected to discover so much about being a human being.

If you would like your society to be featured in a future Spotlight please send details to Sesame@open.ac.uk Tel: 01908 652451.

Focus

Help for those with a hidden disadvantage

By Peter Taylor-Whiffen

Dyslexia is defined somewhat blithely by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as 'abnormal difficulty in reading and spelling'. To those who have it, it can mean short-term memory weakness, an inability to be organised, a lack of fine motor skills and so much trouble putting down or deciphering written words or numbers that tasks others take for granted can take hour upon frustrated hour of intense concentration.

Which means any OU student with even mild dyslexia has to put in enormous extra effort for the physical task of studying – even before trying to understand the concepts and ideas behind their course material. They go through an extraordinary struggle to get their degree.

"There are a wide range of aspects you could link to dyslexia," says OU Assistant Director R04 and convenor of the OU Dyslexia Working Group, Vicki Goodwin, who has worked in the field for more than 12 years. "Everybody displays some of these. Some of us are clumsier than average, others can't remember lists of letters or numbers like a cash card PIN, and many people have difficulty spelling. On their own, none of these makes us dyslexic. However, if you display a considerable number of indicators, you are probably dyslexic or severely dyslexic, which can make your life incredibly difficult."

More than 1,000 OU students have declared dyslexia, but Vicki and her colleague Bonita Thomson are convinced there are countless others, many of whom will be suffering the problems of study in silence.

huge effort

"The label can be a relief for some, because it makes them realise there's an explanation and they're not 'thick', but others are horrified by the dyslexia tag," says Bonita. "Sometimes they are not aware themselves that they may be dyslexic and, despite huge effort, they do not do themselves justice, particularly in exams."

To give yourself a little insight into some of the difficulties such students face, try taking down dictation with your



Vicki Goodwin (left) and Bonita Thomson

'wrong' writing hand. "This exercise automatically makes the non-dyslexic concentrate so hard on the physical act of writing that they're not even able to focus upon what the speaker is saying," says Vicki. This experience mimics some of the difficulties that dyslexic students may have. Their efforts are so geared to getting down the transcription of symbols, remembering the matching of letters to sounds, that they have little memory left over to cope with the content of whatever is being said.

Many – though not all – dyslexic OU students have tales of how they came to the university after leaving school early because they simply couldn't cope with it. They and their families knew they were

intelligent – and could see they were strong in other areas. But they struggled to write their ideas down and, crucially, pass exams. In some cases they may have shown their frustration by being disruptive in the classroom, earning them the label 'trouble-maker' – which made learning even more difficult.

"For many, difficulties at school led to limited career choices: going for the 'safe option', careers in which they knew they wouldn't be put in certain situations which would frustrate or embarrass them," says Bonita. "Many who come to the OU are very determined, given their experience at school."

support

The university is constantly trying to find ways of giving better support to dyslexic students. There is a printed Dyslexia Toolkit, which is also about to go on the OU website, to help students with strategies and encourage students and tutors to work together. Through DSAs (Disabled Student Allowances) students can also get help with reading aids such as coloured overlays which enable some to read more clearly, and can ask for longer to take exams. In addition Bonita and Vicki are currently running a course to help OU staff understand dyslexia.

But dyslexics still have problems with the mountain of written material that comes their way – right from the first prospectus and the registration forms. Many exams still rely almost exclusively on literacy skills, which is insufferably frustrating to someone who knows all the answers but cannot translate those ideas into words on a page.

Living with dyslexia

It took an OU course for Jan Margetts to discover the reason she'd struggled at school – she was dyslexic.

Jan was attending a summer school in York as part of her psychology degree when her tutor identified the condition. "As you can imagine, that thrilled me on the first day of a course ..."

But the discovery helped to solve a lifetime's mystery for Jan, who had always thought she was, as she put it, "a bit thick" at school. "I managed to battle through but it was always difficult."

It was Jan's struggle at school that had prompted her to come to the OU because she believed she would do better if given more time to study. This year the 33-year-old from Giffnock, Glasgow will collect her OU degree.

Jan has been an insurance clerk for 14 years and is determined her dyslexia will make no difference to her work – or the way her colleagues treat her. "I don't want anything to change at work," she says. "Before I knew about the dyslexia I used to make an excuse to read memos in my office so I could get a ruler out to put underneath the words. I suppose I considered not being able to read properly, which is what this is, as a weakness."

"But I still go out of my way not to draw attention to it. I sit at my desk with my back to the wall so people can't look over my shoulder."

OU-NHS partnership

Partnership is prescription for healthy future

By Jane Matthews

Most hospitals and health centres are built of concrete. But it's the 'concrete ceiling', which most concerns a number of health trusts and their Open University partners.

Just a few months after nursing's professional body gave its approval, a handful of healthcare assistants and NHS support workers opened the page of their first K100 *Understanding health and social care* textbook – the first step on a journey which will enable them to practice as registered nurses under the pre-registration nursing programme.

At Oxleas NHS Trust in South London, where 15 mental health support workers are now working towards nurse registration with the OU, Head of Nursing Practice Geoff Brennann says he could have filled the places twice over.

"The great thing for me is we are now able to take someone right through to being a nurse in the Trust. These are people who are already doing very high level work. They have been in the service for a long time doing unglamorous work. They are workers who deliver good nursing care. What we are doing is giving them a stepladder."

Added Geoff: "In the past there has been not so much a glass ceiling as a concrete ceiling."

Vicky King has been working as a health care assistant for almost 20 years. She says: "In those days you were looked down on. I couldn't train as a nurse because I didn't have the qualifications and because of my family circumstances, but I always felt my potential wasn't being used."

"I'm being paid to do this so I'm going to grasp the opportunity with both hands. Already my nursing practice has changed. In the past I would speak my mind, now I know how to challenge things to get positive results."

For each of the 15 the fabric of that barrier is different. John Blovev left school with no qualifications and worked in a wide range of jobs before, he says, "I found my niche in mental health care; being part of helping people to interact with the community in the way most of us take for granted is brilliant."

He recognises the substantial lifeskills he can bring to his work, but was blocked in his ambition of becoming a registered mental health nurse by entry requirements. "We do a lot of key working with the clients, in some

cases more than staff nurses who are tied up with other things, but in the past we have not been given the opportunity to progress."

Family circumstances prevented colleague Grant Baker from progressing within the Mental Health Crisis Resolution Team, where he is an outreach worker. "Working full-time with a family to support the other options like university or college were not open to me.

"I really enjoy the work I do but I can't go any further until I'm qualified."

Leland Graham entered the health service only seven years ago, after careers in mechanical engineering and transport management. He says: "Nursing never came into my mind when I was at school but I don't think, at 16, I would have been mature enough. I am finding the course really interesting and it is helping me understand the system and the importance of inter-disciplinary care teams."

The OU's flexibility is a key feature of the programme, which students will normally complete in four years. It is also a chance for the university to revisit its mission, according to programme director Viv Martin: "This is allowing access to higher education and a professional qualification through a new route to adults who wouldn't have been able to access it before. If you look at the social work diploma and how that has transformed training you can see the potential of this programme for widening participation.

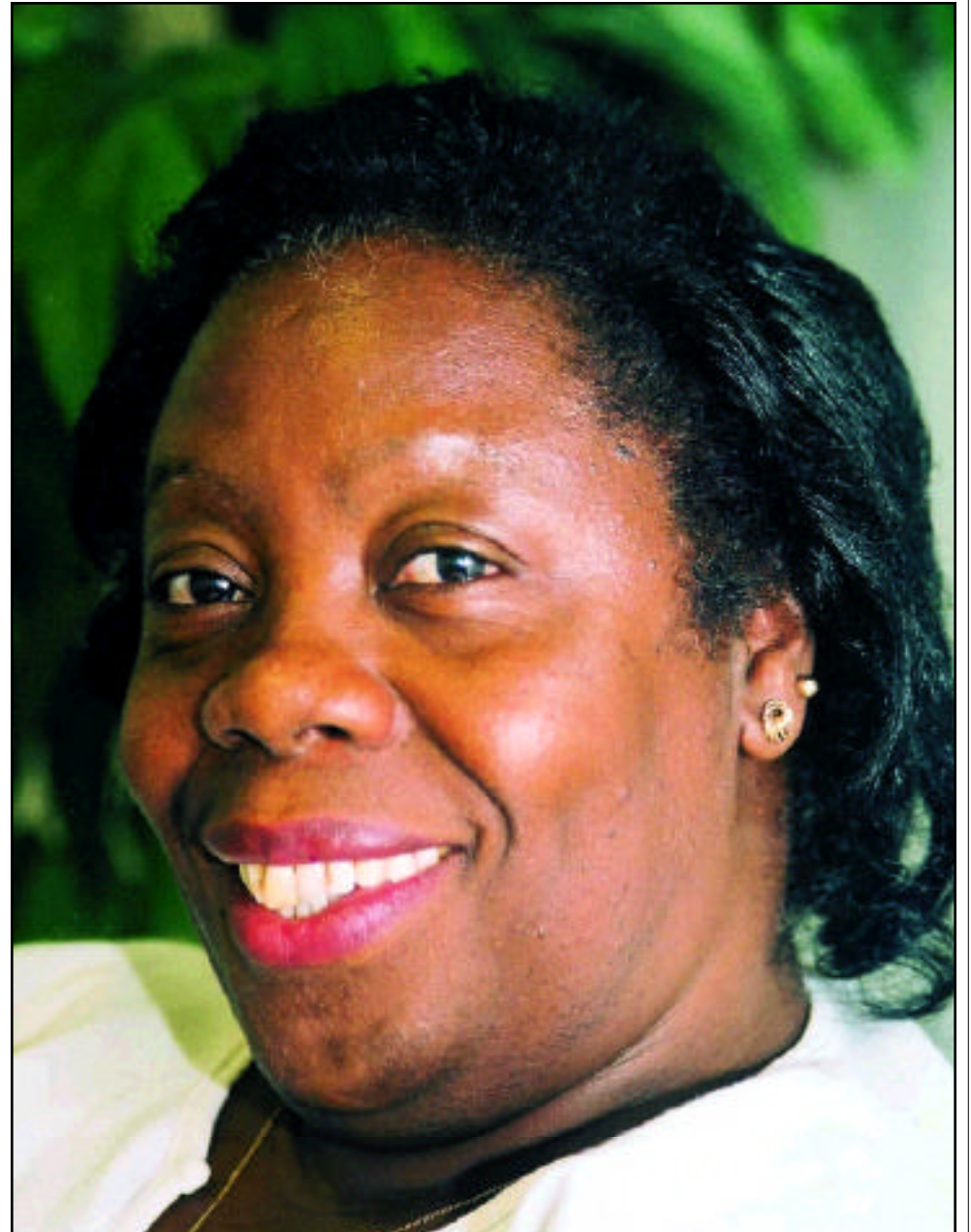
"It is a watershed for nurse education."

Another significant element for all partners in the venture is the amount of support available in the workplace.

Geoff Brennann points out: "It's a very big jump for many mature students from a job to becoming a faceless student in a university. Here they remain in their work area with their friends and colleagues who are interested in what happens to them so they have an in-built support mechanism."

Not only are the courses being funded through the South East London Workforce Development Confederation, the students are also granted study leave and time to attend tutorials. "The whole idea is that the employer is a partner in delivery," says Viv.

"What we at the OU can bring is our experience of supported open learning, enabling adults to grow and develop, which may be one way of addressing the recruitment crisis in nursing. You have got some trusts having to



Healthcare assistant Vicky King is looking forward to achieving nurse registration

go abroad to recruit, and others saying what more can we do for health care assistants. The idea of growing your own is what has grabbed people."

Chris West left school to train as a secretary. "That was what you did when I was growing up but I always wanted to be a nurse. The course is a real challenge but it is giving me real insight. It makes you think about nursing and healthcare and realise that things are not black and white. There's so much more to it. My older son is doing his A levels so there's lots of banter about who's doing their homework and lots of support. The qualified nurses are really supportive."

Interestingly, while the ultimate goal of achieving registration looms large for some of the students, Geoff Brennann homes in on that notion of growth. "This isn't about registration but about giving people what they need where they need it: giving students and workers the confidence to know they are doing a good job for the service users.

"I think the health service has been 'over-initiated'. What we require is people coming to us and saying what do you need, which is what the OU has done here."

Tutor Esther Kusi-Mesah's observations of her group provide evidence that they are

growing in confidence. "I have seen them develop from being quite quiet to being eager to learn. It's wonderful that they can actually begin to link theory and practice, and not just in their own specialism because they bring such a wide range of backgrounds to the course.

"The other thing is they have had to think about themselves having spent so many years looking after other people – and they are beginning to feel good about that."

The programme is in its early days involving only staff from the South London and Maudsley and South Bromley Hospital Trusts. But there are plans developing all over the UK for organisations to work in partnership with the OU. Viv said: "Organisations are linking with us to design development programmes for groups of employees to develop healthcare assistants and others to become registered nurses.

"At the moment, the programme is only available to employees in organisations that become sponsoring partners – but there is no harm in asking your organisation to find out more if you think it would work for you!"

All enquiries to: Betty Morris, Information Assistant, School of Health and Social Welfare, The Open University, Milton Keynes MK7 6AA. Tel: 01908 653743, fax: 01908 654124, email: b.morris@open.ac.uk



Esther Kusi-Mesah (back row, left) and Geoff Brennann (front row, left) with some of the Oxleas students

Boost for Scots NHS Managers

Two hundred health managers in Scotland are taking part in a professional development scheme run by the Open University Business School with the Scottish Executive Health Department.

Managers across the whole of Scotland are being offered 100 per cent bursaries by the Department's Strategic Change Unit and OUBS to

study the Professional Certificate in Management.

"In line with our commitment to ensuring all NHS staff continue to learn and develop their skills, this is an important new opportunity for managers," says Elizabeth Kelly, head of the Strategic Change Unit.

"We consider lifelong learning to be an essential way to equip NHS staff with the right knowledge and provide them with the

necessary skills to improve patient care in Scotland."

"We are excited by this new initiative and see this as a template that can be used by other regional health authorities to develop NHS managers," said Claire Newbould, OUBS Development Manager.

"The programme is very practical and skills acquired during the course can be put into action at work immediately."

OUSA Conference 2002

Priorities for OUSA unveiled

Alison Ryan, a staff nurse from north-east Scotland, was elected President of OUSA, the largest student union in the country, at the annual OUSA Conference in April. Previously Deputy President, Alison joined OUSA in 1985 as a branch committee member and has held a wide range of posts at branch, executive and central committee level. She talks to *Sesame* about the importance of increasing student participation in OUSA, and what she hopes to achieve during her two years in office.

So, how many members has OUSA got?

Well, out of around 200,000 Open University students, something like ten have chosen to opt out. Everyone else is a member, whether they know it or not. A lot of them may not know it.

There has been more awareness since the OU started asking students for photo ID. Many don't realise the discounts that are available to them. It is difficult for us to publicise these because they vary from region to region - in Europe, for example, with an OUSA card you can walk into places like museums for virtually nothing. In the UK it depends on the individual venue or shop - the Burton group gives discount but not if the shop is within Debenhams because Debenhams doesn't. Some of the discount is well worth having - I can get a £34 seat at the Edinburgh Playhouse for £9 for a matinee performance.

How are you setting about encouraging members to participate in OUSA?

FirstClass is important, particularly for those in remote areas who may be unwilling or unable to drive for an hour and a half to a branch meeting. We have seen that more people are contributing to OUSA's conferences on FirstClass. Since we put the branch conferences into the regional conferences window the number of branch conferences has gone up from 40 to 182. The only problem is that, for technical reasons, we haven't been able to keep up with requests from people wanting to have access to conferences and wanting to start new branch conferences. But we are doing our best.

Apart from this, we are making changes in the way we are organising the branch structure, which we are hoping will increase participation.

What are your other priorities for the next two years?

Getting better training for our activists. We are good at training residential school reps and those who sit on university committees but regional and branch training is very, very variable. A lot of people won't stand for an officer's post in their branch because they don't know what it entails. It's basic stuff like how to chair a meeting, filling in finance forms, what a secretary is supposed to do. A lot of branches folded because people were happy to come along, but did not



Alison Ryan, newly-elected president of OUSA

want to take responsibility for the administration.

Branch regeneration is important because the more members we have out there, the more activities we can do, and the more representative we are. It can be done. There were no branches in London last year; now following a big initiative we have five.

What are the main issues you will be taking up with the university on behalf of students?

A lot of issues where we have made progress in the last couple of years. For example the appeals procedure against academic decisions, especially exam results. We have made some headway but there is still some way to go. We cannot yet challenge exam marks.

Notification of students when faculties are changing the courses required for a named degree is still too slow. The history degree has been a particular problem. We understand why this has to happen, so that OU students get as academically credible a degree as possible, but students need to be told quickly if the course they are studying no longer counts towards a particular named degree, so they can decide what to do.

What is your OU background?

I started studying with the OU in 1984. I wanted a degree - any degree - to go into nurse teaching. My academic background up to then was mostly science. I started on the arts foundation course, and was going to go on to do philosophy but as there was no second-level philosophy course I did *Fifth century Athens* and the course in 16th century history instead, and got hooked on history and classics. So I graduated last year with Honours in Humanities with History and Classical Studies.

Now I am doing any OU course that looks interesting to me. Last year I did Latin, this year I am doing one of the science short courses, S191 *Food and health: a chemical story* - it is very useful for my work as it looks at nutrition and drug interaction.

And what do you do for a living?

I'm a staff nurse and team leader caring for the elderly in a very small hospital in Monifeith, near Dundee. I work 150 hours a month but they are flexible which helps me to fit in OUSA business.

What motivates you to work for OUSA in addition to all the other things you have to do?

OUSA is important because it is about students participating in the university; getting the university to give us the best education it possibly can. It is about influencing what is produced. I think we have more influence than other student unions - we can point to successes like named degrees.

V-C urges students to aim for integrity

Open University students can each make a contribution towards finding the solutions which are so desperately needed at this time in history, according to Vice-Chancellor Brenda Gourley.

In a rousing speech to OUSA Conference based on the conference theme Valuing Diversity, Acting in Unity, the new V-C said that there is both a greater awareness of human diversity, and a greater need for dialogue and concerted action, than ever before.

"Globalisation, migration, integration, communication and travel are bringing different races, cultures and ethnicities into ever closer contact with each other," she said.

"People can and should take pride in their particular faith or heritage. But we can cherish what we are, without hating what we are not."

Enmity and conflict, environmental degradation and the growth of inequality between

haves and have-nots worldwide, are some of the consequences of our actions with which we are now faced, she said.

The solutions will require making active choices, including choosing to share, choices which need to be made on moral or ethical grounds, she said. Personal integrity and the ability to act in unity with others are needed, she said.

"To you, our students, I make a plea that you aim for integrity. If you can find that in yourselves and your work, you will be making a great contribution to the integrity of the planet and its healing. For integrity means that you cannot discern greed, despoliation or corruption without doing something about them. It means that you cannot live without a sense of civic duty and commitment because you will have the discernment to see that you are not separate from what ails our public life."

Business School award winners



Professor Derek Pugh (centre) with the award winners

The top-performing students from the Business School's Professional Certificate in Management programme have been recognised with this year's Derek Pugh awards.

Overall winner was Jenny Mounter, a project manager for CGNU in Norwich, who said: "Studying has had a massive effect on my career development. I had been at my previous company for 10 years

and don't believe I would ever have had the confidence to move on if it hadn't been for this course. In my current role I can see that people listen to me and respect me because of the qualification I have."

Runners-up were Andrew Simpson from Stapleford in Nottingham, Duncan Gowing from Coventry and Sarah Hackett from St Peter Port on Guernsey.

Study support

All you want to know – online

It's great having somewhere to go for answers on every aspect of OU study – so long as you know where to look. Which is why the team behind the *Learner's Guide to The Open University* has launched a campaign to help students discover just how much advice, guidance and support is available from their desktop.

Sesame asked prospective student **Peter Taylor-Whiffen** to see what's on offer online. And, below, takes a look at developments in the Careers section of the *Learner's Guide*.

My sister-in-law achieved her BSc with the OU last year. My dad completes his BA at the end of 2002 and my brother is two years away from earning his Masters.

So let's just say it was time I finally made actions speak louder than my avowals that one day, yes, I'd also get round to doing a degree. I logged on the OU website, and from there to the *Learner's Guide*, with only a vague idea of what I wanted to study.

I'd already ruled out courses on linear statistical modelling and artificial intelligence for technology. If I didn't understand even the names of the courses I couldn't hope to get past the first week. But the *Learner's Guide* gave me confidence that maybe there was something here for me after all – and crucially, I could handle it.

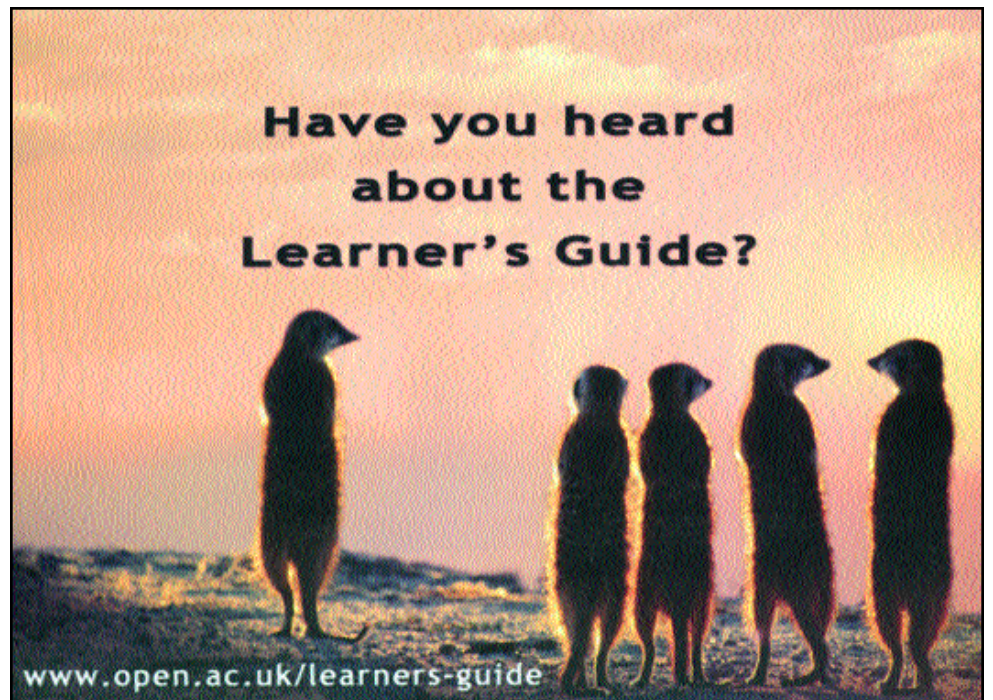
Clicking on "course choices" and then "selecting courses" helped me realise two things: 1) How straightforward and well laid out the site is, and 2) Just how many courses there are. About a million.

Well all right then, maybe not a million, but

it seems like that – which is a plus if you know what you want, but a minus if you don't. In that case the *Guide* helps you to identify the types of things you're interested in by giving you broad subject headings. And once you click on a particular category, it can steer you towards the type of course that not only would suit you but also – hey, get this – you might even enjoy.

I thought I'd enjoy German. I think it will be useful in the coming euro-financed years and I enjoyed it at school. Another great thing about this *Learner's Guide* is that it doesn't patronise you. I remember only one phrase of German since leaving school ("Ich habe meine Sonnenbrillen in die Toiletten gelassen" which has, frankly, been of limited use) so I took the *Guide's* advice to look at Level 1 studies. The information is clear and concise and I soon knew the course I wanted. So far, so easy. I was encouraged.

But mein Gott, I have a living to earn. How on earth am I going to fit all the study in? No problem. The *Guide* even helped me to work that out, in an area of the site devoted to



finding time to study. It didn't tell me how often I'd say "I'll be down in a minute" and get shouted at for leaving my tea to get cold, but I guess that's down to the individual.

Now I'm not particularly fussed about having letters after my name – excepting, of course, that as so many other members of the family have acquired them, I've become the odd one out. But if I was after a particular qualification – say for my work – the *Learner's Guide* also offers advice on selecting the right option, and even helps you to build, or rebuild, a career around your degree.

This is splendidly easy to follow and the enormous range of OU study options is set out in a supremely orderly, easy-to-follow network. You can check out queries (the frequently asked questions section is invaluable) and glean all the information you need to get you going. The huge range of topics includes "preparing for study", "how much will it cost", "what's it like to study alone" and "I left my wife for a TMA". Actually I made that last one up, but you get the picture. This site has

everything – and in the unlikely event you have a query that isn't answered, of course it's full of email options.

As for me, I can't wait to get started and am looking forward to the day when, as my course description promises, I'll be able to 'get by in a German-speaking country'. Which means the *Learner's Guide* has helped me to begin my degree – and I no longer have to make conversation by leaving my sunglasses in the toilet.

● This site was reviewed by a prospective student, but if you're a continuing or returning student you'll also find plenty of helpful information. You can find the site at: www.open.ac.uk/learners-guide. In our next edition we'll be reviewing the Learning Skills area of the *Learner's Guide*.

If you want to talk to members of the *Learner's Guide* team, they will be at Open Day on June 22 (Berrill Building concourse). Amongst other things, the team will be asking students what it is like being an OU student, and recording some of those comments on video (in collaboration with the BBC).

Get on right career track

How to choose the right OU course to match your career plans is among a range of new services available on a revamped careers website.

As well as showing how courses link to particular careers the site enables students and enquirers to go back several steps if they are uncertain which career to choose – and work through exercises which use aptitudes and interests to suggest future directions.

Other new features include:

- Information on careers most-asked about by OU students such as teaching, programming and psychology, together with details of relevant courses;
- Overviews of careers available in a range of broad occupational areas such as finance, environment and information technology;
- Sections for those applying in Ireland, Scotland or Wales;
- An online library featuring most OU careers service publications including the Career planning and job seeking resources pack; What OU Graduates can do; Destinations and qualifications; and Career resources for disabled students;
- Links to a range of other careers sites and services.

relevance

"The idea of developing the OU Study and Your Career area within the site was that students often ask about the

relevance of their courses to particular careers. Or they say 'I'm interested in this career and want to know which OU courses are relevant,'" explained Ellen Jones, project officer, National Careers Team.

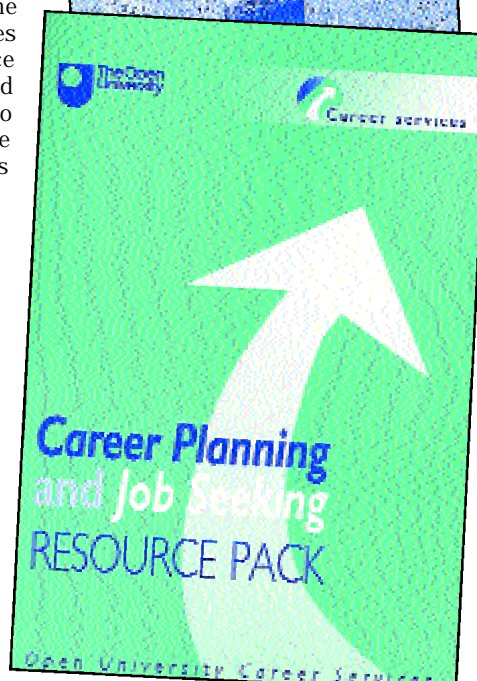
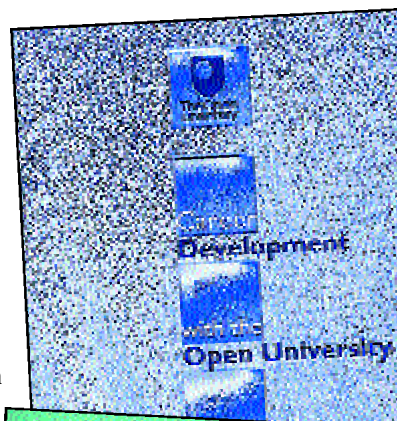
"We are interested in helping students make informed decisions about their future steps, whether they are at the start or end of their OU career."

The careers website is available from the *Learner's Guide* area on the internet which means all its features – including information and advice on CVs, application forms and letters, interviews, and what to do if you're not successful – are available to enquirers as well as students and graduates.

resource

Ellen promised there will be more additions to the website in future. But it is intended to complement not replace careers services offered by regional centres. She said: "The idea is that people can use the website as a resource to work through themselves. If there are other things people would like to see we would love to hear their feedback through their regional centres."

www.open.ac.uk/learners-guide/careers



Choice advice for finding your next course

Tried the *Learner's Guide* and still not sure which course to choose? Ormond Simpson, Director of the OU's Centre for Educational Guidance and Student Support, has these further tips...

Choosing a course that's not right for you can cause problems later on. So try to find out as much as you can about a possible course from various perspectives before signing on.

Can I find out what students who've already taken my proposed course think of it?

Yes, go to: www.open.ac.uk/courseviews for their comments.

What can tutors tell me about my proposed course before I start?

Again, go to www.open.ac.uk/courseviews to see their views on courses they teach. If you haven't got internet access you can ask your region for a paper copy of student comments and tutor views for a particular course.

Can I talk with other students before deciding?

If you use FirstClass you can try the FirstClass Course Choice Fair conference (in the information centre). You'll also find other useful information there about possible future courses coming up in 2004 and beyond.

Can I get a look at course materials before I start?

Yes. Your regional centre will have arrangements to allow you to do that. If you can't get there, or to a local course choice meeting some regions have taster packs for some courses which they can lend you. Some courses, particularly maths, science and languages, also have diagnostic materials you can request.

Above all, don't hesitate to contact your region for advice. They'll be happy to help you in any way they can.

Holidays

June – October, 3 nights
from £127

Guernsey Island Hopper

Guernsey Tourist Board

Guernsey and its neighbouring islands make an ideal choice for a romantic summer or autumn break and with our Island-Hopper offer you can enjoy a fly-drive or sea-drive holiday of three nights or more from just £127, saving up to 25 per cent on brochure prices.

Our special deal with Channel Islands specialist Travelsmith includes return travel by air from selected UK airports or by sea via fast catamaran, a minimum of three nights B&B accommodation in a 3-crown Guernsey hotel, free hire car*, plus a day trip to the beautiful island of Herm.

You can also choose to add on excursions to the equally fascinating islands of Jersey, Alderney or Sark, which although they share the same warm climate, differ greatly in both scenery and character.

You will stay in a twin/double room with private facilities at the Abbey Court Hotel, on the outskirts of Guernsey's historic capital, St Peter Port, which makes a perfect base from which to explore. (Please note children under 12 are not accepted at this hotel).

The second largest of the Channel Islands offers a delightful mix of English and French culture, idyllic scenery, entertainment, restaurants to tempt every palate and VAT-free shopping bargains galore.

Price per person: By sea with Condor from

Weymouth, based on travel May 30-June 26 - £185; June 27-Aug 28 - £199; Aug 29-Sept 14 - £189; Sept 15-30 - £169; Oct 1-31 - £127. Travel on Fri/Sat costs an extra £5 one-way, except July 12-Sept 1 when an extra £10 one-way.

By air from Southampton (with free airport car parking), based on 3 nights starting Wednesdays: Up to May 29 - £199; May 30-Aug 28 - £235; Aug 29-Sept 14 - £239; Sept 15-30 - £219; Oct 1-31 - £185. Flights are available on other days for an extra £10 per person.

The following excursions are available: Sark day trip from £19.90 per person by sea; Jersey day trip from £38 per person by air; Alderney day trip from £56 per person by air.

Extra nights' B&B including car hire are available from just £21 per night. Supplement per person for other airports and seaports on request.

To book your Guernsey Island-Hopper Break just telephone the Travelsmith reservations line on 0870 748 1000 or 01621 784666 and quote reference C173/OU to qualify for the special rates, which are subject to availability.

This holiday is arranged by Travelsmith Limited (ABTA V1290/ATOL 1917).

*Airport/harbour collection/return and based on a minimum 2 adults sharing a Fiesta or similar Group A car and excluding collision damage insurance payable direct.

Walk in unspoilt Corfu

from £329



Explore unspoilt Corfu with escorted walks and included excursions. The resort has always welcomed its British visitors and is famed for friendliness, scenery and climate. This holiday is offered exclusively to readers of Sesame for June to October 2002.

The road to Arillas on the north-west coast wanders through peaceful hillside villages far from the tourist mainstream before descending into olive groves and pine trees down to the clear blue sea.

It's a chance to step off the beaten track into unspoilt villages, pick your own oranges and figs off the trees and drink crystal clear cold spring water.

Our holiday includes two escorted walks (approx. four hours each), exploring villages, monasteries, a working bakery and the fantastic views of offshore islands and the forbidding coastline of Albania across the Ionian Sea. You will walk along ancient donkey tracks through olive groves from Arillas through San Stephanos, Magoulades and Kavadales.

Also included is a full day coach excursion visiting many of the famous resorts including Kouloura and Kalami where the Durrell family lived and Gerald was inspired to write *My Family and other animals*.

No holiday to Corfu is complete without visiting Paleokastritsa and the whitewashed monastery perched on the cliff,

overlooking the tiny bays of clear blue sea.

A Corfu shopping trip is also included in the price. The unique beauty of Corfu town owes much to the mixture of architectural styles left behind by the Byzantines, Venetians, Russians, French, Italian and British.

Your accommodation in Arillas is in privately owned apartments of the highest quality, located in quieter areas not more than 10 minutes' walk from the beach.

For a free colour brochure of the apartments and the resort, or to book, just telephone Travelsmith LTD (ABTA V1290/ATOL 1917) on 01621 784666 or 0870 748 1000 quoting C100.

Spain, France, Andorra and the Pyrenees



Departing
Wednesday
28 August
7 nights
half board
from only £449

The adventure begins with a flight to Reus in Spanish Catalonia. Two nights are spent here with time to visit the Cava wine district and the magnificent monastery at Montserrat. Then it's on to Andorra for four nights in the picturesque principality surrounded by the high peaks of the Pyrenees.

An included excursion aboard Le Petit Train Jaune provides a unique way to view Andorra's wonderful mountain scenery. There is also an optional trip available to Andorra La Vella, capital of the principality.

A lengthy stop in the vibrant city of Barcelona on the last day, with time to visit the amblas and the city's many other attractions, concludes this

amazing holiday.

Accommodation based on shared occupancy of twin-bedded rooms is on a half board basis, with two nights in Spain and four nights in Andorra. Flights from local airports to Reus. A few single rooms are available at a supplement of £75 per holiday.

Full details of this holiday and the optional excursions available from: Preferred Travel Services, 56 High St, Kibworth, Leicester, LE8 0HO. Tel: 0116 279 3929, fax 0116 279 3214. Email: mail@preferredts.com quote tour number 1464. (ABTA W3692 & G9806)

Preferred Travel Services is a trading name of High Concepts Limited Reg. in England No. 4000185. Reg. Office: Christopher House, 94B London Road, Leicester LE2 0QS. ABTA NO. W3692. ATOL NO. 5537

Camping in Jersey



Sunny, friendly Jersey is ideal for a relaxed family camping holiday and now you could save up to 46 per cent off brochure prices including free car transport or car hire* and free child places!

Prices for our seven-night holidays start at just £89 per adult with travel to the island by ferry from Portsmouth, on the Condor high speed jet catamaran from Weymouth or Poole, or by air from Southampton, where free car parking is available.

You will stay in a well-equipped, ready-erected tent that can comfortably accommodate 4, 5 or 6 people at the Beuvelande campsite, a

member of a small group of elite 5-pennant Premier Parks selected by the AA and featured in their Best Parks guide.

Facilities at the site include a swimming pool, free hot showers, games room, cafe/restaurant, site shop and laundry room, plus the services of Travelsmith representatives.

The site is ideally placed to explore the beautiful island of Jersey.

Prices are per adult (based on 4 adults sharing tent) via Portsmouth, Weymouth, Southampton or Poole. There is a £20 per person supplement for 2 or 3 adults sharing on all dates. Prices for travel from other airports are available on request.

All children under two go

FREE. Children under 12 also travel FREE (based on a ratio of 1 child to 1 adult) on all Portsmouth and Weymouth departures, on Poole departures up to July 4, with £49 thereafter, and for just £69 on Southampton departures.

If you travel by sea you can take your car FREE and if by air pick up a FREE hire car* on arrival.

To take advantage of our Jersey Camping Offer, just telephone the Travelsmith reservations line on 0870 748 1000 or 01621 784666 and quote reference 5D150/OU to qualify for the special rates, which are subject to availability.

*Car transport based on a private car not exceeding 5m in length and 1.85m in height.

European City Breaks

save up to
25 per cent



Europe has never been so accessible or so affordable – and with our special offer you can choose from a selection of two-night city breaks, flying on scheduled British Airways services and saving up to 25 per cent off brochure prices.

Whether you want to cruise the canals of romantic Venice or fairytale Copenhagen, explore historic Lisbon, take in the sights and sounds of newly-vibrant Berlin or stroll the beautiful boulevards of Paris – there is a holiday to suit you.

Prices start from £155 per person for two nights at the

3-star Rivoli hotel in Paris and include flights from Heathrow or Gatwick and bed and breakfast hotel accommodation.

These European City Breaks, organised by Travelsmith UK Ltd (ABTA G5222/ATOL 1917) can be taken up to October 29 2002, subject to availability. Extra nights can be added and other hotels may be available on request.

For further details or to book your European City Break just telephone the Travelsmith reservations line on 0870 748 1000 or 01621 784666 and quote reference C1670U to qualify for the special rates.

What you had to say about OU study

The Courses Survey is sent out annually after the October examination period to around 30,000 students inviting feedback on the quality of the teaching and learning experience and the services provided to students by the university, whilst studying a specified course. At present it is university policy to survey a sample of students across a range of courses. **Alison Ashby**, head of the IET Student Statistics Team, reports on the results of the October 2001 survey.

In 2001, we sent out questions to 29,537 students on 115 courses and achieved a response rate of 65 per cent.

The findings for 2001 show a generally high level of student satisfaction with OU courses. 90 per cent of students were satisfied, 49 per cent very satisfied with the overall quality of their course. The majority of students report a balance between vocational and personal development (44 per cent) as their main reason for study, a further 40 per cent responded either mainly or completely personal and 16 per cent responded mainly or completely vocational. 36 per cent of students stated they would have preferred to start the course in a different month. Of those that wanted different times 56 per cent chose September, with another 20 per cent choosing October. The percentage of students with access to a computer for study purposes has continued to rise gradually every year, 88 per cent for 2001 in contrast to 87 per cent for 2000.

helpful

Four-fifths of students (81 per cent) were satisfied with the quality of the tuition from their tutor and face-to-face tutorials were considered the most helpful form of study support. Students who attended tutorials rated the quality of tutorials highly but nearly a quarter did not attend any tutorials (24 per cent). As in previous years the most common reasons for not attending all tutorials were inconvenient times and tutorials too far away.

Students were generally satisfied with contact made with the OU. 89 per cent of students found it very easy to get through by phone while 86 per cent of students reported receiving a quick response to their letter. The vast majority of students (96 per cent) reported that they never encountered any difficulties that had led them to make a complaint. 87 per cent of students said they would recommend their course to a friend.

important

Workload for students is still an important issue for both students and the university. Just over one half of the students (52 per cent) who responded said that they had spent a little or a lot longer than they had expected on their studies. The university is working on improving ways in which workload is quantified, including directed and non-directed study time.

These figures only provide a very high level summary of the results. Overall results are reported to Student Policy Board and a summary is provided for Senate. Individual course teams receive a full set of the results and the IET Student Statistics team write detailed reports for each academic unit and meet with it to review the results. Our future plans include summaries at the course level for publication to students.

The IET Student Statistics Team would like to thank all those students who responded to the end of course survey, sent out by the Institute of Educational Technology at the end of October 2001. The information you provide is a key element in our internal review of courses and services and helps us identify areas where we are successful and areas where we need to improve.

● And thanks to the many readers who have already responded to *Sesame's* readership survey in the last edition. We expect to have results by July and will report back in the next available issue.

Graduation

Celebrating our 2002 achievers



Ten thousand people are donning academic robes at 28 graduation ceremonies across the country this summer. *Sesame* hears from just a few of those collecting their hard-won qualifications. And (below) celebrates those joining the OU community with honorary degrees.

Olympic rowing legend Sir Steve Redgrave heads the latest list of outstanding achievers to be awarded OU honorary degrees this year.

The five-times gold medallist joins other household names including author Bill Bryson, former Northern Ireland secretary Mo Mowlam and Poet Laureate Andrew Motion who will receive the honour at graduation ceremonies throughout 2002.

Sir Steve will be in London in June to receive his doctorate for a 'notable contribution to the educational or cultural well-being of society'. As well as being the only competitor ever to win gold at five successive Olympiads, he has also set up his

own charitable trust, which he hopes will raise £5 million for children's charities.

Peter Kindersley, who founded the home reference company Dorling Kindersley, is also honoured, as is Oxfam honorary president Professor Amartya Sen and former Age Concern Director-General Baroness Greengross OBE.

A full list of those receiving honorary degrees is available on the *Sesame* website www.open.ac.uk/Sesame.

Politician and lifelong campaigner Barbara Castle, who died in May, was to have accepted an honorary degree in Milton Keynes.

Honorary award fits Bill

The buzz and excitement around Open University graduation ceremonies is intoxicating. Family members fixing the hoods of robes, children leaping and wriggling, and chatter swirling through the foyers. In all the excitement do graduates pay any attention to the honorary graduates attending their ceremony? Eulina Clairmont was at the Portsmouth ceremony to meet one recipient of OU honours, travel writer Bill Bryson.

"I really love the Open University," said Bill Bryson as he sat waiting to be robed. "I think it is such a great thing, the idea of a university that anyone can go to is such a Utopian ideal that I think it is just wonderful."

Of course, his admiration of the OU is no surprise. In his book, *Notes from a Small Island*, the writer refers to the OU as one of his favourite things in Britain.

But Bill Bryson deserves this honour for more than his glowing opinion of the OU. He is a world-renowned author: *Notes from a Small Island* has sold almost one million copies and spent three years in *The Sunday Times* best-seller's list. The same observational humour made equal successes of his look at the eccentricities of life in Australia, *Notes From Down*

Under, and America, *Notes From a Big Country* and *Made in America*.

Bryson's writing conjures vivid pictures of the countries he visits and the people, cultures, and habits he encounters – though there are plenty of times when he has left residents fuming in the wake of his comments. He described Liverpool as a "festival of litter", and decided that "Bradford's role in life is to make every place else in the world look better by comparison".

"Sometimes people do get genuinely hurt by my observations and that is unfortunate. If I go to your home town and I didn't have a good experience, people sometimes get upset about that – with some justification," he said.

complicated

"The world that I am writing about is completely different from the one I was taught about in school. Everything I was taught at school in the United States was painted as a pretty picture and was straightforward – but life is more complicated than that. Things didn't always go right for explorers and inventors and they didn't always have a happy outcome.

"When the pilgrims went to America there has never been a less prepared

people. I would have paid a lot more attention at school if I had known how much luck, blundering and bad decisions went into a lot of this stuff."

This must have been what inspired him to become a writer, the need to portray a realistic picture of the world. "No," he replied, "what inspired me to become a writer was a mortgage and raising a small family."

Bill Bryson came to England from the US in 1973. He worked as a sub-editor on a Bournemouth newspaper for two years before moving to London to work on *The Times* and, later in his career, *The Independent*.

"I started writing magazine articles just to generate a little extra earnings. I gradually discovered that I really liked this and one of the great things about writing is that you can decide what you write about."

What advice does he have for any OU student who fancies themselves topping the best-sellers list?

"The only thing about writing for pay is that you just have to write something that somebody wants to publish. That is the only trick. It either has to be so good or so different or have a subject that is so unusual that somebody somewhere will say, ok we're going to publish this and we will give you some money."

"When I first started writing, travel books tended to be written by people who acted as if they knew everything. They never got lost and they never missed a train. Travel can be great but it can also be the most stressful thing we go through voluntarily. You're tired and you're a long way from home, you don't know if the train is going from that platform over there or this one over here. I just write about my experience. I try to always think that I am writing a letter to a friend or my brother."

So what is next for Bill Bryson?

"I am doing a book that is not a travel book, I am trying to understand how the world works – how the earth got to be how it is."

I recommended the OU science course S267 *How the Earth works*, the prospectus is in the post. Maybe we will soon see Bill Bryson picking up another degree from the OU.

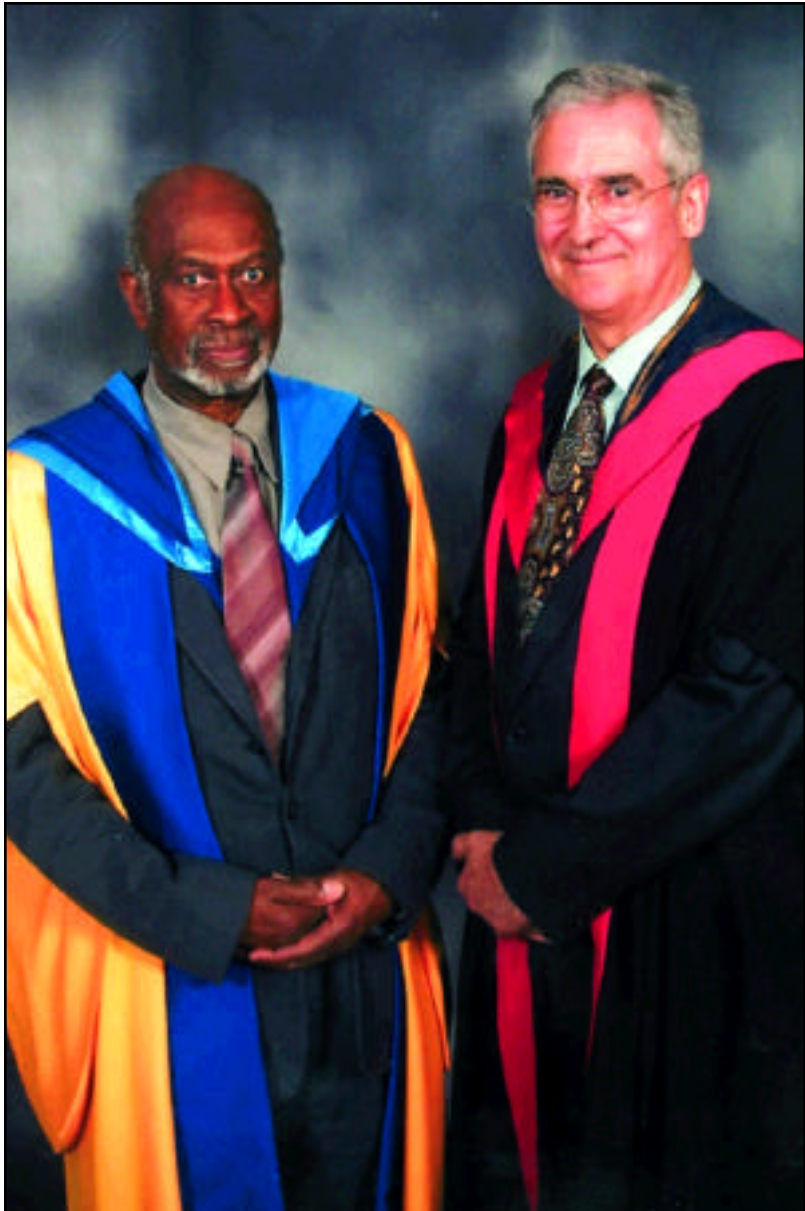
Pictured left: Eulina Clairmont and Bill Bryson



Graduation

Dublin Honours

Neither the wind nor the rain could dampen the spirits of the 383 OU students gathering at O'Reilly Hall, University College Dublin on April 27. Since 1973 over 10,000 people throughout Ireland have graduated with OU degrees. Sesame's **Sheila Forman** reports.



Poet James Berry with Professor Dennis Walder

Berry: 'I want a university in me'

Among those receiving honorary degrees this year is one whose struggle against circumstances and self-doubt to realise his potential will strike chords with many OU students. From a rural Jamaican childhood where he says 'he read nothing and was taught nothing positive about my people', James Berry's evolution into one of Britain's most distinguished poets represent precisely the vision and ideals of the university's founders, according to Professor Dennis Walder, who presented his honorary doctorate at the Brighton ceremony in April. Below, we print extracts from Professor Walder's citation and James Berry's acceptance speech.

Professor Dennis Walder:

"A pioneer of Black British writing James Berry has won many awards for his books and anthologies, and is widely known for his poetry workshops, his school readings, his appearances at festivals and, not least, for his role in raising the awareness of OU students at our literature summer schools to the value of poetry in general as a humanising experience, and to the value of the Black British voice in particular, as an enriching part of the diversity of cultures in this country.

Life in Jamaica during the 1930s was narrow and limited. 'We felt shut away from the world,' he recalls, enduring long spells 'alone in the fields, in the presence of animals, overawed by nature'. What little formal education he had generated an anger that led eventually to poetry; poetry which

both challenged and transformed the culture that excluded him.

Like many other Jamaicans, James Berry left his country to work briefly in the USA, before emigrating to the UK in 1948. He worked in the Post Office for over 20 years, before the award of a C. Day Lewis Fellowship released him to become writer-in-residence at a London comprehensive, where he developed the taste for multicultural education that has become the hallmark of his achievement – helping others to realise what they have to say, and how to say it, in their own words."

James Berry responds:

"At 17 years old I suffered an intense depression with a kind of desperate panic. Suddenly it was like knowing oneself strangely lost. In reality, I see now, I was stuck. I had no continuing education. The shock of an unreachable development possessed me. Yet, doors would open for me magically, gradually.

A few years ago, a poem prompted itself to be written. It became a long poem I called *Letter to you Mother Africa*. Set in that painful 17th year the poem had a repeating line, saying 'I want a university in me'. That meant, surely, I yearned for my full participation.

Now, in my 78th year, I have been called here, and just listened to Professor Dennis Walder celebrating what for me would have seemed almost impossible happenings. Hearing that list of information about me I am moved beyond description. To all responsible for this moment, my many, many, deep-feeling thanks."

As a radio officer based at Malinhead, the most northerly point in Ireland, John Hegarty (pictured right) often has good reason to feel on top of the world.

Now he has another, for in between his life-preserving work maintaining the coast radio station, he has been studying for an Open University science degree and that, he says, has changed his life.

"Now I have applied to do a full time MA in Archaeology at Queens University, Belfast," says John, who stepped up to the platform at O'Reilly Hall, University College Dublin to receive his BSc (Hons) in Natural Sciences.

John, who is 52, went straight from secondary school to attend a marine radio college in Dublin where he gained a PMG (Post Master General) certificate in radio telegraphy and radio telephony in 1970.

"I went to sea immediately with the Merchant Navy and spent 10 years travelling on board ships as a radio officer. My job was to send and receive messages by Morse code and maintain a working radio station," he said.



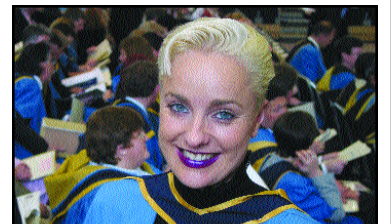
He started working at Malinhead in 1980, doing similar work from the shore out to ships at sea.

He first got involved with Open University study after a colleague began a social science degree in 1989. "I decided I would give it a try too."

"I was attracted to Earth Science immediately and picked courses that I felt I would enjoy.

"I'm amazed that I've come this far and how the OU has changed my life," he said. "I am eternally grateful to the people who have made this possible."

FRONT PAGE STORY



Among those gathering at the Dublin ceremony was our front cover graduate Elaine Ruby, from London, who collected her MA in Culture and Media Studies at O'Reilly Hall.



Family has always been very important to Pat Dwyer from Waterford – so when it came to his graduation ceremony he just took the whole lot with him.

Pat graduated with a BSc (Hons) under the approving gazes of no fewer than 23 members of his family who made the 200 mile round trip. This is no distance at all for Pat who clocked up 400 miles a time travelling to his

tutorials in Belfast, and hardly ever missed one. Pat, a customs and excise officer, said he hoped to carry on and do more courses with the OU. "The courses are just excellent. I really enjoyed my studies but it has been a big commitment and my family have had to put up with a lot for me to get to this point, especially my wife Mary. I am really pleased that so many of them are here to celebrate with me today," said Pat.



Ahmad Jaber fulfilled his promise to his father-in-law when he watched his wife Fatima graduate with a BA in Literature at the afternoon ceremony. "I promised her father before I married her that she would continue with her higher education," said Ahmad who is a GP in Dublin.

Before coming to Dublin Fatima, who is originally from Palestine, had been studying for three years in Doha, Qatar, an Arabian Gulf state where she had moved with her family to escape the troubles in her own country.

"I became pregnant with my daughter Nora almost as soon as my OU studies began," said Fatima. "It has been quite difficult studying with a new baby in a new country but my husband has been a great help.

"The hardest part for me was studying alone. Because Nora was a baby I got excused from residential school and then my other courses didn't have one so I missed out on interacting with other students," she said. "After I have completed my MA, I hope to be able to work in the teaching field, perhaps doing something with foreign students."

Travellers tales

£50 goes to the writer of any published Travellers tale

High road to an eco-friendly holiday

Heather Ramirez Fonseca from Manchester is the latest *Sesame* reader to take up the invitation to describe a trip which helped her OU studies. And what better choice for a masters student of environmental policy and society than an eco-friendly journey to Scotland?

Eco-tourism is the latest buzzword in travel. As we all know, gas-guzzling jets, road-clogging cars and the general tourist stampede put an unmanageable strain on local resources and ecosystems thereby ruining the very beauty and tranquillity we seek.

All very well, but what are the alternatives? Can a week knee-deep in mud in the UK really match up to package-deal promises of sun and sangria? In these post foot and mouth and September 11 times, the government is keen to convince us to don our macs and explore the

great British countryside in its UKOK campaign.

Five months into a masters dissertation and bogged-down at work, any holiday was 'OK' by me. Armed with head-to-toe waterproofs, clutching a week-long rail and ferry pass and feeling ever so eco-friendly, I rallied to the cause and headed for the Scottish Highlands.

My Andean-born husband's eyes bulged slightly at his first sight of 'men in skirts' at Glasgow's Queen Street Station - the kilted crowds indeed a proud and formidable sight on their way to the afternoon's rugby match. Undeterred, we boarded the

West Highland line, which links Glasgow to the western ports of Oban and Mallaig and is a remarkable feat of engineering, traversing some of the most remote, inhospitable and downright boggy terrain in the country. It is also unrelentingly beautiful.

Leaving the suburban sprawl behind, the train climbs rapidly into the hills, offering tantalising glimpses of Loch Lomond far below. This is certainly the way to travel, the scenery more gripping than any in-flight movie and none of the stress of driving: just ever-higher heathery peaks, sometimes a waterfall, sometimes an icy-blue loch, sometimes a crumbling castle. From Crianlarich the train climbs still further, crossing the treacherous Rannoch moor, the mountains now snow-clad, startled red deer stags bouncing away.

We disembarked at Glenfinnan, a village steeped in the history of Bonnie Prince Charlie's Jacobite uprising. While the place was tiny, with no shop or pub, the warmth and quality of our reception could not have been greater. Kitted-out in waterproofs, we walked under the towering railway viaduct with stags grazing close by and magnificent views across Loch Shiel. As the rain relentlessly rattled our hoods, the ground swelled and became alive



Loch Eilt, near Glenfinnan

Picture: The Highlands of Scotland Tourist Board



Glenfinnan Monument

Picture: The Highlands of Scotland Tourist Board

with frogs, forcing us to pick our way along the path to avoid crushing them underfoot. After a day of gallant bog hopping we were spoilt with a roaring log fire and plenty of chocolate cake.

Spean Bridge was our next destination, a positive metropolis boasting a shop and a small woollen mill. The 'Commando Memorial', a tribute to the soldiers who trained here, offers spectacular views over the white-giant Ben Nevis and a host of other peaks. We descended through a pine forest with a pair of golden eagles circling overhead to join the attractive Caledonian Canal - which links Fort William in the west to Inverness in the east. For those with more time to spare, boat trips on the canal, white water canoeing and Icelandic pony

trekking are all available locally.

Our final stop was Oban, a charming fishing port and ferry link to the outlying Isles set among spectacular mountain scenery. Making the most of the astonishing sunshine, we visited the islands of Kerrera and Mull, exploring castles and pointing our cameras at bewildered highland cows. We sailed back into Oban just in time to see the last glows of a fiery sunset, before retreating to a cosy organic café to celebrate the end of our holiday with locally produced food and fair-trade wine.

UKOK? Better, I'd say. I returned energised from fresh air, exercise and good food. Shock of shocks, I even got a tan!

● For more information about holidaying in the Scottish Highlands visit: www.highlandfreedom.com

Linking New Lanark and New Labour

It was back to school for two tutors when the Open University in Scotland joined forces with the Friends of New Lanark and the New Lanark Conservation Trust to establish an annual Robert Owen Commemoration.

The inaugural event, celebrating the life and achievements of the famous social reformer, was a lecture given by Gerry Mooney, senior lecturer in sociology. His topic, '*New Lanark to New Labour*' informed and entertained a large audience by linking Owen's ideas on social reform directly to those of Tony Blair

and New Labour.

New Lanark and its Owen School for Children was recently designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site and was the locus from 1800-1825 of Owen's social, educational and environmental experiment.

Owen himself was the subject of a recent revisionist biography by Ian Donnachie, senior lecturer in history, and vice-chair of the Friends of New Lanark.

Picture shows Dr Gerry Mooney in the restored Owen School with event organisers, left to right: Sarah Colquhoun, Lorna Davidson, Anne Hamilton, Ian Donnachie, David Maclaren and Graham U'ren.



Global impact of super eruptions

By Jane Matthews

This is the way the world ends – not with a bang but a whimper, spoke the poet, prophetically, perhaps, according to Open University Professor Stephen Self.

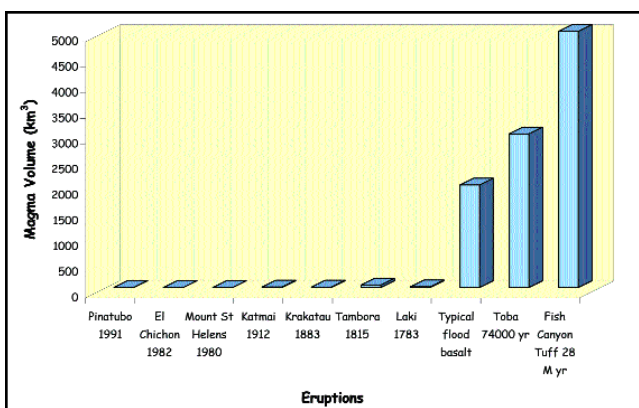
For while Hollywood has been firmly focused on the threat posed to Planet Earth by 'near earth objects' – asteroids and meteorites – the Professor of Volcanology is proposing that we should be more concerned about the likelihood of 'super volcanic eruptions' – and their potentially cataclysmic effects on our atmosphere, climate and way of life.

Though science has known about and studied volcanic activity for decades, its discovery of a quite different league of super-eruptions – defined by Stephen as affecting an area more than 3,500 cubic kilometres and with global fallout – is relatively recent. Improvements in geological dating techniques are just one factor enabling scientists over the last 15 years to push further and further at what were previously believed to be the boundaries of an eruption's size and effects.

The last full-blown super-eruption was Toba in Sumatra 74,000 years ago, and as recently as 1997 oceanographers studying an Antarctic ice core at a depth of two and a half kilometres found high levels of acidity for six years around the time of Toba. The likeliest explanation is that this was a direct result of the enormous amounts of sulphur dioxide spewed into the atmosphere by the eruption.

Just how big a league we are talking about, compared, for example, to the kinds of volcanic activity most of us are lucky enough to experience only through our TV screens is starkly illustrated by a graph (see below). "Some of these eruptions were 1,000 times bigger than Pinatubo," says Stephen. "When the Fish Canyon erupted 28 million years ago the hole that was formed was almost three times the area of Greater London."

"These things are huge – volcanic explosions with a global impact – and it has taken people a long time to piece the evidence together, to get samples of the rock and be able to



Lava flow

date them."

The 'holy grail' now, he says, is investigating whether such earth-shaking events might have been responsible for wiping out many forms of life on earth in the past.

Among the devastating effects of super-eruptions would be temporary darkness with loss or at least severe reduction in the amount of solar radiation reaching the surface, unseasonal temperature reductions and warmings, with strange weather patterns for several years and widespread ash fallout.

And crystal-ball-gazing, even if a future super-eruption were to take place sufficiently far south or north to affect only one hemisphere, many of the services we depend upon, such as air travel, would be disrupted for months or even years, says Stephen.

"What we are trying to do now is test the relationship between these mass extinction events, in which more than 20-30 per cent of all genera died out, and flood basalt events – lava flows of super-eruption magnitude. There's still a huge question about it but they do seem to be related and improved age dating means some of the dates of past pairs of events are being pushed closer and closer together."

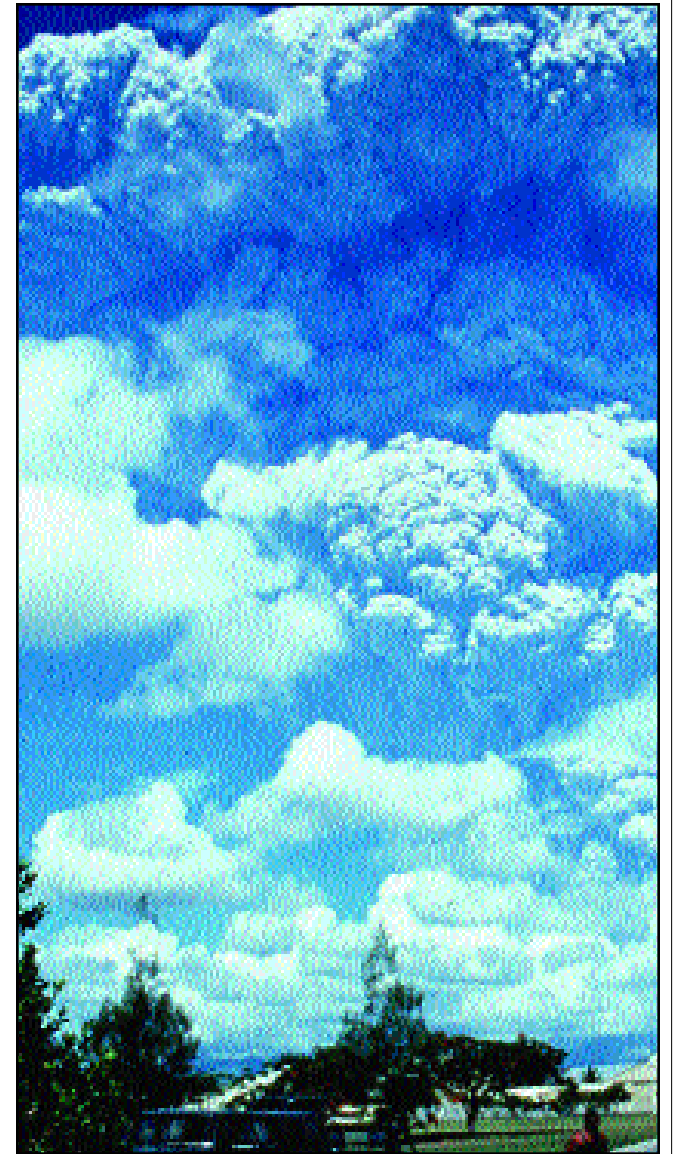
"The mass extinction everyone knows about was 65 million years ago at the end of the Cretaceous period when 40 per cent of genera on the planet were lost. We know there was a huge meteorite impact then which is thought to be responsible, but I'm on the trail of how other phenomena could have done this. There was a series of super-eruptions at around the same time. Is it possible that they had an effect, or are we looking at some strange coincidence in time?"

Delivering this message during his inaugural lecture to the OU, which he joined from the University of Hawaii, Stephen second-guessed his audience's questions about the likelihood of a super-eruption in their lifetime.

The good news, he says, is that we probably don't need to concern ourselves too much with the lava-flow-type of super eruption since best current evidence is that these occur only once every 30 million years or so.

"If we are going to have another super-eruption it's going to be an explosive one. When will it be? We can only look at the facts," Stephen says.

"There have been super-eruptions of this type once every



Super-eruptions could have a cataclysmic effect on earth's climate

20,000 years, and the really big ones once every 100,000 years. Of course we are not dealing with very robust statistics because we do not have many cases to compile. But the other earth-threatening phenomenon that has been worked on is near-earth objects which are reckoned at one every 25,000 years for a small one and one every 500,000 years for a big one.

"That's approximately ten times less frequent than super-eruptions. The effects of such an eruption would be felt globally and would cause severe disruption to our way of life. The more we know about super-eruptions of the past, the better we will be able to advise governments to prepare for the eventuality of the next one."

One response is the emergence of a national committee of the Geological Society set up to bring together evidence of super-eruptions while the International Association of Volcanology has set up its own task force to study the phenomenon. Closer to home our growing knowledge about the scale of these events not only feeds into S269 *Earth and life* but will be a part of a planned new short course on volcanoes – open to anyone who wants to understand more about the massive forces at work on the planet. Forces on a scale as yet undreamed of by Hollywood.

Wake-up call for telephone bosses

Conditions for staff in call centres can be so strict that some employers lose every single one of their workers during the course of a year.

Absenteeism levels soar on a Monday and Friday and the reluctance of staff to come in is down to their poor treatment by management, according to a new report.

"Official annual staff turnover tends to be at around 20 per cent but there's no doubt in some cases, unofficially, it can be as high as 100 per cent," says Open University researcher Dr George Callaghan.

"Workers are frustrated by trying to operate under a preferred style of management that hasn't changed since the days of the 1950s typing pools and factory assembly lines.

"It's ironic that managers in these places seek bubbly, outgoing individuals but then give them a time-limit of three minutes per call, with immense pressure to get a result, which prevents any of

their character coming out," says Dr Callaghan.

And Dr Callaghan, who was sponsored to do his research by a well-known company that employs call centre staff, says such a stifling atmosphere among the staff – 70 per cent of whom are women and most of whom are under 35 – will adversely affect productivity, rather than increase it.

"Some managers have tried to motivate their staff by putting them into teams," he says. "This is supposed to create a feeling of community between individuals but not surprisingly, many of the staff I spoke to viewed it cynically as an attempt to make them more competitive."

According to Dr Callaghan's research, 41 per cent of his interviewees swore they would never work in such centres again, a figure which suggests, in line with the absenteeism rate, that the pool of applicants for such jobs will eventually run dry.

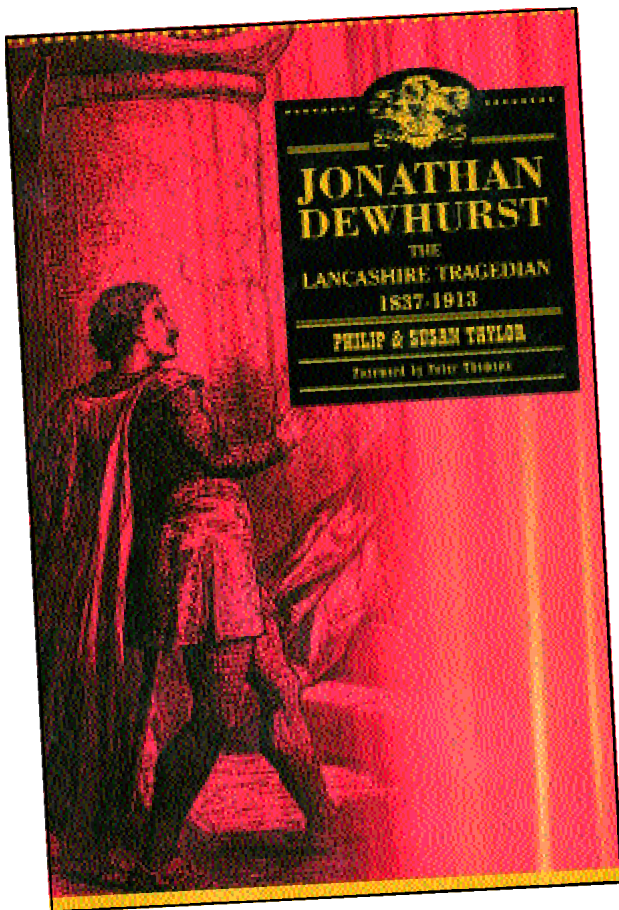
"There is a trend to put call centres in

areas of high unemployment," he says. "But eventually there will be fewer people attracted to these places if the management techniques stay the same. It's things like being given only a set, very short, time to do the job, and being listened into all the time so there's no time whatsoever to relax, and even the idea that you deal only with this one, basic element of the enquiry. The moment it becomes more interesting you have to pass it on to someone else so you can get on with your next routine call."

Dr Callaghan, who recently presented his report *Call Centres – the latest industrial office?* to the International Labour Process Conference in Strathclyde, is keen to stress that not every centre is run the same way. "There are some companies – IBM, for instance – whose staff have to be fluent in two or three languages and know their stuff so they can follow the enquiry through and often deal with it all themselves," he says. "But they do seem to be the exception."

Books

Northerner who rose to centre stage



Jonathan Dewhurst – The Lancashire Tragedian 1837-1913, by Philip & Susan Taylor, The Book Guild Ltd., £13.56

The long and prolific theatrical career of Jonathan Dewhurst embraced both acting and theatre management, and spanned the Victorian and Edwardian eras. In spite of his modest background, he rose from the relative obscurity of northern provincial theatre almost to the highest echelons of British theatrical society, and shared centre-stage with some of the leading actors of his day, including Henry (later 'Sir Henry') Irving.

Dewhurst had a penchant for Shakespearean tragedy and at various times took on the guises of Hamlet, Macbeth, Othello, King Lear and other principal characters, as well as a host of cameo roles. But his talents were not confined to tragedy. His extensive repertoire also encompassed a varied range of dramatic and comedic roles. In addition to his many appearances in theatres around Great Britain he undertook extensive tours of Australia and India.

The book is an attractive single-volume work, published in hardback by The Book Guild. It includes 55 illustrations, extensive appendices, and a useful index. The authors, a husband and wife team, met while participating (appropriately) in a local theatrical production of *When We Are Married*. Philip is an Open University graduate and a member of the OU History Society.

An obvious enthusiasm for their subject, combined with eight years of energetic research – they call it 'a labour of love' – has led to the discovery of many fascinating details about Dewhurst's life and work. Whether they have fully succeeded in uncovering the character of this enigmatic man is a more difficult question to answer. But they have certainly succeeded in producing an informative and entertaining book that deserves a wide readership.

Reviewed by Roy Henderson

Philip and Susan Taylor's book, *Jonathan Dewhurst – the Lancashire Tragedian 1837-1913*, is rather more than just another run-of-the-mill theatrical biography. Shortlisted for the prestigious Theatre Book Prize awarded annually by the Society for Theatre Research, it is also a family history (co-author Philip Taylor is Dewhurst's great, great nephew), a local history, a social history, and the absorbing story of a bygone age. But above all it is a resurrection – the rediscovery of a life which, but for the authors' long and painstaking researches, might have been forever forgotten.

Geographer revives Marx for a globalised world

Producing Places, by Ray Hudson, Guildford Press, 2001, Price £19.00

Producing Places is a deliberate play on words. Ray Hudson, Professor of Geography at Durham University and an associate lecturer with the Open University for 30 years, has written a book which aims to tackle, and to pull together, two major social issues of our times.

On the one hand he wants to explore the changing nature of capitalist production today. But, on the other hand, as a geographer he has a particular concern with the places in which that production happens and with how they, too, are constructed, and are being reconstructed by current changes. So: both "places of production" and "the production of places".

We are always being told that everything is different now. The notion of class society is old hat, we think less about production than about consumption, marketing and finance. 'Place', too, is a concept which is ever more difficult to grasp in a world which is daily more globalised. What meaning can 'place' have now? It surely cannot be the same as in the days of the English village or the local working-class community built around (and for the purpose of serving) a single major industry. Even though we know that our images of 'village' and 'local community' are thoroughly romanticised, and owe at least as much to myth-making as to fact, it is nonetheless true that the meaning of 'local place' has, in the western world, changed dramatically in the last five decades or so.

The aim of this book is to take a deep breath, not to get carried away by over-excited

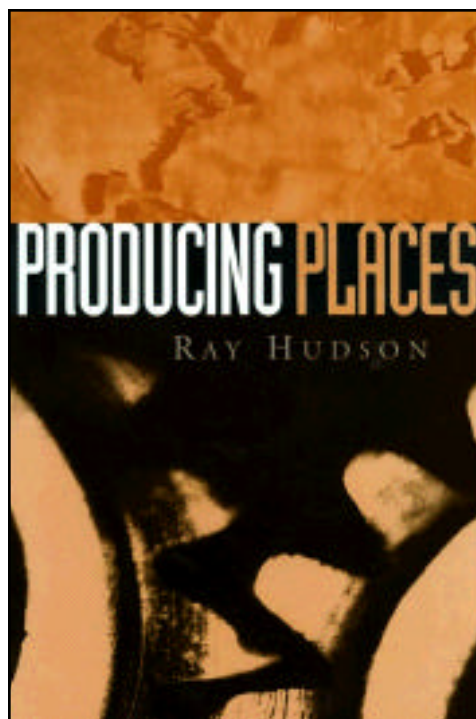
rhetoric, and to look these questions steadily in the eye. The author is open to 'the new' but determined not to go overboard.

So on the economy Ray Hudson sets out to make a powerful case for a Marxist approach, but one which is flexible enough to embrace a range of new theoretical approaches (he is sternly reproving of some others, though!). And through a sequence of chapters he uses these ideas to analyse labour markets, company behaviour and the physical process of production, including issues of sustainability. (One ironic irritation here is that the production of the book itself inadvertently exemplifies the processes of globalisation and unequal competition which it is exploring – though this is a book by a British author, 'labour' is spelled 'labor' throughout!)

In his discussion of place, Ray Hudson engages with some of the work done in the geography department at the OU. Here there is a serious debate about how we can, in this globalised age, take account of the inevitable openness of places without ceasing to recognise that feelings of need for 'bounded territories' can sometimes be very strong.

There is a huge amount of material in this book. As well as engaging with some major debates, the ten chapters provide an impressive and very thorough review of an enormous literature on the building of economies and the making of places, and on the important links between them.

Reviewed by Doreen Massey, Professor of Geography, Open University



Prices quoted for books are those available through the OU's bookshop.

Titles can be ordered online from Amazon through the OU's bookshop: www.openlink.org. Every purchase made via this site creates a contribution to the OU Foundation.



VC's VIEW

Professor
Brenda
Gourley

Use your influence

Much attention is being given to the Government's 'widening participation' policy and it is particularly interesting to consider how this differs from The Open University's fundamental mission – a mission which has been dedicated to widening participation in the very best sense.

'Widening participation' in Government terms derives from two different but complementary forces. The first is the force of democracy and the pursuit of social justice. This strand of the agenda expects universities and other institutions of higher education to reach out to disadvantaged people who come from backgrounds where they would not normally expect to receive higher education or benefit from its fruits. Not all universities know how to reach these students and, even if they do, are not always alert to the fact that these students need significant assistance if they are to succeed. No institution knows this better than the OU for there is no other institution which requires no educational prerequisites from its students – and this in itself concentrated the mind as to what constitutes a satisfactory learning experience – especially at a distance.

The second driving force for widening participation is the growth of the 'knowledge economy' and its insatiable need for 'knowledge workers'. The influence of technology and, in turn, its enabling of globalisation and its consequences has exponentially created a need for highly skilled workers. Whole economies as well as individuals benefit from a much enlarged pool. The pace of knowledge production and the speed at which the technologies change also mean that people need to be lifelong learners since what they learn in any particular time-constrained learning experience will not sustain them for the whole of their working lives.

The impact of this knowledge economy on education is obvious. It has turned education into a very large enterprise indeed – an enterprise which is no longer only the domain of the public sector. More and more private sector providers have joined in a sector where money is to be made – especially in high-demand/low-cost courses. The quality of these offerings is often a differentiating feature but students might well have parted with money before they find this out. The main point however is that the sector is now a highly competitive one and competition often comes from unlikely sources. The rise of the 'corporate' university is a phenomenon of our times and many companies have sophisticated in-house education and training opportunities for their staff. Some seek accreditation for their courses so that the attendees may have some tangible and portable evidence of their success.

What does all this mean for The Open University? It means we operate in a highly competitive environment and have to market our distinctive competencies in this environment. Because we happen to care particularly about students who have not had opportunities before and who often under-rate their own capacity to succeed, we operate in an arena not often ventured into by other providers. We have been doing this from our very inception and did not need special injunctions from Government to do so. We think other providers have much to learn from us and are embarking upon some complementary partnerships. We also would hope that our students lobby on our behalf wherever they have influence. We need their support in these difficult times as the sector struggles with less and less support from the public purse.

The last word

TV TRAILERS

How football scored an own goal

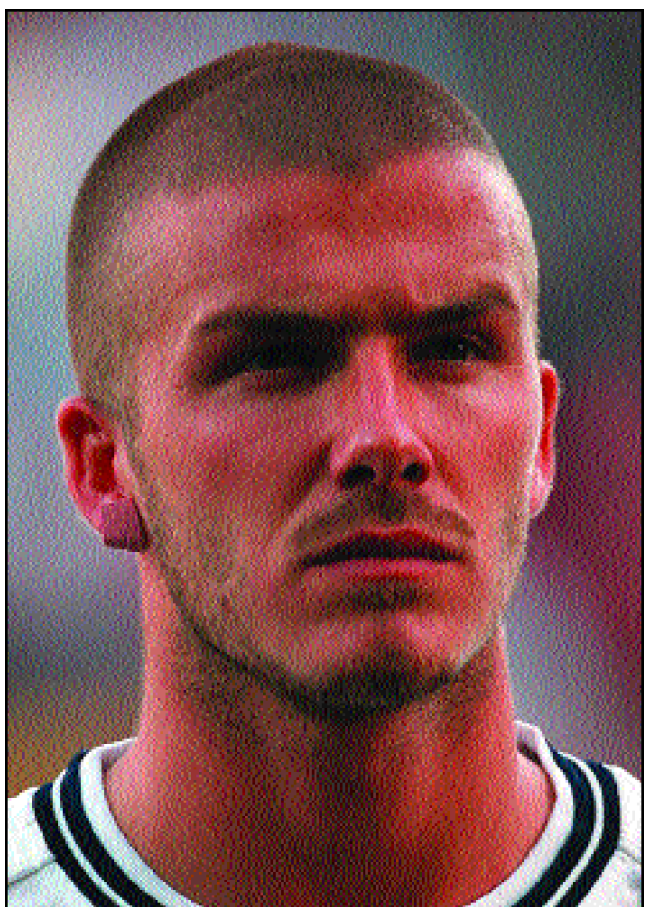
Paying the Penalty – BBC 2, June 15, 9am,
What Workers Want – BBC 2, June 22, 9am
Reinventing the Wheel – BBC 2, June 29, 9am
 Always check press for latest programme details

Don't be fooled by this month's wall-to-wall World Cup coverage: the future of football as we know it is in crisis. With spending on players' wages reaching 100 per cent of the total income of many clubs, and the collapse of ITV Digital which could have provided much-needed revenue, clubs in the Football League in particular are struggling to survive financially. But could one club's experience provide a new way forward?

Paying the Penalty is the first in a three-part Saturday morning series on real-life economics topics, made for DD202 *Economics and changing economics*. It looks at the changes made by Indian hotelier Firoz Kassam when he bought third division Oxford United two years ago. He set about creating a new financial model for the running of a football club that was no longer dependent upon gate receipts, merchandising and inconsistent TV rights. But will he succeed, or will supporters feel cheated by the fact that football is no longer the focus? Entrepreneur P.Y. Gerbeau looks at United's strategy, with contributions from politician and Chelsea fan David Mellor, BBC director of sport Peter Salmon, Oxford United chair Firoz Kassam, Professor Stefan Syzmanski of Imperial College and Professor Jonathan Michie of Birkbeck College.

The second programme, *What the workers want*, focuses on happiness at work, a new and growing area of interest to economists and employers, not to mention their employees. Studies prove that happy workers are more productive, and employers are beginning to realise the value to themselves of making work more attractive – or that's the theory anyway. Featuring a work/life balance project at Hinchbrook Hospital, Huntingdon, the National Theatre's Dignity at Work initiative, and a building dubbed 'the happiest workplace in Britain', the programme includes thoughts from Will Hutton of The Work Foundation and the OU's Dr Susan Himmelweit.

The cars we drive today are, with one or two exceptions, little changed from those of 50 years ago. Yet one hundred years ago the infant car industry was an innovative industry with many manufacturers jockeying for position in the marketplace. What changed? *Reinventing the Wheel*, the third programme in the series, looks at the economics of innovation, why innovation in the car industry was stifled and what might jump-start it – with help from Sir Clive Sinclair and cutting edge designers IDEO.



David Beckham's £92,000 a week makes him the Premiership's second highest paid player
 Picture: Popperfoto

Women readers join the race



Women readers of *Sesame* are invited to join staff of the Open University in Wales in a five kilometre run in aid of Cancer Research UK.

The Cardiff Race for Life on Wednesday July 10, sponsored by the OU in Wales, is one of the largest such events outside London, and last year attracted 6000 women runners and walkers, of all ages and fitness levels. Those interested in taking part should ring 08705 134314 and ask to join the Open University in Wales team. Cost is £7.50 adult, £4.50 under 18. Non-running volunteers are also welcome to help give out leaflets at the OU Access Bus which will be at the event.

The artist and her muse

Visitors to the Memorial Gallery in Wrexham in March were able to view the work of OU student and artist Nichola Hope.

Nichola, 26, from Cardiff, had around 20 pieces of her work on view for several weeks at the gallery. "I am doing the MA in popular culture with the OU at the moment," she said. "Initially I was thinking about doing History of Art but I looked into this course and realised it was just perfect for me."

Her work focuses on interiors such as decoration, household objects, wallpaper and space, as well as the culture and ideals that inhabit these spaces. "The subjects and ideas that I have been introduced to through the MA have been very useful and fed into my work and developed some of my ideas," she said.

Nichola is pictured with her painting entitled *Birdbath* for which, along with other paintings at her final degree show, she was awarded the prestigious R K Burt prize for her use of colour.

Nichola is currently selling her work with the Gallery on Broadway, in Cardiff. You can also view Nichola's work online at: www.nicholahope.com



FIFTH COLUMN

Here's your chance to write 350 to-the-point words on an OU subject that gets right up your nose – and we'll pay you £50 for the privilege.

Commitment – where is it?

Asks Steve Nicoll



As I prepare for my seventh year of study with the OU I have already marked the tutorial dates in my diary. These are dates that will be honoured and kept free regardless of any other demands on my time: tutorials are a vital component of my OU study calendar and assist me to make progress.

And yet in my heart I know that most of the tutorials will be poorly attended. Those that do attend are often reluctant to contribute to making the tutorial meaningful, believing that attendance is somehow a substitute for effort. And perhaps the worst aspect of any tutorial are those who insist on noisily packing away their study materials five minutes before the end of the lesson.

It must be truly soul-destroying for tutors to enter a class to find a handful of largely disinterested souls giving the distinct impression that they would rather be somewhere else. Commitment is often used to describe OU students who manage to fit studies into their already busy lives. It neatly defines the combined qualities of dedication, determination and perseverance displayed by those pursuing academic qualifications. They are right, but why does this commitment appear to dissipate when it comes to tutorials?

Tutorials represent an opportunity to validate your own study progress to date, gain insight and advice, clarify problems, ask questions – I could go on. The benefits of shared experience with other students are also immensely valuable and should never be underrated. With so much to be gained from attending tutorials it defies comprehension that so few are prepared to take advantage of it.

I end with a broad-based appeal to all OU students to attend tutorials and to do so with a sense of purpose and willingness. After all it is about commitment.

Steve Nicoll is an officer in the Royal Marines with 30 years service. He began studying Social Sciences with the OU whilst serving in Northern Ireland and graduated in May of this year with a BSc (Hons). He is continuing his studies with D820 in the Masters programme.