

# Sesame

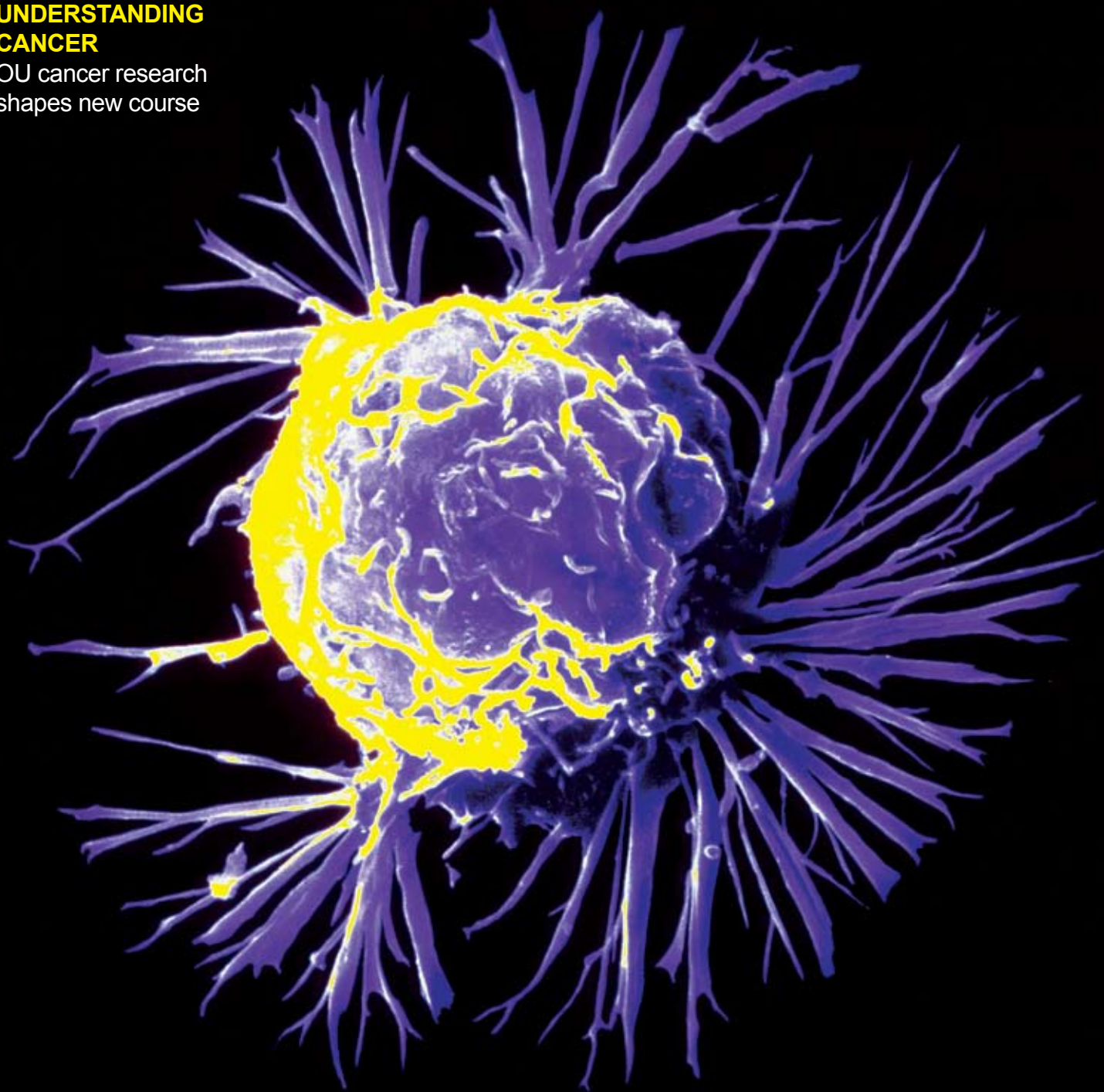


The Open University

Summer 2008 Issue 237

## **UNDERSTANDING CANCER**

OU cancer research  
shapes new course



### **DARK MATERIALS**

Author and OU honorary  
graduate Philip Pullman

### **RESEARCH**

Can America rise to the  
new global challenges?

### **VOLUNTEERING**

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and good for you!

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[www.lighterlife.com](http://www.lighterlife.com)

  
**LighterLife**  
Life in balance

# Welcome



WELCOME TO THE brand-new Open University magazine, packed full of the very content that you, our readers, have requested. Thousands of you were invited to take part in a special reader survey last autumn asking for your views on the communications you receive from the OU, including the student magazine *Sesame* and the alumni magazine *Open Eye*. This new magazine is the result of your

feedback ... and we hope you like it.

Interestingly, more than half of you who were surveyed said you would prefer to stop receiving a print version of *Sesame* and be given access to an online version instead. As a result, we are currently working on producing a new website, which will launch in the summer – keep an eye on StudentHome or your email inbox for details when it launches.

As the OU moves towards e-delivery (and plays its part in saving the environment), so too will *Sesame*. During the summer, we will be working on the *Sesame* subscription list to reduce the number of print versions that are sent out, encouraging readers instead to use the new website for all their usual *Sesame* news and features.

However, fear not, if you do not have regular internet access (and have not given your preferred email address to the OU), you will automatically receive the print version of *Sesame*. And if you are a student and have given your preferred email address but still wish to receive *Sesame* by print, please email your full name and PI number to [sesame@open.ac.uk](mailto:sesame@open.ac.uk) (with the subject 'Print'). However, if you are an alumnus, please follow the instructions on the enclosed form.

So enjoy this issue of *Sesame*, keep an eye out for our new website and we look forward to hearing your views!

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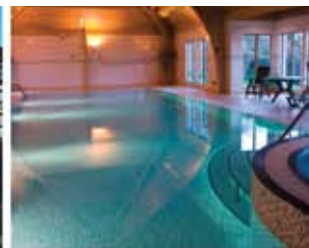
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# Update

All the latest news from The Open University



Online plagiarism is a major concern for universities

## Plagiarism

# Academic integrity?

More universities recognise threat of 'essay mills'

● A REPORT by the BBC has revealed that more and more universities are reacting to the threat posed by the internet in the fight against plagiarism, a problem highlighted by an investigation in *Sesame* magazine in 2007.

Tony Jenkins at the University of Leeds spoke at a workshop into plagiarism earlier this year, stating that academics were in what he described as an 'arms race' with 'essay mills' as they attempt to keep ahead of efforts to detect them.

Principal Lecturer in the Department of Computing at

Birmingham City University, Robert Clarke, has been monitoring sales on websites. He highlighted the difficulties faced by plagiarism software when trying to detect this kind of work, especially when one-off essays are being offered via small websites.

The Higher Education Academy and the internet plagiarism advisory service, Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC), are currently working together to offer support for the UK higher education sector on issues relating to academic integrity.

## Competition

# Up, up and away

Clare Harris reports back after winning the *Sesame* ballooning competition

● OU student Clare Harris is just coming back down to Earth after winning *Sesame's* luxury ballooning holiday competition with Virgin Balloon Flights, which featured in the summer 2007 edition.

Clare, who is currently working towards a microbiology PHD, said: "I'd been desperate to fly in a hot air balloon for ages, which is why I entered, and it was absolutely fantastic. It is just a totally different mode of transport, a different environment that is really quiet and peaceful – until the landing, which is exhilarating. I would definitely go up again."

The winners of the software competition that appeared in the winter 2007 edition of *Sesame* were: Kay Freeman of Worthing, Antony Jordan of Crawley and Anna Kowalewska of London.



Clare is pictured here with her guest in western Switzerland

## Insight

### Are you plagiarising?

You are in danger of committing an offence by:

- Using a choice phrase or sentence that you have come across
- Copying directly from a text
- Paraphrasing the words from a text very closely
- Using text from the internet
- Borrowing statistics or assembled facts from another person or source
- Copying or downloading figures, photographs, pictures or diagrams without acknowledging sources
- Copying from the notes or essays of a fellow student
- Copying from your own notes on a text, tutorial, video or lecture that contains direct quotes

Government

# Minister for Higher Education praises OU

Bill Rammell MP attends ceremony honouring YASS sixth-form students

● THE MINISTER FOR Higher Education, Bill Rammell MP, has praised the role played by The Open University in encouraging people into higher education.

He attended a ceremony honouring sixth-form students from Leventhorpe School in Sawbridgeworth, Hertfordshire, who passed their university courses via the Young Applicants in Schools and Colleges Scheme (YASS).

At the ceremony, which took place in March this year, Mr Rammell said: "What impresses me most is not that Year 13 students have been taking higher education courses and passing them, it's the range of courses that they have taken."

He added: "I am a great admirer of the OU and it is one of the finest creations of previous governments and I firmly believe that it opens doors and unlocks potential."

**ABOUT YASS**

THE Young Applicants in Schools and Colleges Scheme (YASS) is aimed at academically gifted students in Years 12 and 13. It enables them to study a wide range of undergraduate modules at first-year level alongside their AS and A levels.

There are early indications that YASS students who have studied with The Open

University are more likely to succeed at university studies. Those young students who decide to continue their university studies with the OU can count the module they have passed while at school towards their degree.

For more information visit [www.open.ac.uk/yass](http://www.open.ac.uk/yass)

Main: Successful YASS students  
Inset: Bill Rammell with Year 13 Tutor Denise Jackson



OUBS Alumni Association

# New membership, new benefits

New developments for OU Business School Alumni Association

● THE PAST FEW months have been particularly eventful for the OU Business School Alumni Association, with membership being extended to include those who complete certificates and diplomas in management.

The association launched a new-look website at [www.open.ac.uk/oubs-alumni](http://www.open.ac.uk/oubs-alumni) Alumni can now retrieve and update their profile online, search for other members, as well as access all the latest news and relevant course and event information. The next phase of development has already started with plans to implement a host of new interactive features such as RSS feeds, podcasts and more.



MBA Student of the Year Bart Knols

Feedback and suggestions are welcome – email [oubs-alumni@open.ac.uk](mailto:oubs-alumni@open.ac.uk)

A growing number of alumni are also joining the OU Business School group on networking site LinkedIn, and Irish and German alumni

recently met in Dublin for the association's first-ever twinning event. The latest alumni benefits include exclusive membership of the Lifestyle Clubs, which offer reviews and discounts on food, travel, services and lots more.

And last but not least, a selection of OU Business School alumni have been making the news. Bart Knols from the Netherlands won the prestigious MBA Student of the Year accolade from the Association of MBAs, sponsored by *The Independent*, while Paul Mylrea has been named Regional Chartered Manager of the Year 2008 for London.

# Just In...

**Costing the Earth**

THE Interdependence Day project, based at the OU, has just published *Do Good Lives Have to Cost the Earth?*, a collection of articles on environmental issues. Edited by Andrew Simms of nef (the new economics foundation) and Joe Smith of the OU, contributors include Philip Pullman and the late Anita Roddick.

**Unionlearn Quality Award**

JOHN Denham MP presented the OU with the Unionlearn Quality Award in February. The award was given to acknowledge the OU course *Recognising Achievement (U122)* – which was developed with the Transport and General Workers' Union section of Unite.

**Former UN delegate chair**

FORMER United Nations representative Sir Emyr Jones Parry has been appointed as Chair of a new International Advisory Board that has been established for the OU Business School. The new board includes a range of business leaders including Chinyelu Onwurah, Head of Telecoms Technology at Ofcom, and Margaret Miller, Senior Vice President and CIO of Warner Music Group.

**Breathe Internet Limited**

DUE to continuing problems with connectivity, service and support, the OU has been forced to end its relationship with Breathe Internet. This does not affect existing customers with Breathe Internet Limited. If you have any queries regarding your service, please call Breathe on +44(0)901 023 0373 (premium rate).



OU support will be offered to black and minority ethnic communities to work in care

### OU in Scotland

## Ground-breaking project

### OU support for minority ethnic communities

● PEOPLE FROM BLACK and minority ethnic communities will be able to pursue a career in social work and other caring professions thanks to a ground-breaking project led by The Open University in Scotland.

The OU in Scotland has recently completed a two-year pilot programme in partnership with the Multi-Cultural Family Base, the University of Edinburgh and Stevenson

College, which has trialled different approaches to addressing the specific support needs of black and minority ethnic students across Scotland. Throughout the pilot, students were offered free introductory care-related courses from the Openings programme. Funding has now been secured for the project to continue for a further two years.

For further details visit [www.open.ac.uk/scotland](http://www.open.ac.uk/scotland)

### Course connection BA (Hons) Social Work Scotland (B41)

Social work qualification **BA (Hons) Social Work Scotland (B41)** is only available to staff who are working in social care agencies in Scotland\* and are supported by their employer. The programme combines work-based and supported open learning, while responsibility for students' learning is shared between their employer and the OU. The OU provides study materials and tutorial support, and manages the assessment procedures, while the employer manages the practical learning aspects.

Call +44 (0)845 300 6090 or visit [www.open.ac.uk/courses](http://www.open.ac.uk/courses) for more information. Quote **Sesame** in any correspondence.

\*Similar courses are available in the rest of the UK

### Interactive services

## Countdown!

### Screensaver relaunch

● THE OU LIFE Screensaver is currently counting down to a brand-new relaunch on 1 June.

Aiming to keep students and alumni informed of the latest OU news and more, the new screensaver will now include animation and videos with scrolling text. It will also be compatible with Windows Vista.

The current screensaver will have to be uninstalled before the new one can be installed but this can all be done with one click of a button. The old screensaver will cease to operate at the end of June.

For more information email [oulifescscreensaver@open.ac.uk](mailto:oulifescscreensaver@open.ac.uk)



### Survey

## Students satisfied with study

### Results of autumn 2007 Courses Survey

● THE RESULTS OF the autumn 2007 Courses Survey reveals that overall, 87 per cent of students were satisfied with their OU study experience.

Students on 137 courses responded to the survey, the majority online, with an overall response rate of 59 per cent.

Ninety eight per cent were satisfied with the accuracy of course choice information in OU publications or OU websites and 88 per cent were satisfied with the accuracy of guidance on course choice from an OU member of staff.

The results of the survey also found that teaching materials continue to be highly rated by students with 89 per

cent of students being satisfied. Students were also very satisfied with the arrangements for assessment on their course – 87 per cent of students reported that they understood what was expected of them on their course. Ninety one per cent of students received constructive feedback from their tutor/study adviser on the assessed work. For 86 per cent of students, feedback on their assessed work was received promptly. Eighty two per cent of students were satisfied with the support provided by the tutor/study adviser on the course, and 83 per cent of students found it easy to contact their tutor when they needed to.

### OU in Wales

## Development needs of nurses

### Report looks at primary nursing requirements

● A JOINT REPORT from the Royal College of Nursing in Wales (RCN Wales), and the OU has revealed that the development requirements of primary care nurses in Wales are more complex than ever.

The project focused on identifying common themes relating to the provision of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for existing primary care nurses. Drawing on input from lead nurses and healthcare experts from across the country, it also looked at the educational needs of emerging primary care nursing roles, finding a huge variation in nurses' access to CPD. The RCN Wales also highlighted

the need for protected time for healthcare workers to undertake CPD.

Lorraine Morgan, Staff Tutor in the Faculty of Health and Social Care at the OU said: "It is important that nurses' education and development needs are met and administered in the most effective and beneficial way for nurses and service providers.

"We have looked forward to how we can strengthen the delivery of development opportunities in the work place to best meet the needs of nurses and improve upon the patient experience."

For more information see [www.open.ac.uk/wales](http://www.open.ac.uk/wales)

## ELQ funding debate

# Student cuts condemned

Key report by House of Commons committee slams government's ELQ policy

● THE OPEN UNIVERSITY is targeting employers and hard-to-reach students to try and soften the blow of losing millions of pounds of funding for one-quarter of its students in England – those who are studying for equivalent or lower qualifications (ELQ) to ones they already hold.

The ELQ policy has been comprehensively criticised following an enquiry by the House of Commons' Innovation, Universities, Science and Skills (IUSS) Committee, but government is set to go ahead with it.

The OU welcomed the Committee's March report, which endorsed widespread concerns about the ELQ policy, calling it "premature and not based on hard evidence".

It said: "We saw no convincing evidence that part-time students would gain from the redistribution of funds away from ELQ students." It added that "overall support for part-time students remains precarious and we conclude that these proposals are in danger of undermining improvements and current progress".

Among its recommendations is a call for a review of the effects of the policy by the Commission for Employment and Skills.

OU Vice-Chancellor Professor Brenda Gourley said in response to the IUSS Committee report that the University will continue its attempt to reverse the policy. She said an important task now

is for the University to do all it can to see that the Committee's recommendations are adopted.

But at the same time the University has no choice but to work with the policy as it stands, and try to mitigate its effects, she added.

"We will do all we can to replace the lost funding for teaching – including bidding for funding for additional non-ELQ students; seeking extra funds to help to support growth and reform in key areas, such as widening participation and employer engagement; and enhancing existing courses and

services to engage with new student markets."

She added that the new policy is a high risk for the University, which does not know if there will be sufficient demand to fill the additional non-ELQ student places or whether employers will be willing to fund more students.

She added: "The idea that employers would step in to fill the gap is hardly based on evidence to date. Only 12 per cent of our ELQ students get some kind of support from their employers.

"Many of our students are studying in order to equip themselves for new and different jobs, most often with different employers, an aspiration hardly recommending itself to present employers for funding."

The OU Students Association's campaign against ELQ continues: see [www2.open.ac.uk/ousa](http://www2.open.ac.uk/ousa)

The full IUSS Committee report is available at [www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm/cmdius.htm](http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm/cmdius.htm)

**"The idea that employers would step in to fill the gap is hardly based on evidence to date"**



The OU's Vice-Chancellor, Professor Brenda Gourley

## Insight

### How will ELQ affect current students?

From the start of the next academic year 2008/09, the OU will no longer receive government funding for ELQ students in England – except for a small number studying certain exempt subjects, such as initial teacher training or social work.

But transitional funding means the impact on existing students before 2011/12 will be limited. Fees in 2008/09 will rise by an average 7.5 per cent, following existing policy. The University is currently reviewing its fee structures. As yet, it is not clear what impact the ELQ decision will have on student fees. The new policy, however, could threaten the viability of some courses that have large numbers of ELQ students.

Speaking to *Sesame*, Vice-Chancellor Brenda Gourley said the impact of ELQ is not concentrated in any particular faculty, but affects courses across the board. "Faculties are working out how they are going to accommodate it," she said. "But we will ensure that anyone studying now will be able to finish their studies.

"And we will continue to provide new offerings. We are looking to growth in widening participation students and more engagement with employers, to bring us new opportunities."

She added: "I would like to thank Open University students for their continuing support in opposing the policy." At the time of going to press, more than 21,000 OU students have signed a petition organised by the OU Students Association, calling on the Prime Minister to reverse the ELQ decision.

Barristers examines the lynchpins of our legal system



New law TV series

# All wigs and gowns

A landmark BBC/OU TV series goes behind-the-scenes of the UK legal system

● BRITAIN'S MOST POWERFUL profession has opened its doors to the cameras for the first time in its history. *Barristers* is a fly-on-the-wall documentary series that gets inside the cloistered world of the lynchpins of our legal system – the barristers.

Made possible only after negotiations with the Bar Council, the series paints an intimate portrait of our learned friends in and out of court.

Barristers make up the largest single professional group in Parliament and from their ranks of judges and QCs have come prime ministers and millionaires, as well as those who make our laws. But entry to the world of wigs and gowns is, as the series reveals, intensely competitive – of the thousands who train to become a barrister, only a few will succeed.

For Gary Slapper, Open University Professor of Law and academic advisor to the series, the opening up of this world to the TV cameras is a historic development. "The role of law in society is immeasurably

important. Societies that don't have it, or don't have as good law as we in the UK do, are much less secure and comfortable places to live in.

"And at the heart of our law are barristers – yet people know little about them."

This lack of knowledge is hardly surprising, because until now most people have had to rely on fictional portrayals in books and TV dramas like *Rumpole of the Bailey* and *Judge John Deed* for their insight into the barrister's world.

One of the things the series does is explode a few myths, not least the idea that the Bar is only for people from certain backgrounds. In fact, the profession has become much more open, says Gary. "Meritocracy has taken over. Entry is balanced in relation to gender, ethnic background and class. Basically, they want people who are the best."

What pleases Gary most is that the series combines good human drama with an insight to some of the deeper political and philosophical questions about

how our law works. "It builds up a picture of the fabric of the law but it does it indirectly, not in a lecturing way. It is the BBC at its best, managing to educate, entertain and inform."

*Barristers* will be shown on BBC TWO this autumn

## Course connection OU law courses

**Rules rights and justice (W100)** is an introductory law course which offers a basic knowledge of the English legal system.

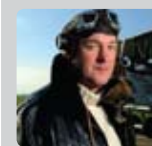
**Understanding law (W200)** introduces the foundations of legal knowledge and practical legal research. Understanding law is also the first course in the Open University's Qualifying Law degree, which gives entry to the legal profession.

Call +44 (0)845 300 6090 or visit [www.open.ac.uk/courses](http://www.open.ac.uk/courses) for more information. Quote Sesame in any correspondence.

## TV Round-up

### Coming soon

BBC TV – AUTUMN



**JAMES MAY'S BIG IDEAS**  
BBC TWO  
James May

returns this autumn for a new series exploring world-changing inventions.

**HISTORY OF SCOTLAND**

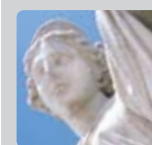
BBC TWO SCOTLAND  
Chronicling the history of the nation from its earliest days.

**THE PRICE OF OLD AGE**

BBC ONE  
A new six-part series that follows the lives of people in a retirement community in modern Britain.

BBC RADIO

**THE ESSAY: GREEK AND LATIN VOICES**  
RADIO THREE



This four-part series looks at how classical literature underpins

Western civilisation. Each week, scholars, writers and passionate classicists explore aspects of a key Greek or Latin author. Broadcasts are currently scheduled for 11pm during June and July.

**THINKING ALLOWED**  
RADIO FOUR

This episode of the OU/ Radio Four production is a special edition of the long-running social science research programme presented by academic and writer Laurie Taylor.

**THE MATERIAL WORLD**  
RADIO FOUR

The science news series teams up with the University to bring a series of reports from OU summer schools, revealing what it's like to be an OU science student.

## Going for gold

# Olympic dreams

*Olympic Dreams* follows athletes as they strive to make it into the GB Olympics team for London 2012

● FOR MORE THAN a year BBC cameras have been tracking Olympic hopefuls as they go about their daily routine to become the best in the world. They include 14-year-old diving prodigy Tom Daley; 19-year-old BMX girl racer Shanaze Reade; and 18-year-old Darius Knight, who has emerged from a bleak south London housing estate to become a rising star of table tennis. A diverse group of young people united by one dream, we see them training, travelling around the country and competing in make-or-break events. With the help of a video camera that each athlete carries to record their thoughts and feelings at crucial moments, we get an insight into the sacrifices made by them and their families.

The series, broadcast in the run-up to the Beijing Olympics, follows the young hopefuls as they attempt to qualify for the games in China – potentially a

crucial step on the road to 2012, as Ben Oakley, the OU's Senior Lecturer in Sports Studies and academic consultant to the series, explains.

"It takes about 10 years to make an Olympic champion and someone who is going to win gold in 2012 will probably be going to Beijing in 2008, or at least knocking on the door."

The media is already building up high expectations of Britain's performance in 2012 and with increased funding, including National Lottery money, being poured into the development of Britain's young athletes, the pressure is on for them to deliver. "It's not enough just to be good at your sport, you have to be able to deal with the pressures and to do that you have to mature very quickly," says Ben.

One of the themes of *Olympic Dreams* is the sacrifice that young athletes have to make – it's goodbye to a normal

social life – with the benefit of opportunities such as global travel and even fame.

The series also focuses on the all-important relationship between athlete and coach, and reveals the techniques that coaches use to develop their athlete's talents. Ben Oakley, a former windsurfing coach who accompanied the British team to the Olympics in South Korea in 1988 and Barcelona in 1992, predicts we will see "tension and quite a few tantrums".

Parental support and involvement is another theme, as a young person's Olympic ambitions can have a huge impact on their family. "*Olympic Dreams* shows how the people around the athletes sacrifice themselves," says Ben. "Some of the parents are fully involved – perhaps too involved. On the other hand, some of the parents are not involved at all."

The final theme is the hugely controversial topic of the selection process – is it fair and will it produce a winning team? After Beijing, the cameras will continue following those athletes who are still on the Olympic road, all the way to 2012. "Some will drop out, and some new faces will emerge," says Ben. "We will end up with a fascinating record."

*Olympic Dreams* will be shown on BBC ONE during the four weeks prior to the opening ceremony of the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games on 8 August

## Course connection

### Sport courses at the OU

*This Sporting Planet (D170)* is a new 15-point course looking at why sport is so important in the world today.

*Exploring sport online (Y164)* is a short course suitable for all sports fans, dealing with all aspects of sport from improving sports performance to the place of sport in society.

*Introduction to sport, fitness and management (E112)* is a new 60-point course covering the key issues in sport and fitness training, which can be applied to your own participation in sport or exercise, or to careers such as fitness instruction or sports facility management. This is the first course in a new OU foundation degree in Sport, Fitness and Health. Other short courses that may be of interest are *Challenging obesity (SDK122)* and *Understanding human nutrition (SK183)*.

Call + 44 (0)845 300 6090 or visit [www.open.ac.uk/courses](http://www.open.ac.uk/courses) for more information.



Watch British competitors of traditional Olympic sports such as diving and table tennis – as well as the less traditional competitive sport of BMX racing – strive to make it to London 2012

OU academic and TV presenter Hermione Cockburn steps back in time



TV feature

# Fossil-fuelled hunter

The OU's Hermione Cockburn presents new BBC series *Fossil Detectives*

● WHEN IT COMES to firing up the British public with enthusiasm for rocks and fossils, few people are better suited than Hermione Cockburn. An earth scientist and OU tutor (on *Environmental science*, S216), Hermione has pursued a career in TV since she left full-time academia five years ago. She's appeared on *What the Ancients Did for Us*, *Rough Science* and *Coast*, but

are also packed with scientific meaning. Imagine walking along the beach and among the thousands of pebbles, your eye catches the unmistakable swirl of a glistening ammonite – you may be the first and only person for millions of years to see it. I challenge anyone not to be thrilled by that! But fossils also connect us to the past in a way nothing else can; they are vital to our understanding of the

of viewers, because there is something for everybody."

And like *Coast*, the real star of the show is the land itself. When the series' publicity talks about the British Isles' rich legacy of fossils and rocks, this is not just media hype. Our landscape has in ages past been washed by tropical seas and stalked by dinosaurs, and the traces are still there to be found. *Fossil Detectives* introduces the West Runton giant elephant (see above right) and the Cuckfield iguanodon – one of the earliest dinosaur discoveries ever made.

Making the series was great fun, says Hermione – but even the exhilaration of abseiling down a crumbling cliff face on the Isle of Wight to dig out dinosaur fossils paled into insignificance when she met her hero, David Attenborough.

"We spent an hour talking through his fossil collection. I was so excited – I almost feel that I can retire happily now." *Fossil Detectives* will be shown on BBC FOUR in June

## "Fossils connect us to the past in a way that nothing else on Earth can"

*Fossil Detectives* will be the series she is most proud of, she says, because its subject is "closest to my heart".

Fossils have an image problem, admits Hermione. "I think it is left over from the days when museums displayed endless cabinets of grey rocks with small labels. What *Fossil Detectives* says is: give them a go, they're fun and exciting.

"Fossils are beautiful and fascinating in their own right but

evolution of the planet, to life on Earth and to our own evolution."

*Fossil Detectives* follows the format of the award-winning OU/BBC series *Coast*, which includes homing in on particular locations in Britain.

"I think one of the things that made *Coast* successful was the short-story format; we don't go into too much depth but we try to get a quite a lot of information in each story," says Hermione. "It is a format that suits all sorts

## Insight Fossil hunting

You don't have to be a rock-climber or an earth scientist to go fossil-hunting – some very significant fossil discoveries have been made by complete amateurs...

In 1990, two keen-eyed locals out for a walk in West Runton, Norfolk noticed a stub of bone sticking out from a cliff. It turned out that what they had spotted was the fossilised remains of a giant elephant – ancestor of the smaller woolly mammoth. Scientists later uncovered the most complete skeleton ever found of this creature, which in life stood over four metres tall and weighed more than 10 tonnes.

## Course connection Earth sciences at the OU

***Fossils and the history of life (S193)*** is a 10-point course which helps you to identify the common fossils you may find, and shows you where they fit into the story of evolution.

***Geology (S260)*** is a 30-point practical introduction to the fundamentals of modern geology and includes a home kit of rocks, fossils and a microscope.

***Environmental science (S216)*** is a 60-point course that draws together biology, chemistry, Earth science and physics to analyse how the Earth's systems work.

You can find further information and online discussion about all of the OU/BBC series, at [www.open2.net](http://www.open2.net)

# We've got mail!

Please email your letters to [sesame@open.ac.uk](mailto:sesame@open.ac.uk) or post to Letters to the Editor, *Sesame*, The Open University, Milton Keynes, MK7 6AA. Please include your name, address and daytime telephone number. We reserve the right to edit letters. Letters will be permanently available to read online at [www.open.ac.uk/sesame](http://www.open.ac.uk/sesame) A £20 book token is awarded for the published Star letter

## Star letter

### MINIMUM WAGE, MAXIMUM EDUCATION

This is just a big thank you to The Open University, which has helped me to achieve my ambition of studying for a BA (Hons) Open degree that I finished last year.

I am a cleaner on the minimum wage who never had the chance to go on to further education and it is only through the OU that I have had the opportunity to study the subjects that I enjoy and gain qualifications, self respect and a little confidence.

ANNE GREATOREX,  
NOTTINGHAM



### OU RECRUITS POLAR BEARS!

In the winter 2007 edition of *Sesame*, what is a picture of a polar bear doing alongside an article about the Antarctic? Since there are no polar bears in the Antarctic and the interviewee, Mark Brandon, is pictured, I can only assume that this is a picture of the interviewer, Debbie Dixon? I was not aware that polar bears are so intelligent; how did the OU recruit her?

ELVIN THURSTON,  
NORWICH, NORFOLK

*Thanks for your letter, Elvin. How we wish we had polar bears working in the office, they'd be rather useful when it comes to changing the heavy bottles on the water cooler! But alas, no. The photo of a polar bear was published alongside the article to illustrate the story Dr Brandon recounted about polar bears knocking down his equipment in the Arctic (not the Antarctic), where you do in fact find polar bears. We're not sure if they work in the offices out there though!*



### EDUCATING PETER

Our government proposes to compel 16 to 18 year olds to stay in education. Having left school at 16, I noticed limitations on my career progression. Still, I do not regret the decision; I was not inspired and was a disruptive influence (school report, 1982). It was probably to the benefit of all that I left.

Now, with the OU, I am inspired by my studies and hopefully I am not a disruptive influence at the tutorials.

I wonder how many 16 to 18 year olds will experience poorer education should this bill pass? How many serious students will be distracted? And how many who should be gaining other types of experience (perhaps returning to education later) will be robbed of that opportunity and possibly alienated from study for ever?

PETER GALE,  
AWSWORTH, NOTTINGHAMSHIRE

### IN CREDIT?

During the years of my study with the OU, I have often questioned why I was not allowed any credit for the Financial Planning Certificate (FPC) that I held from the Chartered Insurance Institute.

I note that the OU now offers *You and Your money: Personal Finance in Context (DB123)* – a 30-point course which I would contend is a simpler version of the FPC.

In the circumstances, perhaps consideration should now be given to allowing up to 60 points credit to those who, like me, hold the Financial Planning Certificate as a level 1 course?

ROSS M HUSSEY,  
EXETER

*Joanne McAllister from the OU's Credit Transfer Centre responds... In order to be assessed for credit with the OU, learning must have been at the UK higher education level; formally assessed; undertaken with appropriate quality assurance arrangements, and be essentially academic.*

*The Chartered Institute's Financial Planning Certificate (FPC) has been accredited by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), who positioned it at level 3 in the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). Higher education study is positioned at Levels 4 to 8 on the NQF so, as the FPC is not at the higher education level, it is not eligible for credit with the OU.*



### GOOD DISABLED ACCESS?

The following is from The Open University's web page on degree ceremonies and, specifically, it is about access to the venue used for this purpose in Milton Keynes:

'The venue offers good disabled access with lifts to all levels. However, flat access to seats in the auditorium is limited with the majority of the seated area requiring graduates and guests to negotiate some steps. Access to the stage is via a short flight

of steps and it is therefore not directly wheelchair accessible. The venue does not offer a designated 'disabled parking' area for parties attending events at the venue. However, there are plenty of public disabled parking spaces to be found close to the venue.'

No, access to the presentation area does not constitute 'good disabled access'. Wheelchair-users are not being afforded the same level of dignity as their able-bodied peers. Why is the OU booking venues that are unsuitable for their many disabled students?

FELICITY WRIGHT,  
LOCATION WITHHELD AT REQUEST

*Tony Barker, Head of Awards and Ceremonies at the OU, responds: The selection of venues for degree ceremonies to produce a programme that provides real choice for our graduates is determined by a set of factors. These include geographical location, available dates, auditorium capacity in relation to anticipated demand and so on. Only a limited number of potential venues meet all requirements. Access to the stage/platform is taken into account in deciding whether or not to use a*

*particular venue, but it has not proved possible in all cases to find suitable venues that meet all other requirements and have an accessible platform.*

*In the process of complying with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act, the University has sought to encourage the provision of access to platforms and a number of venues have provided this for the first time. However, in some instances there is currently no wheelchair access between the auditorium and the stage and it has not been possible to find alternative venues that meet all the University's requirements.*



#### CARBON FOOTPRINTS

In relation to the 'Our Man in Antarctica' article in the winter 2007 issue of *Sesame* – I have been to Antarctica and recognise that my visit had an

environmental impact.

While in Antarctica I did notice among my colleagues a growing awareness of the threat to this part of the planet. I felt that we all returned home with a heightened sense of the danger, and to a fair extent what we should now do in our lives to help reduce the threat.

We all learned a lot, and contributed money to help save the Patagonian toothfish (no it's not another unicorn, I assure you it's real!).

'Our Man in Antarctica' was a challenging article and I wonder whether I would have still gone to Antarctica if I had read a similar thought-provoking article prior to my visit? I would be most interested in other OU students and alumni views.

JOHN GRIFFIN,  
OSPRINGE, KENT

#### CRACKING CODES BEHIND BARS

I found the 'Cracking codes behind bars' article in the winter 2007 edition of *Sesame* inspirational. What I have achieved pales into insignificance compared with what Tony has done. I wish him every success in the future.

MICHAEL BISHOP,  
CHELTENHAM

### Announcements and corrections

#### Behind the scenes

Ever wondered what goes on behind the scenes of the busy OU Communications department, home to the *Sesame* team, the Media Relations department and much more? Well, then check out the OU Communications blog at <http://conclave.open.ac.uk/communicationsblog/>

#### Corrections

In the winter edition of *Sesame*, a letter was featured from a student who expressed concerns about the electronic submission of TMA's on *Maths for science (S151)*. A response from Shelagh Ross, S151 Course Team Chair, can be seen at [www.open.ac.uk/sesame](http://www.open.ac.uk/sesame)

The correct URL for the OU's new Mathematics, Computing and Technology (MCT) Faculty can be found at its interim website, [www.mct.open.ac.uk](http://www.mct.open.ac.uk)

#### COCK-A-HOOP!

I've finally received my results for 2007. It's my final year of study, so I now know I have a degree in literature and I'm cock-a-hoop!

When I first started, I was unsure if I'd be able to cope. During those six years a lot has happened to me. My son is disabled and was diagnosed with ulcerative colitis. Three years ago my husband began to suffer from depression and had to leave teaching. At the same time as he left his job, I was made redundant. These may appear to have been ample reasons to set aside my studies. However, the OU had the opposite effect. It kept me focused, I found supportive friends and my studies took my mind 'to a different place'. My husband is getting better and I have found work, so life is improving.

I thoroughly enjoyed my studies. It was a rewarding experience. I just wanted to say thank you.

DETAILS WITHHELD AT REQUEST



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*Rory McCormick*, Second-year undergraduate, University of Bristol.

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# Shamed By Your English?

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

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# Courses

The latest information on new and exciting courses

Understanding modern-day diseases

## The big issue

Heart disease, obesity, diabetes and cancer are four of the major killers in society today. Four new short science courses study these in-depth

● THE OU'S SCIENCE faculty has introduced a suite of short courses which examine in-depth the causes behind life-threatening diseases such as diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, cancer and obesity. Aimed at science and non-science students, the level 1 courses offer a general overview of the diseases and can count towards a foundation, BA or BSc qualification.

Two of the courses, *Understanding cardiovascular diseases* and *Diabetes care*, have already started with the next presentations commencing in September 2008, while *Challenging obesity* starts in September 2008 and *Understanding Cancer* (see feature on page 18) begins in October 2008.

### **UNDERSTANDING CARDIOVASCULAR DISEASES (SK121)**

This course introduces the different major types of cardiovascular disease and underlying risk factors, and describes how the cardiovascular system functions normally. It also describes how cardiovascular disease can be prevented, both in individuals and whole populations. There are also chapters on the ways in which

genetic factors combine with environmental and lifestyle factors to affect risk in different groups of people. Although the course predominately focuses on the person with cardiovascular disease in the context of the UK National Health Service, it does make reference to global issues and ethnic and class differences in the incidence of the disease.

### **DIABETES CARE (SK120)**

The medical, social, psychological and educational aspects of the condition of diabetes are all covered in this short course. The course covers the underlying biology of the condition and explores the differences and similarities of Type 1 and Type 2 diabetes. The core of the course concentrates on the person with diabetes and how that person can make informed choices in relation to treatment and lifestyle. Course materials cover recommended treatment paths such as annual review and checkups, types of medication, diet and exercise, and managing hypos and hypers. The psychosocial aspects of having the condition are also examined.

### **CHALLENGING OBESITY (SDK122)**

The World Health Organisation



## The World Health Organisation warns that obesity has reached epidemic proportions globally

warns that obesity has reached epidemic proportions globally with more than a billion adults overweight, of whom at least 300 million are clinically obese. In Britain alone, 50 per cent of the adult population is overweight according to the International Agency for Research on Cancer, while the treatment of the condition costs the UK's National Health Service £500 million a year.

Obesity and the consequences of inactivity are discussed in this course, which also considers how governments, and others, might develop policies that prevent the continuing escalation of the obesity epidemic.

### Insight

#### Obesity facts and figures

- The overall cost of obesity to the UK is estimated at up to £7.4bn a year
- Over 30,000 deaths a year are caused by obesity in England alone
- Adult obesity rates have almost quadrupled in the past 25 years
- The number of obese children has tripled in 20 years
- Obesity can decrease life span by nine years

New language course

# Discover Welsh!

Or as the Welsh say, Canfyddwch y Gymraeg! The OU launches a new Welsh language course



Rhossili Beach on Gower Peninsula, near Swansea

● BEING PREPARED TO serve a prison sentence to preserve a language would be unheard of today. But that is exactly what thousands of campaigners did to save the Welsh language, which was in decline during the early 1960s.

More than 40 years ago only a small minority spoke Welsh in Wales, but thanks largely to the campaigning work of Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg (the Welsh Language Society) this has now risen to approximately 580,000 people, approximately 21 per cent of the population.

The number of Welsh speakers is expected to increase even further now that the language is embedded in the school curriculum.

However, it isn't just children who are studying Welsh, as many adults are learning what is thought to be Britain's oldest language which dates back at least 2,500 years.

Whether your interest in the language is educational or purely vocational, the OU has launched a new Welsh course **Croeso (L196)**, which will give you the skills you need to be able to speak and understand simple Welsh in everyday situations. It takes you through a range of practical situations such as socialising, travelling and shopping. By the end of the course you will be able to speak and understand simple Welsh. You'll also have developed an understanding of aspects of Welsh society and culture.

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Forensic science

## Crime watch

Learn the 'tricks of the trade' with this new science course

● FANS OF TELEVISION crime shows such as *Ashes To Ashes*, *The Bill*, *Prime Suspect*, *Inspector Morse* and *CSI* will enjoy the new **Elements of forensic science (S187)** course which is launching in November 2008.

This course is suitable for those who have a basic knowledge of chemistry, DNA and genetics and who want to understand how this science is applied to crime scene investigations. The course explores how forensic scientists work, the techniques they use and how they reach the conclusions presented in court. In this course the focus is on



Discover how forensic science is applied to crime scene investigations

topics relating to the human body, with the opportunity to learn about fingerprints and their visualisation on hostile surfaces, body fluids in crime detection, drugs and DNA testing. You will also learn about the 'forensic process'; how the police and forensic scientists work together to take a structured and logical approach to collecting, analysing and presenting forensic data.

An introduction to archaeology

## Become the new Indiana Jones

Step back in time with this new OU course

● THE NEW INDIANA Jones film – *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull* – has hit cinema screens this summer. If you feel inspired to become a bit of an archaeologist, like Harrison Ford's intrepid Dr Jones, then the OU has an interesting new level 1 course that might be of interest.

**Archaeology: the science of investigation (SA188)** has been created in partnership with The British Museum and the York Archaeological Trust. These partnerships have allowed the course to gain access to a wide range of archaeological sites and examples, including direct access to the

conservation laboratories within the museum, as well as access to specially commissioned interviews with key scientific and conservation staff.

As the OU's very own (female) Indiana Jones, Course Chair, Dr Arlene Hunter, told *Sesame*: "The course is suitable for anyone who has an interest in archaeology and wants to know more about how the scientific methods of investigation, processes and techniques used within archaeology really work."

The course has two presentations in September and November, so log onto **www.open.ac.uk/courses** to discover more.

## Cultural encounters

## Art for arts' sake

Excellent introduction to the humanities

● FROM CLEOPATRA TO the meaning of life and leisure via Shostakovich's string quartets – these are all featured in ***The arts past and present (AA100)*** which launches in October 2008.

The first book, *Reputations*, focuses on artistic and historical reputation through case studies of famous and infamous people such as Cleopatra, Stalin and Christopher Marlowe, while Book Two, *Tradition and Dissent*, takes a more philosophical approach covering topics such as Plato's theory of courage and poetry about animals.

Book Three, *Cultural Encounters*, meanwhile examines different cultures at different times. Case studies include the Benin Bronzes, modern short stories and



Examine the reputations of historical figures such as Josef Stalin

Seamus Heaney's adaptation of Sophocles' *Antigone*.

The final book, *Place and Leisure*, looks at the human environment over a range of periods and contexts to explore questions about the meaning of life and leisure, and the placement of the arts within this arena.

**This level one course will be replacing *An introduction to the humanities (A103)*.**



## Win Indiana Jones goodies!

● TO CELEBRATE the launch of this summer's Indiana Jones blockbuster hit and the OU's brand new archaeology course, the Sesame team has gone on a treasure hunt of its own – and the results are some goodies to give away from *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull*, which is released at cinemas everywhere on 22 May (see [www.indianajones.com](http://www.indianajones.com) for more information).

In our Indiana Jones goody pack, you will find:

- A PVC whip
- An Indiana Jones hat
- A digital Indiana Jones photo frame

To be in with the chance of winning these goodies, email [sesame@open.ac.uk](mailto:sesame@open.ac.uk) with the subject line 'Indiana' including your full name, address and telephone number.

## Course updates

## K100 replaced

The popular course *Understanding health and social care (K100)* has been replaced with *An introduction to health and social care (K101)* which starts in October 2008. Each year, £15 billion is spent on social care services in the UK and care is constantly in the headlines not just because it involves huge budgets, but because it employs a large workforce and affects so many lives. The course examines the lives of care workers and care service users through in-depth case studies.

## Weather with you

Gale force winds, snow storms, above average temperatures and even an earthquake; the UK has endured it all this winter – but is it down to global warming or irregular weather patterns? *Understanding the weather (S189)* is a new course, starting in October 2008, which provides an introduction to weather patterns and events around the world and will even provide you with the know-how to be able to predict your own local weather.

## Returning to science, engineering and technology

If you have studied or worked in science, engineering or technology and you're looking to return to work in one of these sectors, then *The return to science, engineering and technology (T161)* course offers a supportive environment to help you realise your ambitions. Through a series of web-based activities, you'll analyse your previous experiences and skills, identify new employment

opportunities, and develop an action plan that will help you fulfil your aspirations.

## OU launches new Scots law course

The OU's Centre for Law has launched a new law course *Introduction to the law in contemporary Scotland (W150)*. With support from The Law Society of Scotland, this brand-new course looks at law-making in Scotland and introduces students to specific areas of Scots law, including criminal, delict, child and employment law. The course starts in November 2008 and is aimed at professionals across public and private sectors, the general public, lobby and community groups, and will provide an excellent foundation to students who want to understand how modern Scotland operates.

## Introduction to counselling

This new level 1 course (D171) offers an interesting introduction to the theory and practice of counselling. It introduces a range of key topics in counselling, including the cultural and historical origins of counselling. This course starts in October 2008.

## Courses galore

Other Courses That are now open for registration include *Earth in Crisis (DU311)*, *Investigating the psychological world (D821)*, *Accessible online learning: supporting disabled students (H810)*, *Introduction to bookkeeping and accounting (B190)*, *Making it happen! Leadership, influence and change (B204)*, *Business functions in context (B203)* and *Business organisations and their environments (B201)*.

## Spotlight on science

# Understanding cancer

Cancer is a disease that impacts on many of us. A new course examines the causes of cancer, from genetics through to environmental factors, and looks at the range of treatments available worldwide

● UP TO 10 million new cases of cancer are diagnosed worldwide every year with over two-thirds of new cases occurring in developing countries, according to the World Health Organisation. Closer to home, up to 300,000 cases are diagnosed in the UK with breast, lung, bowel (colorectal) and prostate accounting for over half of all new cases of cancer each year.

Among those trying to find new treatments to cure cancer is OU academic Dr Sotiris Missailidis, whose research into developing a ground-

breaking treatment using genetically engineered DNA, otherwise known as aptamers, to track down cancerous cells in the body is featured in a new level 1 course *Understanding cancer*. Talking to *Sesame*, Sotiris said: “The course looks at what causes cancer, the diagnosis of cancer and the different treatments and therapy available globally.”

The course material covers the worldwide distribution of cancers and gives a brief overview of the major trends and variations in their prevalence and global impact.

It also looks at the different choices available to people with cancer with regards to their treatment, and outlines the palliative treatments available as well as the rationale for their use, which can vary greatly depending on where the patient lives. “Palliative care can vary dramatically between countries, with some patients just simply being given an aspirin to cope with the pain, while other countries provide hospices with specially trained staff,” explained Sotiris.

As well as a general overview, the course covers the basic biology of cancers and the genetic factors that influence their initiation, formation and progression. For example, course material describes the cell biology behind normal and tumour cells and explains how cancers form, progress and spread through the body.

The course also looks at the ways in which multiple risk factors contribute to disease onset and how genetic, environmental and lifestyle factors combine in the generation of cancers, through the use of case studies.

*Understanding cancer* also gives details of the different methods available for cancer screening and the advantages and disadvantages of their use, explains the diagnostic tests and imaging methods used to diagnose cancer and examines the various therapeutic approaches available, including surgery, radiotherapy, chemotherapy and biological therapy.

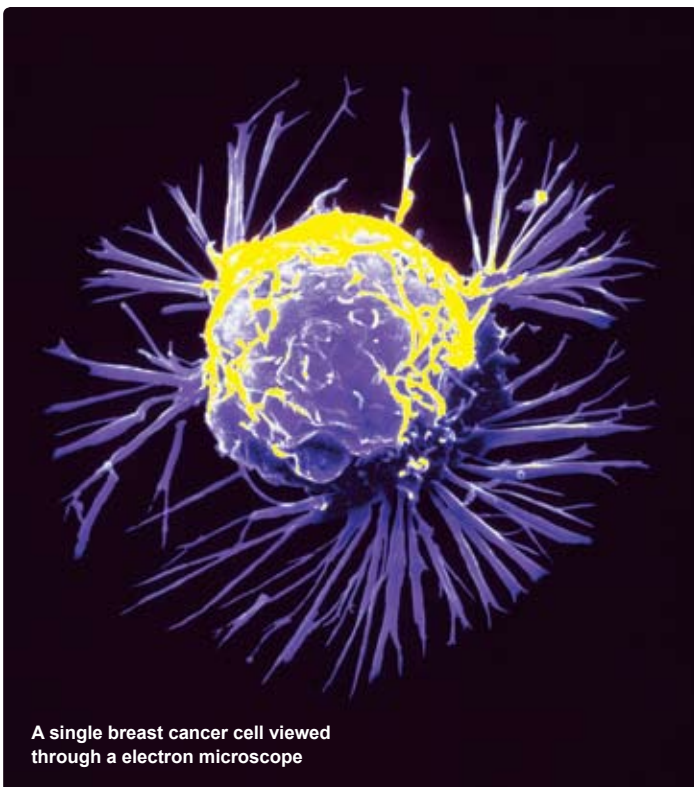
It also defines the issues related to living with cancer, the management of side effects

and symptoms, and the psychological impact of cancer diagnosis, treatment and return to normal life.

Although *Understanding cancer* is initially aimed at science students, it is suitable for anybody interested in one of the major killers of our time.

***Understanding Cancer (SK123)*** starts in October 2008. Visit [www.open.ac.uk/courses](http://www.open.ac.uk/courses) for more information and details on how to register. Please quote *Sesame* in any correspondence.

**“Palliative care can vary dramatically between countries, with some patients just simply being given an aspirin to cope with the pain”**



A single breast cancer cell viewed through an electron microscope

## Insight

### The Cancer Clock

If you don't want to wait until October to find out more about the disease, then a new book on the subject will be of interest. *The Cancer Clock* covers all the key aspects related to the disease. It is written by leading academics and doctors from across Europe and includes research from OU academics Professor David Shuker and Dr Sotiris Missailidis. Professor Shuker looks at the role of diet and cancer, and how certain food and drink can prevent cancer – for example, drinking a glass of red wine a day reduces the risk of prostate cancer by half. Dr Missailidis examines why cancer is considered a genetic disease.

Published by Wiley, *The Cancer Clock* is priced at £27.50 (paperback edition). For further details visit [www.wiley.com](http://www.wiley.com)

# Research

A round-up of the latest research news from The Open University

New research is dyno-mite!

## Dinosaurs hit by gas attack!

OU team's research suggests dinosaurs could have been wiped out by toxic volcanic gases

● VOLCANOLOGISTS FROM The Open University have found evidence that the extinction of dinosaurs may have been triggered by gases released by volcanic eruptions.

An OU team consisting of Stephen Self, Stephen Blake, Kirti Sharma, Mike Widdowson and Sarah Sephton found the degree of eruptions in northwest India (known as the Deccan Traps) were so huge that the probable environmental pollution caused by the gases released were two to three times greater than the current global industrial output.

With data showing that a huge amount of sulphur dioxide was being pumped into the

atmosphere for years if not decades, late Cretaceous environments and climate would have been severely affected. The team gleaned original gas content from the samples by cutting thin slices of rock to find pockets of glass, revealing original sulphur and chlorine contents of the lavas that had been 'frozen' within.

OU volcanologist and Deccan expert Dr Mike Widdowson says: "It has been said that the history of the world is written in the rocks, and what we've found here is merely a few more sentences. But this research provides vital data that may explain how pollution will hurt the atmosphere.



The team's findings were published in influential US magazine *Science*

### Other news

#### All eyes are on you!

● THE OU BUSINESS School's Senior Lecturer in Organisational Studies, Dr Kirstie Ball, is part of an international research team that has been awarded \$2.5m for a project entitled 'The new transparency: surveillance and social sorting'. The project, which runs until 2015, explores the key characteristics and major consequences of surveillance in the world today.

#### Online repository

● THE UNIVERSITY'S OPEN Research Online (ORO) has recently been placed a very respectable 172nd out of nearly 15,000 university repositories in the Webometrics world ranking of repositories. The ORO is a collection of freely accessible research papers that bring together the range of subjects studied by OU researchers. For more, see <http://oro.open.ac.uk>

#### Chilling news

● IN THE WINTER 2007 issue of *Sesame*, we spoke with OU scientist Dr Mark Brandon about his research at the poles. Since then, a chunk of the Wilkins ice shelf in Antarctica has broken free due to climate change. "Scientists knew that the Wilkins ice shelf was next," says Mark. "But I'm surprised just how quickly it's starting to go. In a couple of weeks it lost over 400km<sup>2</sup> of ice."

#### Climate changes

● SCIENTISTS CANNOT accurately predict future climate changes because we simply don't know enough about the past. That's the view of Bob Spicer, OU Professor of Earth Sciences. His views were expressed as part of research published in *Earth and Planetary Science Letters* in March, issues 1-2. For more, see [www.sciencedirect.com/science/journal/0012821X](http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/journal/0012821X)

Scholar's address

# Basic instinct?

Why do we desire what we know is bad for us? Why do we at times resist temptation and at others give in to it? And do we have any real free will or are we programmed by our biology to act in certain ways?

● **FREDERICK TOATES**, Professor of Biological Psychology in the OU's Life Sciences department, recently delivered his inaugural lecture entitled 'Human nature and human motivation – desire and temptation' at the main campus in Milton Keynes. His aim was to show how psychology researchers explain desire, passion and temptation in a way that sheds light on human behaviour such as addiction, obsessive-compulsive behaviour and mental illness.

One key to unlocking these puzzling traits is dopamine, a chemical in the brain that is produced when we want something. Pleasurable experiences reinforce the dopamine pathways in the brain: so a person who takes and enjoys drugs will find their desire for them increases.

## Addiction

But there is a paradox, and one which touches on the heart of the human condition. Once researchers thought dopamine was associated with both wanting and liking, but in 1991 psychologist Kent Berridge demonstrated that, under some circumstances, wanting and liking can be split: dopamine may make us want something that we actually get increasingly less pleasure from. Nicotine is a classic example. "How many smokers do you know who say, 'I'm so happy to be a smoker'?" asked Toates. Smoking creates powerful wants that are not matched by the experience.

The implications of this are much wider than addiction; they take us to the roots of human unhappiness. "Our minds are equipped with a dopamine



The story of Adam and Eve, a classic example of human temptation

drunk wanting system," according to psychologist Daniel Nettle, quoted by Toates, "that draws us to compete for a promotion, a larger house, more material goods, etc." And does so regardless of whether what we get will make us happy.

## Consumerism

The dilemma is particularly acute in our modern consumer society. Being programmed to want was useful to our ancestors needing to find, for example, food. But it is "maladaptive" as Toates said, when you are standing in a food-laden supermarket.

The theme that pursuing our desires will ultimately lead to frustration and unhappiness

## Nicotine is a classic example, "How many smokers do you know who say, 'I'm so happy to be a smoker'?"

long predates the discoveries of biological psychology; it runs through much philosophy and many religions. For example, the philosopher Epicurus said: "Nothing satisfies the man who is not satisfied with a little." And it is a fundamental precept of Buddhism that desire causes unhappiness.

Dopamine is not the only factor influencing desire; social considerations also play a part, with some societies less materialistic and prone to wanting than others. But there

is another twist to the evolutionary tale, one which has made us eternally liable to be at war with ourselves.

The first living organisms were very simple creatures that evolved to survive by reacting to external stimuli. Humans have developed cognition – the ability to learn, to reason, to look ahead and predict the consequences of our actions. But cognition is effectively a 'bolt-on' to the existing system. Within our brains, the primitive through-link between stimulus and behaviour still remains. Sometimes our behaviour is dominated by cognition, other times the primitive system gets the upper hand.

## Temptation

Experiments have shown how our cognitive side is liable to be weakened by a host of factors including chemicals, brain damage, and emotions such as aggression and rage.

The classic case of human temptation is the biblical story of Adam and Eve. The forbidden fruit was a novelty, and novelty is particularly good at exciting dopamine. The tempting apple was physically present, something known to undermine cognitive control – especially when a physically present stimulus is pitted against the memory of an instruction given in the past. You can watch Professor Toates' lecture in full at <http://stadium.open.ac.uk>

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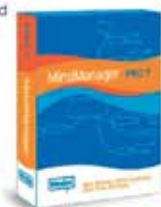


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# US and them

Dr Simon Bromley, Associate Dean of the OU's Faculty of Social Sciences, discusses his new book which questions the precarious position of America at the dawn of a new world order. Scott Russon reports...

● THE US IS showing signs of serious strain. The 9/11 terrorist attacks laid bare the nation's domestic vulnerability, while the subsequent declaration of the War On Terror has given rise to a new breed of US military campaign. The invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq that followed have proven costly, unpopular and prolonged. Relations with old enemy Russia are becoming familiarly frosty, but it's the rise of China and India that is causing the real chills. The EU, meanwhile, continues to grow in confidence and the flagging of the dollar ensures sustained pressure on the US economy. Things are less than rosy in the land of the free and the home of the brave...

In his new book *American Power and the Prospects for International Order*, OU academic Dr Simon Bromley looks at some of the trials that the US faces as the world order shifts and questions whether it will be capable of rising to the new challenges posed. As part of his research, he looks at four key issues: the strengths and weaknesses of US foreign policy, the relationship with Europe, the international oil industry and, finally, the dollar as an international currency in the context of China's rise in the world economy...

**Tell us a bit about chapter one, *The American ideology: modernization theory and the neoconservatives?***

It's a study of the aims of US foreign policy and looks at debates in the US about the nature of it. My research draws

on the public documents that set out official policy, but it also looks at the writing and analysis of the foreign policy community in the US – such as the writings of Henry Kissinger [former US National Security Advisor and Secretary of State], neoconservative thinkers, think-tank material, policy statements, the media, etc. So I look at the nature of US power and what uses it can be put to in terms of shaping international order – and what US politicians and analysts have to say about that.

**There's an argument that the US is no longer able to act unilaterally. Would you agree?**

It depends on what the 'act' is. If it's to act to attack a target or destroy a regime, then I don't think that's true at all: they can go anywhere and do anything. If the 'act' is to attack and have some kind of political stability in the aftermath, then definitely yes – and Iraq is an object lesson in that. The whole point of military force is to enable you to get the political objective you desire, and what the US is unable to do is secure the political objective without the help of other nations.

**Is that a recent lesson for them? US involvement in Vietnam and more recently Somalia ended badly...**

Iraq has brought it home to an administration that assumed being the sole superpower gave them the ability to do things. They hadn't reckoned on the political consequences of breaking up a regime or the



"The aftermath of the Iraq victory has shown the limit of military power when it's not connected to a clear political strategy"

difficulty of putting it together again – and you can't just leave it broken. At least when you have a regime you don't like, you have a regime to deal with; when you haven't got a functioning state, it is chaotic and difficult. The US totally underestimated what it would need to do. Whether that is a new thing? Well you have to remember the US history: it's never had a colonial army; apart from Korea and Vietnam it has never fought wars of decolonisation, and it has never fought long counterinsurgency wars – so they don't have a history or strategy of thinking about conflict in terms of what happens when you knock a regime over and what do you put in its place.

**Should the blame be placed at George Bush's door?**

I don't think it's as personal as that. After 9/11, large sections of the US foreign policy elite simply didn't give much thought to the political thinking that needs to go alongside any serious use of military force. So it wasn't just Bush, there were a host of senior decision makers in the Pentagon and the administration.

**But did Bush not appoint those decision makers?**

I think there is an element of truth in that because two of the people who are most responsible for a policy that was reckless – whether you agreed with the war or not – were Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld, who Bush appointed. The other person who should carry a huge amount of the blame is Condoleezza Rice. As National



## “The US hadn’t calculated the political consequences of breaking up a regime or putting it together again”

Security Advisor, it should have been her job to force people to think about what would happen when victory in Iraq was secured. The aftermath of the Iraq victory has clearly shown the limit of military power when it’s not connected to a clear political strategy.

### Your second chapter is concerned with the US’s relationship with Europe...

That’s correct, it looks at the specific way that the US has related to Europe since the end of the Second World War and particularly the way it is related to the process of the integration of the European Union. It’s based primarily on

reviewing the issues of trade and investment across the Atlantic, and the various elements of cooperation and conflict that have occurred. So I’ve examined the academic and policy literature on trade and investment between the United States and the EU – and wider academic debates about how to understand transatlantic integration since the Second World War, though with the main focus on US/EU relations during the 1990s and up until the present.

### And what did you find?

Well, for all the high-profile bust-ups over the banana wars [a six-year dispute between the

US and the EU about free-trade rules related to, not surprisingly, the yellow fruit] and also Airbus [the US government took the European Union to the World Trade Organisation in 2004 in an effort to stop member states giving financial support to European aeroplane producer Airbus, which the US argued placed US company Boeing at a competitive disadvantage] and things like that, the big story is that there have been very cooperative relations and very little conflict.

### Was that surprising?

Yes, it was actually. When I first looked at it I had assumed that there might be more divergence as Europeans integrated internally. I thought that might cause tensions in the transatlantic relations –

it has over some issues, such as Iraq, but on the whole EU integration has actually led to stronger EU and US integration. So where one might have expected that, as Europe integrated internally and more strongly it might have weakened transatlantic relations, it doesn’t seem to have been the case – if anything it’s reinforced them. EU integration has benefited US companies just as much as their EU counterparts because they have the same freedoms within the EU’s internal market.

### You then look at the often controversial relationship between America and oil...

It’s about the US and the international oil industry, and looks at debates prompted by the Gulf War but it’s not specific to that. There is a lot of interpretation about the Iraq War being an attempt by the US to control Middle East oil. That’s obviously not a new statement about US foreign policy in the Middle East – it’s been said since the Second World War. In one sense the statement is true, as the US would not be that interested in the region if it didn’t have any oil, though Iraq is currently a relatively small producer. What I have looked at is: what does it mean to talk about control of a commodity like oil? Here I have extended on the work I did on a previous book I wrote, *American Hegemony and World Oil*, and question what type of international oil industry structure have US foreign policy and the actions of the major oil companies attempted to create. I examine what the US government and US companies are doing and how that relates to what other states (whether these are the oil-producing states in the Middle East or other states that are either now or in the future major consumers of oil, whether that is the EU, Japan, China or India) who have a significant interest in this area are trying to do. The main

conclusion I come to is that, although it is true that US foreign policy in general and military power specifically are very important in the way in which the international oil industry gets structured, it is an industry that is open to other countries. So far there is no evidence that the US is seeking to exclude any other countries. It is a form of US control but it's a form of control that, at the moment, is working to the advantage of the main oil-consuming regions.

**Does your book hypothesise as to what the US can do to lose its huge oil dependency?**

The conclusion of the chapter that looks at the international oil industry questions what will happen when conventional oil starts to become scarce. I have considered several possibilities and essentially there are two main ones that I think will be important in terms of what the US does. One is that there are considerable reserves of what is called nonconventional oil around the world and some of that is already being developed. What's called conventional oil is what's found in reservoirs under the ground: you drill down, sometimes you have to inject pressure to get it out, but the stuff comes out. Nonconventional oil is oil that is underground but is mixed up with other elements, such as sand and broken rock – it's not just sat in reservoirs and it's not easy to access. To be able to use it like conventional oil involves an energy-intensive and rather environmentally unfriendly process, which is also expensive. So it only becomes an economical source when conventional oil prices reach a certain price: it is economical now given the price levels of the past years.

The sticking point for the US is that you can substitute oil in most sectors of the economy but at the moment it's very difficult to do that with transport, which is where most of the oil that the US imports goes. And I



**“You can substitute for oil in most sectors of the US economy, but it’s very difficult to do that for transport”**

don't believe the US transport sector is going to be weaned off oil anytime soon – it's simply not being addressed as a political priority.

The other alternative is to make oil out of coal; worldwide coal reserves are large and the process is technologically easy – the Nazis did it during the Second World War, and South Africa did it when there was an embargo on oil supplies during Apartheid. Again, it's not a very clean process, not very cheap, and oil prices have to stay high for it to be a serious proposition. However, some US states that have large coal deposits are very seriously proposing that they turn their coal into oil.

**The final chapter is about something that's currently topical: the value of the American dollar...**

It's partly about the role of the dollar as an international currency; the other aspect is the challenge posed by rising China. With reference to the dollar, it is often assumed that, because the dollar is the

world's currency, the US gets great benefits as a result. I concluded that was not the case: there are some benefits but there are also some costs. I argue that there is a very fine balancing act that the US has. If the US misused its privileged position, then it would only serve to weaken the dollar: the dollar is an international currency only because it serves the interests of people outside the US to be so. If the US tried to get benefits at the expense of other countries, then other nations would simply switch out of dollars and into euros, which has become more of an international currency.

**The presidential nominees' race has highlighted a real hunger for political change in the US. Do you have a view on which of the candidates is best equipped to deal with the issues you've identified?** As far as the book is concerned, I conclude that it is a very open question whether the American political system is capable of producing a

coherent foreign policy that the US sticks with. I have my doubts whether that is feasible, and it doesn't matter who the candidate is. In my view, whoever becomes president is faced with all kinds of constraints that are not of his or her making – such as you have to appeal to the basic instincts of the US people, which is not a settled, single set of instincts. Forging a consensus around a foreign policy rather than *many* foreign policies is actually very difficult.

The other issue for the future president is that Congress gave Bush such a free hand and it turned out to be such a mess. I think future presidents will find their hands much more strongly tied by Congress.



*American Power And The Prospects For International Order is out in June*

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# People

Everything to do with you, from inspirational stories to fascinating interviews

Spotlight

## A high note

Jacky Thompson is certainly in tune when it comes to achieving ambitions – a deaf student completing a degree in music is no mean feat. She tells Robyn Slingsby why she's not stopping there...

● JACKY THOMPSON, 60, from Truro, Cornwall, has limited hearing, suffers loss of balance, giddiness and tinnitus following a road traffic accident in 1992. So what made her choose to do a music degree with The Open University?

"Bloody-minded pig-headedness," she says "When I read through the prospectus it said it wasn't suitable for someone with hearing difficulties, and that was like a red rag to a bull."

Jacky has developed Meniere's syndrome (excess pressure accumulation in the inner ear) since her accident, as well as benign positional paroxysmal vertigo (periods of intense dizziness).

But a love for music – she plays bass clarinet and saxophone, rehearsing with two local bands and two orchestras – spurred her on.

Despite the times of sudden giddiness and annual surgery to stop the progression of the Meniere's, Jacky says the OU came up with all sorts of ideas to help her achieve her goals.

"With The Open University's help I was set up with a good computer, ergonomic chair and special mouse – all sorts of

equipment I had no idea was available. I was going to do the course anyway but as I couldn't sit in front of the computer for very long, I was given an all-singing, all-dancing computer, tools for recording tutorials and sometimes a note taker. I couldn't have done the course without that help."

Jacky said she'd always known about the OU but it was only when she became disabled and was no longer bringing up a family or holding down a career that she was able to do a course.

"When I first had my accident I did a science course with the OU because I wasn't sure what I had left as far as intellect goes, as I suffered some brain damage. I wanted to do my job again but didn't know if I still had the knowledge. The science foundation course gave me a lot of courage.

"If it was three years of intensive study I couldn't have done it. The OU is incredibly good with disabled students. They didn't put me off. The course brochure said it may not be considered appropriate for people with hearing difficulties but no one actually said that to



Jacky Thompson

me. They guided me to their resources for people with hearing difficulties and sat back, waiting and watching to see if it worked. And now I've got my degree they know they're giving the right amount of support."

Starting with a foundation course, Jacky did every music course going and, combined with transferred credit from an A Level in music from Truro College, earned her 300 points for a degree she collected at the Barbican, London, in April.

Jacky talks about her

student journey as if was trouble free. But it's not been without its hurdles.

"The hardest parts for me have been the hearing, recognising music, and analysis, where you need to hear the harmonies – that was certainly a big challenge.

"There was a very bad year when I lost my son in 2003 and my mother three weeks after. It was really difficult to keep going, but I did complete the course that year and it did take my mind off the trouble to some extent and gave me a focus. >

Jacky Thompson rehearsing with the Restormel Concert Band



### Insight The OU can help

More than 9,000 people with disabilities study with the OU each year. A Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) grant can help with the extra costs of studying that can arise from a disability or a specific learning difficulty. Many of our study materials are available in accessible formats, including audio recordings and electronic versions of many course texts and set books, and transcripts of DVDs and CDs. These services are supported by funds raised through OU alumni.

[www.open.ac.uk/disability](http://www.open.ac.uk/disability)

"I'm not a good lip-reader and one-to-one conversation is hard. Concentrating is tough and I can lose my words when I get tired. Writing the Tutor-Marked Assignment (TMA) is the same; because of the stress, it causes my word count to be over the top as I can't find the words I want.

"Straight after the accident I was finding silly words. I used the word 'sandwich' a lot, for no reason. I'd say things like 'There's an enormous sandwich in the bath, can you get it out?' But year on year that has improved."

Jacky, a microbiologist by profession, has tried on many occasions to get back into work but, as she says, the laboratory is a dangerous environment for someone with her disabilities. "Being faced with 100 Petri dishes was just too much."

So studying with the OU gave her a purpose and it wasn't uncommon for Jacky to be lying in a hospital bed surrounded by books; recovering from the latest surgery and trying to get ahead with her studies on a laptop provided by the OU.

"Some of the tutors were very good. One lived in St

### "Lip-reading someone who is speaking French is going to be difficult for me. I'll play it by ear, if you'll forgive the pun"

Austell and would come to me for tutorials, as travelling was often difficult for me. All tutors tried to accommodate my hearing difficulties, but working with other students was difficult; that was the hardest bit. And that will be the hardest bit in this year's course..."

And it's to be a busy year ahead for Jacky. Having already been on a bird-watching trip to Florida, she is getting married this September and is about to embark on another OU course. "In February I began a modern languages degree, starting with French. It may be a bridge too far – lip-reading someone who is speaking French is going to be difficult. I'll play it by ear, if you'll forgive the pun."

Jacky will be going to summer school in Caen in Normandy for a week during the summer and says it's important to be able to describe her medical condition when she goes abroad, in the event that she falls ill.

Jacky has worked hard to cope with her disabilities and sets herself some very tough challenges, so what does her family make of all this studying?

"They think I'm completely barmy and wonder what I'm trying to prove. They are proud now I've got the degree and I share tips with my elder sister, who is doing a creative writing course with the OU.

"I chose the OU because it was available and because it can be done at home, because there is so much help and it's so well structured. But if you do what you're told and study, doing the hour or two a day that they advise, then it works. It's hard sometimes and you miss a few days, but for someone who's at work it's much harder; you have to be so disciplined.

"I am always pleased to hear about people who say I would love to do that but don't think I could. Now I have achieved this it's nice to be able to say that if I can, anybody can."

### Course connection Start listening to music (A179)

If you are interested in studying music like Jacky, why not begin with **Start listening to music (A179)**? The 10-point course, which can be studied online over 12 weeks, offers an insight into a variety of music from different historical periods, styles and genres, including classical, jazz, popular and world music.

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 is offering a 10 per cent discount on its 13,000 cosy cottages, traditional gites, rustic chateaux and modern villas throughout the UK, Ireland and Europe. Visit [www.cottages-4-you.co.uk/openuniversity](http://www.cottages-4-you.co.uk/openuniversity) or call 0845 268 0539.

## Crowne Plaza, Holiday Inn & Express by Holiday Inn

 Enjoy 25 per cent off weekend leisure breaks at more than 400 participating hotels across the UK, Ireland, Europe and the Middle East. This offer

is available Friday, Saturday and Sunday nights until 31 Dec 2008. To book call **0870 400 8135** quoting 'Exclusive Rate'. Or visit [www.ichotels.com/exclusive](http://www.ichotels.com/exclusive)

## On foot holidays

 is offering a £50 per person introductory discount off its 2008 self-guided walking holidays in Europe. Please quote 'OU Alumni Offers'. See [www.onfootholidays.co.uk](http://www.onfootholidays.co.uk) or call 01722 322652

## Spirit of Adventure's cruises

 are for those who want to explore and learn about unusual locations, especially those rarely visited by other cruise ships. A discount of up to £150 per person is being offered. See [www.open.ac.uk/alumni](http://www.open.ac.uk/alumni)

## Walking with Wine

 offers fully guided wine and walking holidays in Rioja and Sicily, allowing you to wander through vineyards and visit wineries. For detailed itineraries and to claim your £50 per person discount off weekly trips see [www.walkingwithwine.co.uk](http://www.walkingwithwine.co.uk)

## ACTIVITIES

**La Fitness** is offering OU members discounted membership and a free trial (including 15 per cent off the club, group and off-peak rates).

It's also offering a free two-day pass. See [www.open.ac.uk/alumni](http://www.open.ac.uk/alumni) for more.

## Cotswold Outdoor shop

 Get great discounts on a host of outdoor clothing and equipment from top brands such as The North Face. Visit [www.cotswoldoutdoor.com](http://www.cotswoldoutdoor.com) and enter AF-OU-A2 in the promotional code window for your OU special discount.

## Open Fairways

 is offering a special membership rate of £79 (RRP £99), entitling you to play half-price golf at over 1,200 premier courses worldwide. Call 028 9073 1055 and quote OUA. Or visit [www.openfairways.com](http://www.openfairways.com)

## MISCELLANEOUS

### Moss

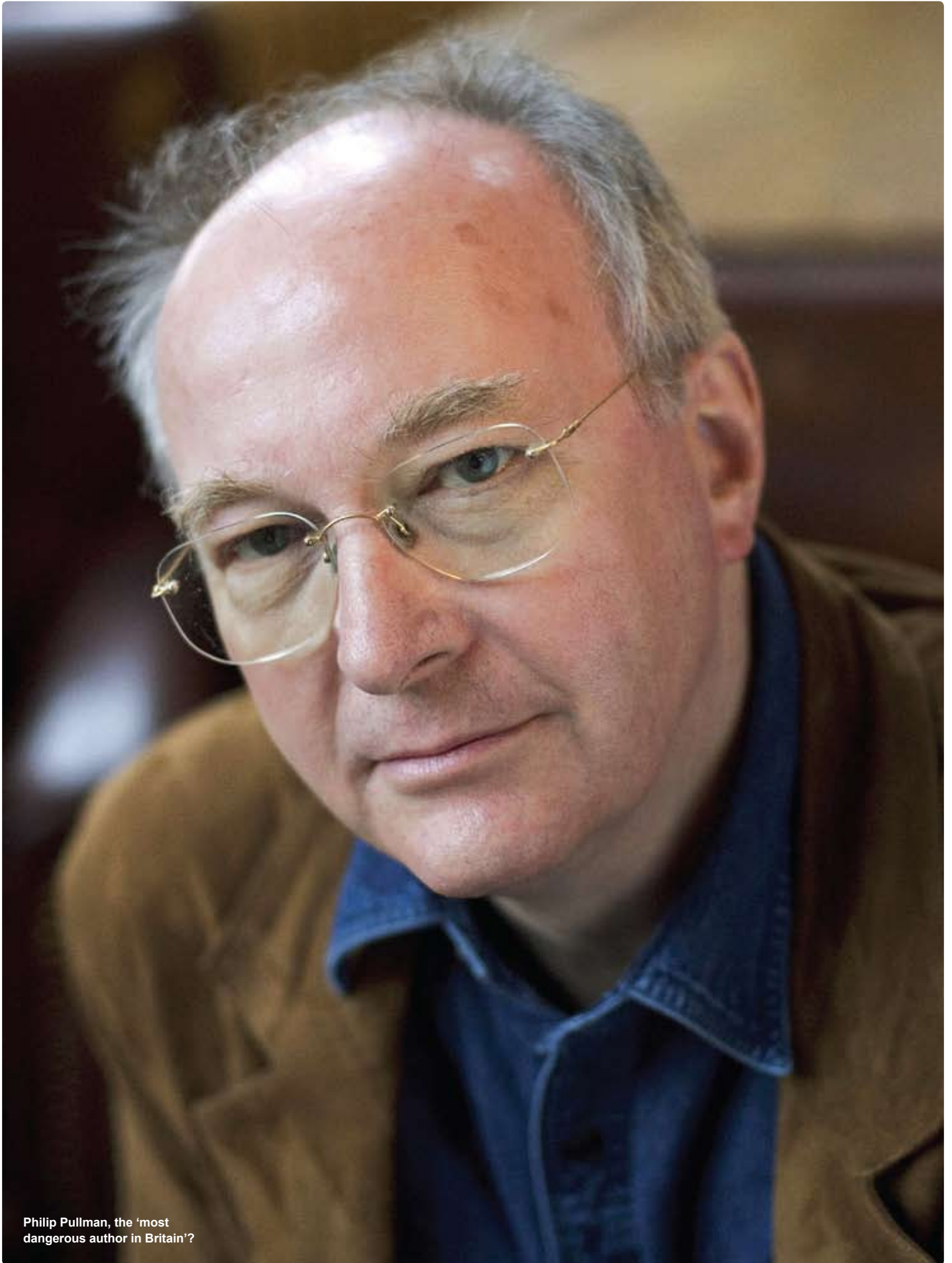
 is offering 15 per cent discount at Moss Bros, Moss Bros Hire and Moss Direct. Simply print off the advert featured on [www.open.ac.uk/alumni](http://www.open.ac.uk/alumni) and present a completed copy at the till or alternatively quote CIP07249 at [www.mossdirect.co.uk](http://www.mossdirect.co.uk)

### The Digital Frame Company

 is offering a free 1GB SD memory card or a memory card reader/writer with every digital photo frame purchase of £50 or more. Visit [www.DigitalFrameCompany.com](http://www.DigitalFrameCompany.com) and enter code OU08.

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Philip Pullman, the 'most dangerous author in Britain'?

GETTY IMAGES

# Are you sitting comfortably?

Tracy Buchanan caught up with novelist and OU honorary graduate Philip Pullman to discuss fairy tales, the dangers of ignoring the arts and his view on being labelled the 'most dangerous author in Britain'

● **WRITER PHILIP PULLMAN** found himself thrust into the limelight following the huge success of his trilogy of children's books, *His Dark Materials*, the first of which was recently turned into a film – *The Golden Compass* – starring Nicole Kidman and Daniel Craig. Before gaining success as a writer, he was a teacher in his home town of Oxford and even briefly worked for men's suit chain, Moss Bros. Here, we discover more about his work and his views...

**Congratulations on becoming an honorary graduate of the OU. How do you feel about this tribute?** I feel very honoured. I admire The Open University immensely – it's one of the last remnants of the impulse towards real social inclusion and betterment that underpinned the welfare state. Nothing like it could ever be created today, and so much the worse for today.

**You've expressed frustration that the arts aren't always deemed as being necessary in education. Why is it dangerous to ignore them?** It's dangerous because if we ignore what the arts can tell us, we lose a sense of ourselves as human and social beings. The relentless pressure of the past 30 years or so towards profit, towards appeasing the market, will be seen (when eventually someone writes the history of the decline and fall of our civilisation – if anyone is left alive to do such a thing) as one of the stages on the road towards decay and collapse.

**You've written some great fairy tales. You say that you find writing these fairy tales difficult. How so?**

Well, writing everything is difficult. But certainly the great fairy tales, whether truly folk tales or the work of Hans Christian Andersen or indeed Angela Carter [*The Magic Toyshop*], are repositories of a good deal of sense and wisdom. The real difference between my novels and my fairy tales (which are not 'short stories', strictly speaking: the short story is a quite different form) is the way the characters are depicted. In the novels I try to represent characters that have some sort of psychological depth or individuality; whether or not I'm successful, that is what I'm

trying to do. In the fairy tales, the characters are deliberately flat – types rather than individuals. They have no psychology at all.

**In one of your articles, you stated: "I don't do science, though I love to read about it. What I do is fiction."**

**How much research do you do before you embark on a book?**

It is important that the science in fiction is accurate because I find that if I'm reading something where the author writes about something I happen to know and gets it wrong, I just don't trust the book any more. What I ask of a novel I'm reading is that it should know a fraction more about the things I know than I do. When I'm writing, and this scene or that calls for a bit of research, I ask myself: would I be convinced by this if I read it? If I knocked against this bit of scenery, would it feel solid? But I'd add that novelists should research not so that they can put the knowledge undiluted into their novels, but so that they can make up more stuff convincingly.

**Were you pleased with the film *The Golden Compass*?**

I was pleased with the performances and with the look of it, and I thought it made a valiant attempt to tell a complicated story in perhaps too short a time.

**What's in the pipeline for the future? I hear you are working on a sequel to 'His Dark Materials'...**

Yes, that's true. But I am doing some other short things as well. A book called *Once upon*

## Course connection Start writing fiction (A174)

If you feel like there's a novel within you, then why not try **Start writing fiction (A174)**? A 10-point online course, it does just what it says on the tin – it gets you writing! Covering areas such as plot, narrative voice, genre and time, it gives you the chance to start formulating the bones of a good novel or short story. It also provides excellent opportunities to receive constructive feedback from your tutor and your peers in an online environment. [Registration closes 12 September for an October start. Call +44 \(0\)845 300 6090 or visit \[www.open.ac.uk/courses\]\(http://www.open.ac.uk/courses\) for more information. Quote \*\*Sesame\*\* in any correspondence.](#)

*a Time in the North* has recently been published; it's about two characters from 'His Dark Materials' – Lee Scoresby and Iorek Byrnison.

**Daily Mail columnist Peter Hitchens described you as the 'most dangerous author in Britain' and your work has attracted some controversy for what some believe to be an 'anti-Christian agenda'. How do you respond?**

With gratitude.

For more information on Philip Pullman, plus tips for aspiring writers, log onto [www.philip-pullman.com](http://www.philip-pullman.com)

## Insight Favourite five

**Favourite book?**

*The Anatomy of Melancholy*, by Robert Burton.

**Favourite film?**

*The Magnificent Seven*.

**Favourite meal?**

Sausage, egg and chips.

**Favourite view?**

In North Wales: the view southwards across the estuary of the Arthro towards Mochras and Morfa Dyffryn from the road between Llanbedr and Harlech.

**Favourite memory?**

A particular dream I had when I was a small boy in Australia. There was a train in it.



OU staff, students and alumni are being encouraged to volunteer

How and why to volunteer

# A helping hand

We investigate how volunteering can be a rewarding experience that may benefit your career, soothe your soul and, not least, support society

● THERE'S NO DOUBT that the act of volunteering has a multitude of benefits, not only for the people being helped but also for the helpers themselves. As the philosopher Confucius once said: "He who wishes to secure the good of others has already secured his own."

The Talloires Network was formed two years ago, an international partnership of institutions committed to ensuring that higher education, and the millions of HE students, are engaged in volunteering all over the world. A commitment to a shared global project (chaired by the OU's Vice-Chancellor) emerged from that network, focusing specifically on literacy. The Open University hosted a Strategic Forum on Literacy in September 2007 and from this, OU staff, students and alumni

are being encouraged to get out there and volunteer.

So why not think about volunteering? As George Macfarlane, an OU Council member who contributed to September's forum, says:

**"The satisfaction a volunteer receives is immense, and can often lead to career development"**

"The satisfaction a volunteer receives is immense, and can often lead to career development through the new skills a volunteer will gain from their experience."

There are many routes through which you can discover more about volunteering, including via associations such as Volunteering England (see the links to the right). In partnership with a number of

organisations, including the charity Changers, the University is developing all types of volunteering opportunities specifically aimed at Open University students and alumni – including virtual

volunteering.

In June, the University will be relaunching its student volunteering website under the new title 'Volunteering in the Community', which will include information about volunteering, case studies from OU student volunteers, and links to a wide range of volunteer organisations.

Watch out for this on StudentHome.

## Course connection Relevant courses

**Winning resources and support (B625)** course is the distance-learning route to the Institute of Fundraising's Certificate in Fundraising Management. It gives students the chance to develop essential fundraising and campaigning skills, and is a 30-point course that can also count towards the BA in Business Studies.

**Recognising achievement (U122)** gives you the chance to gain credit towards higher education qualifications by drawing on your experiences of past learning at work. It's suitable for anyone with experience in either paid or voluntary work settings. You'll spend 100 hours with online course materials and assessment to capture evidence of past learning.

Call +44 (0)845 300 6090 or visit [www.open.ac.uk/courses](http://www.open.ac.uk/courses) for more information. Quote Sesame in any correspondence.

Tell us about your volunteering experiences – email [sesame@open.ac.uk](mailto:sesame@open.ac.uk) (subject: 'Volunteer')

### USEFUL LINKS:

**Community Service Volunteers**

[www.csv.org.uk](http://www.csv.org.uk)

**Do-it**

[www.do-it.org.uk](http://www.do-it.org.uk)

**UN Online Volunteering Service:**

[www.onlinevolunteering.org](http://www.onlinevolunteering.org)

**Talloires Network**

[www.tufts.edu/talloiresnetwork](http://www.tufts.edu/talloiresnetwork)

**Volunteer Centres Ireland**

[www.volunteer.ie](http://www.volunteer.ie)

**Volunteering England**

[www.volunteering.org.uk](http://www.volunteering.org.uk)

**Volunteer Scotland**

[www.volunteerscotland.org.uk](http://www.volunteerscotland.org.uk)

**VSO**

[www.vso.org.uk](http://www.vso.org.uk)

**Year of Reading in Wales**

[www.yearofreadingwales.org.uk](http://www.yearofreadingwales.org.uk)

## Case study

## Life-changing

As Head of Citizenship, Religion and Ethics at Cheadle Hulme High School, OU graduate and student Andy Gregory, 25, feels it would be 'hypocritical' of him not to volunteer. As he says: "I want to demonstrate to the children I teach the relationship between the crucial role of volunteering and being good citizens."

And Andy would know – he volunteers for a range of different charities and is currently Chair of the Wigan and Leigh Amnesty



International Group and director of the environmental charity Groundwork Wigan and Lancashire West.

For Andy (not pictured), teaching literacy is particularly rewarding. "More people than you would think require help with literacy. It involves a great deal of patience".

As he points out, the great flexibility of OU studies gave Andy the time and space to volunteer as well. He says: "My volunteering coupled with my OU qualifications have got me to where I am now, in terms of my career and lifestyle. Though I am only 25, I believe that volunteering and OU study has affected my life profoundly."

Andy already has a BA (Hons) Open with The Open University and is currently on the dissertation module of the MSc in social research methods, and is planning to spend the summer holidays this year in the West Bank city of Nablus teaching English to children in the UN refugee camp through an organisation called Project Hope.

## A word from the Vice-Chancellor

## Make a difference

Vice-Chancellor, Professor Brenda Gourley, explains why volunteering is so important...



● ACCORDING TO THE National Literacy Trust, one in five people in the UK struggles to read and write. Our considerable student and alumni body can make a significant difference to improving this situation (and indeed other pressing social issues) by sharing our skills and

become involved and many are quite simple. If, for example, you have a school-age child, one simple step you can take is to volunteer in your child's school – particularly if you are a man. There is continuing concern for boys' underachievement in the UK, and becoming a male reading champion is one way you can help. If you would like to find out more about becoming a reading champion see [www.literacytrust.org.uk](http://www.literacytrust.org.uk)

Students who play a key role in exceptional volunteering initiatives related to literacy will also have the chance to be nominated for the prestigious international MacJannet prize. Further details will be available on the Student Volunteering

## "Literacy problems affect every community, in every country"

our time. In so doing, you will join hundreds of thousands of other students throughout the world who belong to that growing group of universities that have signed up to the Talloires Declaration – a declaration that commits to civic engagement and in the process makes a contribution to achieving one of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals.

Indeed the Talloires Network has embraced illiteracy as a special global project. No one underestimates the impact of poor literacy skills on individuals and society: health, employability and self-confidence are all affected, and literacy problems affect every community, in every country. Helping people to improve their literacy skills really does change lives.

So how can you help? There are lots of ways in which to

website which is being re-launched in June. Also, it is currently the National Year of Reading in England and Wales, and International Literacy Day is on 8 September – so it is especially appropriate that we join hands to make it a successful initiative. For more information on how you can get involved in your area, visit [www.yearofreading.org.uk/index.php?id=getinvolved](http://www.yearofreading.org.uk/index.php?id=getinvolved)

So there is much to be done and much we can all do. While we all have busy lives it is still true that we are often refreshed by voluntary service and engaging with people in quite different circumstances from our own. It is an opportunity to learn as well as to give. No commitment is too small to make a difference, bring about change or impact lives, and all of us can play a part. I would urge you to participate in any way you can.

## Case study

## Rewarding

Debbie Gregory (no relation to Andrew) started studying with the OU in 2004 when the youngest of her three children went to nursery. Currently studying level 3 politics and maths courses, she also volunteers for the Government's Skills for Life project, which covers adult literacy, numeracy and ICT. She spent a year helping dyslexic adults in a Birmingham literacy class and is now helping students in a numeracy class.

She recalls one woman who started a class with very little confidence. After a few weeks, Debbie (not pictured)

watched her blossom with confidence, so much so that she found voluntary work in her own community and started to look for a job.

"This is what is most rewarding," says Debbie, "seeing learners acquire confidence and an enjoyment of the subject they are learning and going on to do other things."



The OU's Fundraising team works hard to raise money and awareness of crucial OU projects



Your valued support

# Make positive and lasting changes

Discover what the OU can achieve through the generosity of its supporters

● THE OPEN UNIVERSITY has exempt charity status that enables it to raise funds in order to promote educational opportunity and social justice for all.

The expertise and experience of the OU places it in an ideal position to help make positive and lasting changes to a large number of people, and has led to the launch of two new major fundraising initiatives.

The Education Fund for Africa will enable the University to play a significant role in meeting the education and health challenges in Africa, while the Fund for Educational Equality will enable the OU to make its unique educational provision more widely available both in the UK and internationally.

The OU Development Office is engaged in fundraising for projects such as OpenLearn, which has reached out to more than one million learners and is

changing the face of online education, through to individual bursaries for course books and travel costs. The Development Office is generously supported by OU alumni, staff, friends, trusts and companies.

Last year, donations from alumni totalling £715,000 funded activities such as:

- Scholarships and bursaries
  - Openings courses
  - Digital Audio project
  - Funding for PhD students
- Studying Openings courses helps students take their first steps into higher education.

One example of the huge impact donations can have can be seen in the case of Giles Wallwork. He realised that he needed to increase his life-choices and aim for a career rather than a job, as he was about to become a parent. He applied and was successful in receiving funding to start an Openings course. Giles now works for the Big Lottery Fund and hopes to move into a Grants

Officer position in the future. He says: "I sit back in awe at how my life has changed over the last three years."

Another example is Uli Beisel, who received funding for her research project looking at competing approaches to controlling malaria.

The ground-breaking Digital Audio project enables students who find it difficult to use print to study with the OU. The project is developing new ways of translating course materials so that more people can benefit from an OU education.

All of these projects contribute to the OU's mission to make education accessible to all, and as Simon Bailey, Acting Director of Development, says: "It's the help from our supporters that makes all this possible. Whether the contribution is large or small, financial or people's time, we are extremely grateful for their support."

## Insight

### How to support us

A telephone campaign will be running this June, where selected alumni will be called to talk about their experiences with the OU, get updated on events and news, and be asked to support the OU. The previous campaign in 2006 raised over £140,000 for projects including scholarships and bursaries, and services for disabled students.

Funding is currently being sought for a range of projects including free Openings courses for disadvantaged people in Ireland and developing teacher education in Sub-Saharan Africa through school-based teacher education programmes.

To find out more visit

[www.open.ac.uk/fundraising](http://www.open.ac.uk/fundraising) or call

+44 (0)1908 655044

### Make a change

## Leave a legacy

You can also help others by leaving a gift in your will

● Dr John Warnaby did just this. Blind from birth, he left a legacy to the OU, now used to help visually impaired students.

For more information call Karen Hart on +44 (0)1908 659141 or email [k.l.hart@open.ac.uk](mailto:k.l.hart@open.ac.uk)



The late Dr John Warnaby

OU project that needs your help

## Field of dreams

The Open University is hosting a new partnership project focusing on species-rich floodplain meadows in England and Wales

● SPECIES-RICH MEADOW was once the dominant land use on almost all the floodplains in England, with the land much prized by the Roman military and medieval farmers due to the rich crop of hay produced. Since the 1950s, 98 per cent of the flower-rich meadows have been lost due to urbanisation and changes in farming.

The remnants, though protected by national and European law, are at risk from our changing environment. "Due to their position on floodplains, they are

staggering variety of birds and densely packed flowers. At present, the terrain receives little systematic monitoring in terms of the meadows' response to the ever-changing environment – hence we risk losing them through inappropriate management.

There is, therefore, a need to monitor the dynamics of the remaining meadows, to investigate their resilience, to disseminate best conservation practice and to raise public awareness. A new project that brings together the OU, the Environment Agency, Natural

as well as educating the wider community of their importance (see [www.floodplainmeadows.org.uk](http://www.floodplainmeadows.org.uk)).

Supported by additional funds from the Esmée Fairburn Foundation, the project will, during a 10-year period, meet these needs by convening a forum of interested parties and improving our understanding of the meadows' current status and future requirements.

*This is just one of the many projects that the Development Office are approaching alumni, friends of the University, and trusts and foundations for a major contribution to meet the £50,000 funding gap. If you can help, please call +44 (0)1908 655052 for more information*

## "98% of the flower-rich meadows have been lost due to urbanisation"

particularly sensitive to changes in rainfall pattern," explains David Gowing, Professor of Botany at the OU. "And being species-rich, they are sensitive to the increasing burden of pollution." It is estimated that less than 1,000 hectares of the classic habitat remain.

Not only valuable assets of our natural heritage, the meadows are also habitat to a

England, The Grasslands Trust, the Field Studies Council, The Wildlife Trusts and the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, aims to deal with this.

Thanks to a contribution of £50,000 from the Garfield Weston Foundation, work has begun monitoring the dynamics of the remaining meadows, investigating their resilience and ensuring that conservation managers follow best practice,



The meadows are home to species such as the snipe

### Course connection Environmental science (S216)

This course draws together biology, chemistry, Earth science and physics. It includes two multimedia interactive field trips, in which you can explore an area visually and analyse your observations. You might also be interested in the 10-point residential-school course **Environmental science in the field (SXR216)**, which complements this course and is particularly suitable for study in the same year. Registration closes December 2008 for a February 2009 start. Call +44 (0)845 300 6090 or visit [www.open.ac.uk/courses](http://www.open.ac.uk/courses) for more information. Quote **Sesame** in any correspondence.

### Spotlight on Senate Strengthening partnerships

Senate is looking at ongoing initiatives including strengthening partnerships and extending the OU's global reach, both common themes in committee feedback. These involve potential collaboration with Microsoft to access Indian and Chinese markets, while the Gates Foundation has expressed interest in OU work in Africa. Our reputation as a leader in Open Education Resource (OER) provision is developing, the OpenLearn site having attracted over one million visitors.

Meanwhile, overall UK student recruitment is on target for 2007/08 with take-up of postgraduate and short courses surpassing expectations.

The OU's current Research Assessment Exercise submission demonstrates remarkable improvements since 2001. Research income has increased 74%, research student numbers are up 61%, funded students up 80%, and PhDs awarded have increased 47%.

Major current reviews include the Student Support Review, where student progression is likely to be tackled by greater personalisation of support, and the review of course presentation patterns, which aims to simplify study routes and facilitate fast-track awards where demanded.

The University is now preparing for a Quality Assurance Agency review in 2009. *Veronica Summers, Alumni Senate Representative*

# GM crops ate my hamster!



Professor of Environmental Systems at the OU, Andy Lane, ponders whether the nature of the popular media makes it a practical arena to debate research...



Does media coverage of in-depth research needle you, too?

● IF YOU ARE reading this article, is it because the headline is shocking and concerns a controversial topic – namely genetically modified crops? I ask that question as it is important for understanding a research project I have led and the reaction to a news release about its findings.

In 2007, a team of OU academics including myself completed a three-year study funded by the Economic and Social Research Council's (ESRC) Science in Society programme. The programme aims to explore the rapidly changing relations between science (including engineering and technology) and wider

and using this new technology were it to be licensed for use in the UK – namely large-scale arable farmers. We also felt that the high-profile and contested nature of this new technology may highlight what it is that most influences what these farmers think and do when making such decisions.

To examine this issue fully we undertook many in-depth interviews and one workshop using interactive visual-mapping techniques to iteratively build up a detailed picture of what farmers and others thought about new technologies, or who most influenced their decisions. As this is a time-consuming

networks of influence. Not surprisingly, they are all finding it hard to manage the increasing volume of information and advice and all feel there are poor connections between them and the work of scientists and policy-makers. If you want to read beyond these sound bites then visit <http://technology.open.ac.uk/cts/esrcfarmer.htm> where you will find all of our reports.

Is that all? Not exactly. After peer reviewing our project and declaring it 'Good' the ESRC put out a news release aimed at catching the attention of busy journalists. The result? It was picked up by several media outlets, some including all the details in the news release and others who wove other 'stories' around parts of it. So what was the reaction? Some groups campaigning against GM crops complained that the work was biased, unscientific and a waste of money, a position that the ESRC and we refute because of the rigorous research and review processes involved.

While we have created a debate, it is not made easy when only parts of your work

are quoted or looked at, and it is assumed that most readers have a limited attention span.

So, have I told the whole story about this episode or been selective myself? Do you care and, furthermore, how would you know?

## “Have I told the whole story about this episode or been selective myself?”

society, and thereby to facilitate debate and policy development. Our successful project proposal was to investigate 'Farmers' understandings of GM crops within local communities'.

The proposal built on previous research investigating the attitudes and behaviour of farmers and others with respect to new technologies and practices such as pesticides, hedgerow management and biotechnology. But it also seemed necessary as there had already been much research on the views of the public and policy-makers across Europe, but nothing on the people who would be most directly involved in choosing

business, we were only able to interview 30 farmers – some of whom had been involved in the government-sponsored Farm Scale Evaluations (which were run to investigate the environmental impacts of GM herbicide-tolerant crop varieties) and some of whom had not.

So what did we find out? In a nutshell, both groups believe GM crops would help their business and the environment and they view GM crops as just another new technology. We also discovered that they learn about new technologies through informal means, whereas local communities do not feature much in their

### Course connection Understanding media (DA204)

Interested in how the media deals with controversial subjects such as GM crops? Learn more by signing up for the OU's **Understanding media (DA204)** course. It explores issues such as the phenomenon of celebrity; the production and technology of media; and the role played by power, values and beliefs in the media.

Registration closes 17 Dec 2008 for a January 2009 start. Call +44 (0)845 300 6090 or visit [www.open.ac.uk/courses](http://www.open.ac.uk/courses) for more information. Quote **Sesame** in any correspondence.

We all deserve a treat, a chance to unwind and relax and this is the perfect time of year to explore our beautiful countryside and enjoy the Spring sunshine and flowers.

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Terms & Conditions

All prices are based on two people sharing a twin or double standard room for two nights. Rates include full English Breakfast. Single supplements apply. Cannot be used in conjunction with any other offer. Applies to new bookings only. Offer valid until 31st March 2009. Calls are recorded for training purposes. OEI reserve the right to remove/change the properties during the promotion and to withdraw the promotion at any time. The right is reserved to refuse bookings. This offer cannot be combined with any other offer previously made. All bookings are subject to availability and an allocation of rooms. When this allocation is reached, the hotel cannot accept any more bookings at this rate, even though the hotel may not be fully booked. Bookings cannot be made more than 3 months in advance

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the **Mystery Leisure** company

[www.mysteryleisure.com](http://www.mysteryleisure.com)



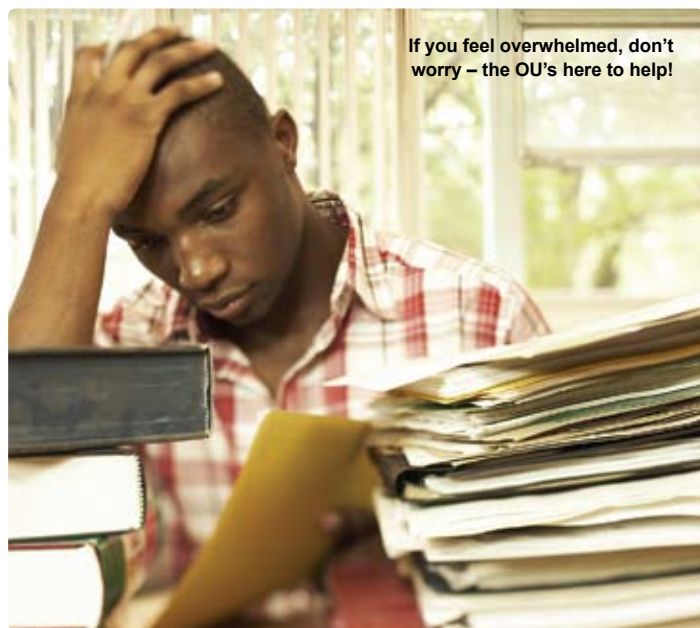
# Support

Studying isn't easy. In this section, we offer you support and guidance

Expert advice

## Mid-course health check

Many of you who are current students may have now reached the mid-course point, so this could be the ideal time to take a step back and reflect on how things are going



If you feel overwhelmed, don't worry – the OU's here to help!

● DURING THE PAST few months it is possible that you have amassed a few questions which need answering or issues which need resolving. You could be feeling the pressure of completing TMAs, or may be worrying that you've missed one. You may have concerns about your course or you may feel a little daunted at the prospect of your impending exam or End of Course Assessment (ECA). Then again, you may be thinking about where to go next with your studies, or how your study actually fits into your long-term

career plans. We hope that a mid-course checklist will help you on your way to success.

### Check your progress

Check your progress on StudentHome by accessing your Course Record and clicking on the Assessment Calculator. If you combine this with the assessment strategy for your course, you should be able to work out what grades you need to get to meet the course requirements successfully.

If you need any help with this, please contact your tutor in

the first instance, or you could contact your regional or national centre whose details can be found via your Profile page on StudentHome. If you are having concerns about course materials or TMAs, your tutor will be in the best position to help you.

### Study skills

Studying is not just about learning the who, what, and why presented by the course materials. To become a truly successful student you also need to learn how to study effectively. How well you manage your time, how efficiently you read, how succinctly you take notes, will all make a very real impact upon your TMA scores. So, if you feel that you are not achieving your full potential, or that your TMA results do not do justice to the hard slog that went into producing your assignment, you may need to brush up your study skills.

The OU has four new booklets in its 'Skills for OU Study' series: *Reading and Taking Notes*, *Develop Effective Study Strategies*, *Preparing Assignments* and *Revising for Examinations*. These are available for download via the Skills for OU Study website at [www.open.ac.uk/skillsforstudy](http://www.open.ac.uk/skillsforstudy)

[www.open.ac.uk/skillsforstudy](http://www.open.ac.uk/skillsforstudy) where you can also find a wealth of online and interactive resources covering a wide range of skills. You may also find it helpful to speak with your tutor or your Regional or National Centre to discuss whether local support is available.

And remember to read the article overleaf for some stress-busting advice!

### End-of-Course Assessment

As you are about half-way through your course, the examination or end-of-course assessment is not such a distant proposition. Make sure you don't get any unwelcome surprises by finding out now what will be expected of you. There may be a specimen examination paper for your course on StudentHome, and past examination papers are available to purchase from the OU Students Association at: [www2.open.ac.uk/ousa/p10\\_2.shtml](http://www2.open.ac.uk/ousa/p10_2.shtml)

Your tutor will be pleased to help with more specific advice. If you are re-sitting an examination or resubmitting an end-of-course assignment you will be offered advice and help from your regional or national centre to support you through the process and to answer any queries you may have.

**Course choice – next steps**

Although you still have a way to go to your exam or ECA, it is already the time to begin thinking about your next course. Many students believe that it is better to wait for their results before beginning to contemplate 'what next' – it isn't! You can start by exploring your options online, browsing different courses on the Study at the OU website [www.open.ac.uk/study](http://www.open.ac.uk/study) or [www.open.ac.uk/courses](http://www.open.ac.uk/courses). You can also find more detailed degree information at [www.open.ac.uk/learning/planning-studies](http://www.open.ac.uk/learning/planning-studies)

If, however, you would prefer to have a chat with one of our advisers, you may find that there is a course choice event happening nearby. You can find out where these are held via your StudentHome page. Log into StudentHome and click on the 'Courses' tab at the top, a drop-down box will then show the link to 'Choose Your Next Course', where you can find information about nearby events.

You can ring our Registration and Enquiry Service on **+44(0) 845 300 60 90** Monday to Friday, 8.30am to 9pm, who will be able to reserve a place for you on your chosen course, or provide further information. Should you need more specialist or in-depth advice or guidance, you will be referred to an Educational Adviser at your regional or national centre. Alternatively, you may find it more convenient to email us at [general-enquiries@open.ac.uk](mailto:general-enquiries@open.ac.uk), remembering to quote your personal identifier number.

**Careers advice**

You may be wondering about your future career prospects as well as your future study plans. Whether you are studying towards a particular career or thinking more generally about a change of direction, you will find it useful to explore what the OU's Careers Advisory Service can offer you at [www.open.ac.uk/careers](http://www.open.ac.uk/careers)

**Stress check**

## Let off steam

Feeling the pressure? Study skills expert Eileen Tracy has some suggestions to help relieve the strain

● IT'S MAY ALREADY and your deadlines are getting closer. With large-scale writing projects, huge reading lists and long syllabuses, the university challenge can be overwhelming. But take heart: a few simple strategies can make a huge difference. Consider these case studies below...

*"My whole life is dedicated to my BA. I work full time, then study. I've lost my social life."*  
**LUISA, 35, STUDYING BUSINESS**  
*No wonder Luisa's drowning in work: she considers breaks an unaffordable luxury. But after 40 minutes' study, concentration decreases measurably. Luisa should switch to 40-minute study bursts punctuated with short breaks. Taking time out also helps by creating beginnings and endings, which we remember much better than all the stuffing in the middle.*

*After each break, she should review earlier material for a few minutes. To maintain permanently high recall, review*



Academic under-achievement has been linked to caffeine intake

*material shortly after learning it – then after a day, a week, a month and so on. These five spaced-out reviews save hours of re-learning.*

*"I'm worried I won't finish my thesis, so I set my alarm early to study and I live on coffee."*  
**MARC, 27, PSYCHOLOGY STUDENT**  
*Marc should go back to bed with some camomile tea. A 1981 US study by Gilliland and Andress links depression and academic under-achievement to caffeine overload. Neuropsychologist Stanley Coren at the University of British Columbia warns that cheating on sleep by two hours a night over five nights costs 15 IQ points: 'Short-term memory goes, along with flexible thinking. You talk in clichés. Nor can you hold complex matters in your head or act on*

*them sensibly.'*

*"I'm quite behind in my reading and have problems extracting relevant bits. I'm a slow reader anyway, so I'm panicking!"*  
**SAMIR, 19, READING ENGLISH**  
*Samir's reading so slowly that he can't see the wood for the trees. He should start speedreading by guiding his eyes with a pen and moving it across his lines at a steady rate. This will stop him backtracking and will also immediately sharpen his concentration. If necessary, tricky passages can be marked and returned to later.*

Eileen Tracy ([www.eileentracy.co.uk](http://www.eileentracy.co.uk)) is author of *The Student's Guide to Exam Success*. She teaches EFT and study skills to students and runs revision support teleclasses.

### Insight

## Emotional Freedom Techniques

The Emotional Freedom Techniques (EFT) are among the simplest and most powerful calming tools you can use to dispel your memories of failure. Follow these instructions to complete the short form of EFT:

1. Pick one of your worst memories of failure. Now, dig around your left upper chest

area with three fingers until you hit an area that feels quite tender. This is the 'sore spot', an area of lymphatic congestion. Massage it and say: "Even though I have this memory of failure, and part of me fears it makes me a failure, I love, accept and forgive myself." Say this three times, even if you don't believe it or it upsets you.

2. Touch the top of your head with three fingers. As you hold this point, focus on your fear and breathe in and out once.

3. Now touch the beginning of

either eyebrow and breathe again, still focusing on the fear. Ditto the corner of either eye (on the bone); Under either eye (on the bone); Under your nose. In the cleft of your chin; Under your neck (touching with your palm to hit the spot); On either side of your body, four inches below your armpit.

4. Repeat everything, from the top of your head downwards.

Caution: In very rare cases, usually when dealing with extreme trauma or phobia, EFT can trigger an 'abreaction' – a reliving of the problem.



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- ◆ Highlights include an excursion through the forested Wicklow Mountains to magical Glendalough and a visit to the Vale of Avoca, where we discover the village featured in TV's Ballykissangel. We travel to County Cork and visit the historic port of Cobh and Blarney Castle, where you have the opportunity to kiss the Blarney Stone at the top of the tower.
- ◆ Enjoy a drive around the Ring of Kerry, which takes in Macgillycuddy's Reeks, passes Glenbeigh's palm trees and visits Waterville and colourful Sneem. We take the ferry across the River Shannon to County Clare and visit the Bunratty Folk Park and Castle for a medieval banquet. Discover Ireland's wild west by coach, crossing The Burren en route, a lunar-like landscape of 300 square kilometres and visit the Cliffs of Moher. We also enjoy a sightseeing tour of Dublin, including Molly Malone's statue and the graceful Ha'penny Bridge.
- ◆ Price includes rail, coach and ferry travel as described in the brochure, hotel accommodation with breakfast each day, 3 lunches, 5 dinners, a full programme of excursions and the services of a Tour Manager throughout.



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- ◆ Highlights include a special 'Scottish night' in the Great Scots Hall in Edinburgh, a journey from Inverness to Kyle of Lochalsh on-board the *Scotrail* service, one of the most scenic rail journeys in the British Isles; and we cross the Skye Road Bridge for a scenic tour of this unspoiled and rugged island.
- ◆ Travel along Loch Ness and visit Urquhart Castle on the shores of the loch, where we have time to explore the castle ruins and discover its history. Enjoy a journey on the *Jacobite Steam Train*, which takes us past Ben Nevis and then climbs into the mountains surrounding Glenfinnan, where we cross the 21-arched viaduct used in the Harry Potter films. Finally, we drop down to the sea's edge on our way to Mallaig. We also take the ferry to Craignure on the Isle of Mull, where we join the *Isle of Mull Railway* for a journey along the Sound of Mull, enjoying spectacular views of Ben Nevis and the island of Lismore.
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## E-communications update

# Get switched on!

The Open University is embracing a host of digital communication options. Below is an overview of the latest updates for students

● IF YOU ARE a student, you may have already received a postcard informing you that OU correspondence to you will be changing from letters to emails. It is important that you indicate your preferred email address via StudentHome, if you haven't done so already.

If you have given a preferred email address, remember to change your junk/spam settings to ensure that any emails from the OU are not marked as 'junk' and arrive in your inbox. All generic university emails will come from [ou-mailings@open.ac.uk](mailto:ou-mailings@open.ac.uk), so add this to your 'safe email' list. How you do this depends on which email service you use. With Microsoft Outlook, go to 'Actions', select 'Junk e-mail' then click on 'Add Sender to Safe Sender's List'. You should be able to find a tool like this via the 'options' button or similar if you're using a different email client. Below is an overview of some other interesting developments...

## Help with your PC and internet costs

If you are a current student who lives in England or Northern Ireland and have received statutory support for course fees, you should have been sent a letter inviting you to join the PC and Access Grant scheme two to three weeks before the start of your studies. If you need to purchase a new PC for your course, you can apply for a grant towards the cost of a PC and internet access.

If you live in Wales and are entitled to financial support, you will receive a generous course grant that will also cover

the cost of a PC and internet access if required. For more information, contact the Financial Support Office on **+44 (0)1908 653411**.

Alternatively, you can find more information at [www.open.ac.uk/financialsupport](http://www.open.ac.uk/financialsupport)

In Scotland, you may be eligible for hardship funding to help pay for PC and internet costs. Call the OU in Scotland on **+44 (0)131 226 3851**.

## Mobile phones

The OU is developing a text message information service, so students will be alerted by SMS to timely resources,

assignment and exam date reminders, revision tips and related study support.

What information would you like to receive via SMS? If you are a student, send your views to [sesame@open.ac.uk](mailto:sesame@open.ac.uk) with the subject line 'Text Messaging'.

## Virtual Learning Environment

A Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) allows learning to take place collaboratively, making use of 'social software' such as blogs, wikis and forums.

An increasing number of OU courses are making use of

the VLE. Developments to look out for in the future include learning on the move via podcasts (audio files that people download to a mobile device such as an MP3 player, iPod or mobile phone and listen to at their convenience).

As Niall Sclater, Programme Director of the OU's VLE says: "Students will have better online contact with ALs and other students, reducing the feeling of isolation that some distance learners have.

"They will have the ability to interact and work collaboratively with others in new ways."

## It is important that you indicate your preferred email address via StudentHome if you haven't done so



## Case study VLE in practice

There was a surprise in store for students opening their mailing for the course ***Business organisations and their environments (B201)***. No course material! The team that created the 60-point course has put almost all its learning resources on the VLE. Apart from a few printed readers and a DVD, all the course material is online on a VLE Moodle website. Wikis, ePortfolio, MyStuff and the Moodle forum are an integral part of the course. "We know we are right on the far edge of where the OU has gone," says course chair Dr Jill Mordaunt.

You can see ***Business organisations and their environments (B201)*** on the VLE Courses website <http://learn.open.ac.uk/course>. Click on 'Business School' and then 'B201-08B'.

Employment tips

## Employer focus



Rebecca Fielding, Talent Manager

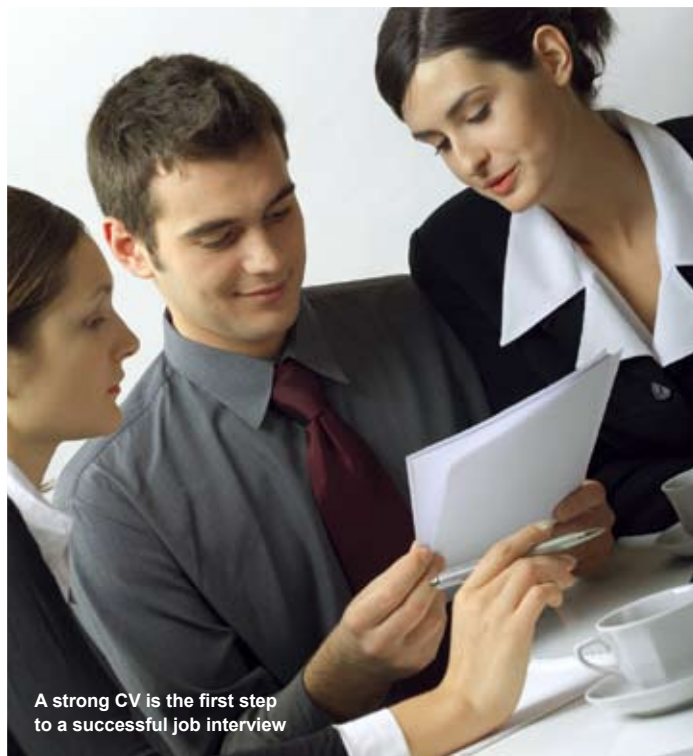
for HJ Heinz, offers career tips and advice for students and alumni

● **How does your graduate programme work?**

It is a two-year scheme that is specific to a particular function. During the two years you will have roles within your 'home' function but also spend time working on projects 'away' from your function. In addition, members of our graduate programme receive a senior mentor, a personal training and development plan, professional sponsorship, networking events and more. You can apply via [www.heinz.co.uk/graduates](http://www.heinz.co.uk/graduates), filling out a simple online application form. We encourage applicants from all age groups by not setting a minimum number of UCAS points as a barrier to application; we work with organisations that have a strong age profile, such as the OU; we don't offer a 'one size fits all' training and development programme that is aimed at young or inexperienced individuals.

**What skills, qualities and competencies do you look for in applicants?**

We look for specific technical skills and qualities in areas such as engineering or R&D, although some areas like sales are open to people from any degree discipline. For all candidates we look for competencies such as drive, analysis and decision making, planning and organising, developing partnerships, effective communications and driving innovation.



A strong CV is the first step to a successful job interview

## “My top three application tips: do your research, take time over your application and differentiate yourself”

**What application form tips would you give to people?**

There's so much advice I would offer but here are my top three: do your research, take time over your application and differentiate yourself – now there are hundreds of thousands of new graduates every year, so what makes you different?

**What suggestions would you give to applicants who are applying but not getting any interviews?**

Print off your application and show it to other people, and ask for their feedback. Pick up one of the many books out there to help you with your application form skills. Speak to a careers adviser – they are experts at this. Attend real or virtual training events on application form skills. Use the STAR model to answer competency-based questions: Situation, Task, Action, Result. If you do all of this and are still unsuccessful I would also suggest taking another look at

the sector/organisations you are applying to – it may be that you simply don't have the types of skills or competencies that are required in that sector and you might be much more successful in another area.

**What general career advice would you give to Sesame readers?**

Gaining work experience is a great way to get a foot in the door, but it is highly competitive and not often advertised, so you have to be prepared for this to be hard work. Join the professional body for your sector/profession and attend networking events or seminars to make valuable contacts. Read the trade or industry-specific press to pick up on trends, best practice and any potential mergers/acquisitions or market changes which may create opportunities. Be proactive, approach organisations as well as responding to adverts – they may not have something now but might later.

## Employment news

**Graduate vacancies to increase**

The results of a survey by the Association of Graduate Recruiters (AGR) suggest that graduate job vacancies will rise by 16.4 per cent this year.

An increase in the recruitment of graduates from minority ethnic groups has also been reported.

However, many employers who were questioned in the survey said they would have difficulty filling these roles with over half saying not enough candidates held the right skills, while 43.4 per cent said there were not enough applicants with the right qualifications.

**Careers Forums 2008**

The Careers Advisory Service is hosting a number of online forums in June and July including one on volunteering in June, one on law from June to July and one on arts in July.

Forums that have run earlier in the year are now available in read-only format, covering subjects such as 'What Employers Want' with representatives from Enterprise Rent-A-Car, LogicaCMG and KPMG answering student questions, as well as forums focusing on social sciences, psychology and science.

All forums will be moderated by a Careers Adviser.

For more information and to find out how to access the forums, go to: <http://www.open.ac.uk/careers/secure/forums.php>

# Classifieds

Publication of any advertisement or loose insert in Sesame should not be taken to imply University approval or recognition of the goods or services offered. In particular, courses advertised by other institutions relating to OU courses are not in any sense part of those courses: nor, in the University's opinion, is attendance at any privately arranged course necessary for the successful completion of OU studies

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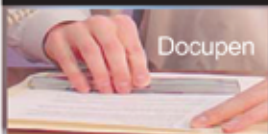
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