

OpenDoor

You are building futures full of hope and opportunity



Thank you for your support

Welcome to OpenDoor, our magazine designed especially for you, our OU family of donors and supporters.

Thanks to the kindness and generosity of the OU family, this year's Giving Day in July was a fantastic success. The fundraising campaign demonstrated the collective power of philanthropy, with 1,360 donors coming together to raise an amazing £121,818. This will support scholarships and bursaries for disabled veterans, carers, Black students, young people who have been in the care system, and those seeking sanctuary. We truly appreciate your kindness and support in helping to change lives.

In this issue, we share the impact of your generosity and introduce you to scholarship recipients like James and Sharon who, thanks to you, have experienced first-hand the transformational power of an OU education. We share news, including an award for an exceptional OU alumnus and entrepreneur, and update you on the OU's groundbreaking Observatory for Online Violence Against Women. You'll also find out about the inspiring and innovative environmental research conducted by academics at The Open University.

Finally, whether you graduated recently or years ago, don't forget we have an incredible array of free courses waiting for you on OpenLearn. Plus, if you want to upskill for the workplace, boost your CV, or pursue a personal interest, the OU's choice of paid short courses is now bigger than ever! Created by our expert academics and delivered entirely online, our short courses and microcredentials have been designed to fit around your life in order to help you achieve your learning goals. Follow the links below to find out more.



Get started today
www.open.edu/openlearn
www.bit.ly/discovershortcourses

Thank you for all your support and for being such a valued member of the OU family.

Best wishes

Karen Hart
Deputy Director of Development



Inside your magazine

- 3 The Disabled Veterans' Scholarships Fund**
James Champion tells his story
- 4 Care Experienced Scholarship**
The OU and John Lewis Partnership launch new scholarship programme
- 6 The Student Assistance Fund**
Supporting students when they need it most
- 7 Black Students' Support Fund**
Reducing inequity in higher education
- 8 Responding to urgent environmental challenges**
Sustainability at the OU
- 10 News in brief**
Updates from around the University
- 12 Remembering our legacy donors**
Ten years of the Legacy Garden

Keep in touch



alumni.open.ac.uk



giving@open.ac.uk



01908 655 044



The Open University
Development Office
Walton Hall, Milton Keynes, MK7 6AA



Follow us on Facebook
facebook.com/theopenuniversity



Make a gift today
alumni.open.ac.uk/donate

How we look after your data

Our privacy policy clearly explains how we will manage and use your data to communicate with you as either a member of The Open University Alumni Association, or as a valued donor, or friend of The Open University. If you would like to find out more about how The Open University manages and takes care of your data please view our latest privacy policy at giving.open.ac.uk/privacy.

The editorial content of this magazine was correct at the time of going to press. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form without the prior permission of the publishers.
© The Open University 2023, The Development Office, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes MK7 6AA.

The Open University is incorporated by Royal Charter (RC 000391), an exempt charity in England & Wales, and a charity registered in Scotland (SC 038302). The Open University is authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority.



James Champion in service



James Champion, OU student

Rewriting futures through the Disabled Veterans' Scholarships Fund

Lieutenant James Champion flew Gazelle helicopters for the Army on dangerous reconnaissance missions after the end of the Bosnian War. The frequent stress of being targeted by surface-to-air missiles combined with the sleep deprivation of living in an operational conflict zone, eventually took its toll on James' mental health and he was medically discharged.

Life outside the military has been challenging for James, who has been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and suffered many stress-induced conditions over the years, including being diagnosed with bipolar disorder. But, true to his character, he continues to fight back, working in health and social care so that he can use his experiences to support others.

While James was able to follow his childhood dream of flying helicopters, there was always another long-held dream which he wanted to explore.

"I wanted to study law since I witnessed a burglary when I was nine years old," explains James. "I gave evidence in court; the man was convicted, and I was given a commendation. When I left school at 18, I did not have the right grades to study law, and I wanted to get straight to Sandhurst anyway for Officer Training, so I followed that instead."

After he was discharged from the military, James' partner encouraged him to explore opportunities to study, which is where he discovered the OU's Disabled Veterans' Scholarships Fund (DVSF) online. This pioneering fund provides free education and wraparound disability support for veterans like James who want to pursue fulfilling lives outside the military. James applied and, to his delight, he began studying Law with the OU in 2019.

"It's been a challenge, but it has really boosted my confidence and made me realise that I am more than capable of studying. It has really helped with my mental health because I can lose myself in my

studies and when I need to, I've been able to speak to my tutors and the support team who have been outstanding."

James is incredibly grateful to donors. "You are really changing people's lives, and I'm very grateful to you as part of the Open Futures Fund that you continue to support us."

James thanks donor charity

James recently met with ABF (The Soldiers' Charity) which has been generously supporting the Disabled Veterans' Scholarships Fund since 2018.

Along with funding OU scholarships, the Charity has provided a wide range of study equipment for scholars such as laptops, alternative study format materials, talking books and other online virtual learning materials.



Left to right: Colonel Barney Hague - Grants Director, ABF (The Soldiers' Charity), Major General Seamus Kerr - DVSF Ambassador, James Champion - DVSF student, Tracy Grunwell - Philanthropy Manager, OU, Major General Tim Hyams - CEO, ABF (The Soldiers' Charity).

Supporting care experienced young people

The Open Futures Fund is at the heart of what The Open University stands for; breaking down the barriers to education and giving people the opportunity to change their lives.

This year the OU, in collaboration with the John Lewis Partnership, is delighted to launch the Care Experienced Scholarship programme, which will provide young people aged 25 and under with experience of being in the care system the life-changing opportunity to study an undergraduate level qualification for free.

Why Care Experienced Scholarships?

Today, there are 108,000 young people growing up in the UK care system, and the evidence shows that those who have spent time in care can face significant barriers to entering and succeeding in higher education.

Estimates suggest that only 12% of care experienced young people progress to higher education, compared to 40% of young people on average in the UK. Once there, they are one third more likely to drop out than their peers.

This inequality is being exacerbated by the cost-of-living crisis, with 44% of care experienced young people reporting that their mental health is affected by concerns about money and a particular concern is getting into debt.

As a result of the startling statistics, many young people are unable to access higher education, missing the opportunity to unlock their potential and realise their aspirations and ambitions.

The Open University's model of flexible supported learning, alongside our open entry policy, provides an environment where young people can build their academic achievements alongside their other commitments. They are no longer forced to sacrifice their education.



The Open University is ideally placed to provide support to young people who have spent time in care and face many barriers to higher education. The Care Experienced Scholarship programme is an extension of our ambitious work to make education open to all. Through these scholarships, students get to re-write their futures and transform their lives.

We are delighted to be working with the John Lewis Partnership to bring these educational opportunities to fruition. Not only will these scholarships benefit those who have been in the care system, but they will also benefit industry. Right now we know that talented, ambitious young people are being denied the opportunity to progress in their career because of a lack of access to education.



These scholarships will help to change that.



Jhumar Johnson
Chief of Staff to the Vice-Chancellor

Those eligible to apply must be:

- 25 years of age or under
- A first time OU student
- Ordinarily resident in the UK and eligible for a UK fee
- Hold no existing higher education qualification(s)
- Be able to demonstrate proof of experience of being in care
- Have a gross personal income of not more than £25,000 per year or be in receipt of a qualifying benefit
- Be studying a minimum of 30 credits of undergraduate study per year, towards an Open University undergraduate qualification

108,000

young people are growing up in the UK's care system

Only 12%

of care experienced young people reach higher education, compared to **40%** of young people on average in the UK



The OU's mission is to make learning accessible to people from all walks of life; enabling them to balance personal, professional and financial circumstances to realise their educational dreams and goals. 26% of OU undergraduate students come from the most deprived areas in England. We are determined to improve the representation of care experienced young people at the University. We know that when someone is given the opportunity to succeed, dreams can become a reality.

Not only will scholarship recipients have free access to an Open University qualification, they will also receive a full range of careers and employability services, including professional, individual guidance.



This is just the start and we are committed to flying the flag for the care community for the long term to ensure they not only feel seen and heard, but empowered and supported to reach their fullest potential.

Dame Sharon White
Chairman of the John Lewis Partnership



Welcoming our first students

This October sees the first cohort of students join the Care Experienced Scholarship programme thanks to the support of the John Lewis Partnership who have funded the first four scholarships. We are delighted to welcome these students and see them begin their OU journey. We can't wait to help them unlock their potential and realise their ambition.

Can you help?

Each year we see more applications than places available for our scholarships programme and the Care Experienced Scholarship has been no different. It is only thanks to the incredible and unwavering support, generosity and kindness of our donors and supporters that over 600 students have received life-changing Open Futures Fund scholarships and bursaries since 2018.



Support more young people today
<https://bit.ly/carescholarships>



Care Experienced Scholarship

Young people that have been in care can face many barriers to education and be pushed towards jobs in unskilled work that limit their opportunities in life. The Care Experienced Scholarship will provide a different path for those wanting to access higher education.

Supporting students when they need it most

For many OU students, study is just one aspect of their life that they're trying to juggle, often alongside a job, supporting their family, running a home and many other commitments. OU students and alumni know just how much hard work and dedication it takes to achieve their educational ambitions.

At The Open University, we see students every year who not only have to rise to all these challenges, but also face unexpected events in their life that can potentially force them to have to make the agonising decision of whether they can continue with their studies. When these moments of crisis strike, our students can find themselves in desperate circumstances. The Student Assistance Fund is there to help them continue to pursue their dreams.

Messages of gratitude

The difference you make to our students' lives was captured perfectly by these students:



Thank you so much, this will help me more than you can ever imagine.

Student Assistance Fund recipient



I am absolutely delighted, overwhelmed and humbled by your kind gesture and my family and I really appreciate your support at this extremely difficult and testing time.

Student Assistance Fund recipient



I cannot say how much this will help and cannot thank you enough! This is a massive relief and will help me pay for costs that I could not otherwise afford!

Student Assistance Fund recipient



Find out more
www.bit.ly/studentassistancefund

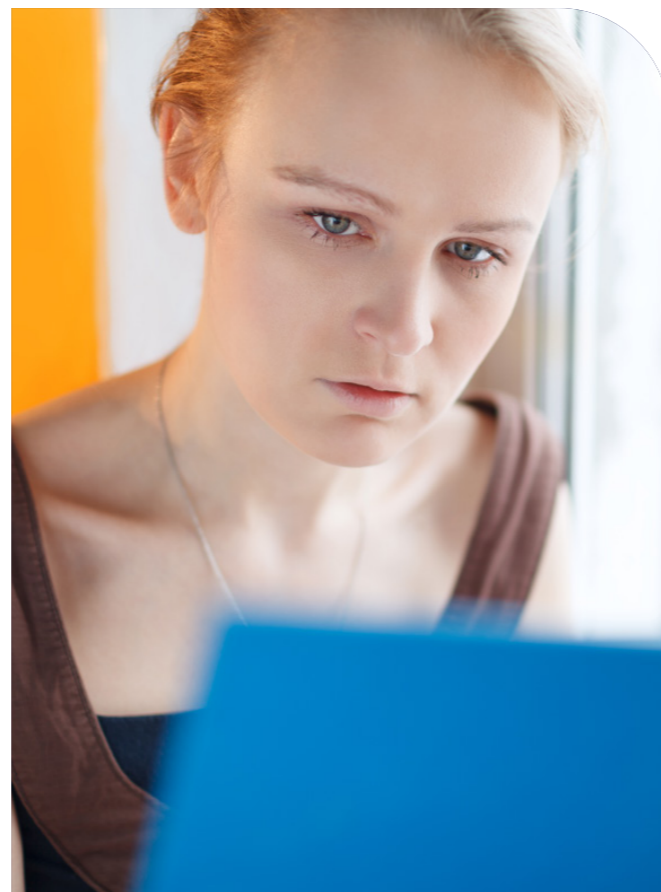
The Student Assistance Fund

Since 2020, the Student Assistance Fund has supported over 6,000 students with financial assistance, helping them through the toughest of times. During the global pandemic, the Fund supported many students whose lives were instantly turned upside down and faced the prospect of major financial instability, having to choose between funding their education or vital commitments like rent, mortgages, food and bills. Thousands of students received life-changing support.

The impact of the Student Assistance Fund can be understood by the words of a student who received support and shared that "if it wasn't for this help, I wouldn't have food to eat or a place to live."

We still see thousands of students each year needing support and the Student Assistance Fund is more vital than ever to those who are being severely impacted by the cost-of-living crisis and other unforeseen hardships and challenges. Students can apply for up to £500 and not only does this help ease the financial burden, it also gives them the comfort and security of knowing they do not have to give up on their OU journey.

The support that you, our inspiring and amazing OU donor community, have given during the pandemic and the years since, has truly been a lifeline for so many students whose calls for help you answer when they need it most.



Reducing inequity through the Black Students' Support Fund

At the heart of the OU's social justice mission is the belief that everyone, regardless of background or circumstance, should have the opportunity and support to transform their lives through education. In the United Kingdom, research shows that Black undergraduate students receive lower classes of degrees than white students. The degree awarding gap is a major issue that reflects the structural disadvantages faced by Black students.

The OU has a history of supporting students across society. The Black Students' Support Fund, launched in 2022, forms one element of the institution-wide approach the OU is taking as part of its Access, Participation and Success Strategy, designed to reduce inequities.

Scholarships were awarded to 48 students, and the first cohort started their studies in Autumn 2022. A further 44 bursaries were also awarded to students who had not been awarded a full scholarship to help them with their studies.

Sharon's celebrating success

Since leaving school Sharon (right) has been working in performing arts – singing, dancing, and acting. She was classically trained and danced with various companies in her twenties and thirties. She is now semi-retired, but still teaches and performs, and has worked with some high-profile actors during her career.

Sharon is studying for a BA (Hons) in Arts and Humanities and is hoping for a complete career change when she finishes her studies as she knows that having a degree will open more doors for her.

Find out more about the Black Students' Support Fund

Visit
www.bit.ly/blackstudentsupport



I never imagined that I would go back to studying – but it's a decision I'm so happy I made!

I felt the time was right for me to study and I was looking for courses to apply for when some information about the OU's Black Students' Support Fund popped up. I knew that the flexibility of OU study would suit me as I would still be able to manage my studies, work and all the things going on in my life!

I am also thankful to the supporters of the OU's Black Students' Support Fund. A lot of people from African and West Indian backgrounds feel that specific opportunities are not readily available to them and education being a big one. This scholarship programme is beneficial in giving some people an opportunity to further themselves.

Sharon
OU student and scholarship recipient



Responding to urgent environmental challenges

Sustainability means more than just reducing greenhouse gas emissions. At The Open University, we believe there can be no environmental justice without social change; that combatting the climate crisis also means protecting people's rights, food supply, and improving living conditions now and for future generations worldwide.

Ensuring a sustainable planet is one of our most significant existential challenges, with many interconnected problems and opportunities.

Weston Open Living Labs

The climate emergency and the rapid loss of biodiversity will shape the lives of future generations, and nature-based solutions are essential to addressing both. Yet a critical factor in people's willingness to engage with nature recovery is disconnection, we don't protect what we don't feel the value of.

The Weston Open Living Lab, with seed funding from the Garfield Weston Foundation, offers an educational and community space to investigate environmental issues and explore human-nature connection in the physical, digital, and virtual worlds. Through the Lab, people of all ages and levels of academic attainment will develop knowledge and skills for nature-based solutions to climate change and nature recovery.

Sited adjacent to the River Ouzel on the OU's Milton Keynes campus, the Lab will regenerate the ecosystem of two hectares of floodplain woodland and, with adjoining floodplain meadow and urban woodland habitats, form a dynamic living science laboratory for observing a range of processes, habitats, and nature.

The Lab will also be a digital laboratory offering unique science learning and teaching opportunities at distance, for OU students, the wider sector, and the public.

We believe this requires thinking beyond academic silos and disciplines, bringing together experts from anthropologists to astrobiologists and political scientists to physicists to address diverse challenges, from engaging indigenous communities in environmental protection to building carbon-neutral cities.

Together with the generosity of our donors and partners, the following programmes are ways in which the OU delivers social impact in the UK and beyond.

Floodplain Meadows Partnership

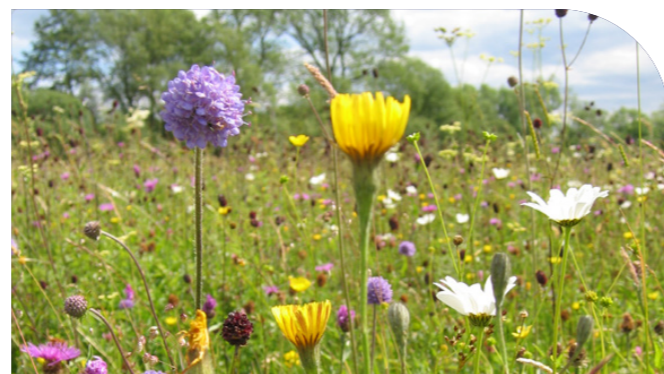
A hundred years ago, floodplain meadows existed throughout Britain's river valleys. Awash with wildflowers and waving grasses, humming with insects and the birds that depend on them, they were a valued part of the agricultural system.

Today, more than 97% are lost. Remaining meadows serve a variety of purposes; from generating prized hay crop, to flood and carbon storage. They have a critical role to play for natural heritage conservation and, well-managed, to support biodiversity and provide valuable ecosystem services in the climate crisis.

The OU's Floodplain Meadows Partnership has a long-term aim to restore 70,000 hectares of floodplain meadows across the UK, and has collaborated with local and national restoration partners, policymakers, and more than 270 landowners towards this.

In the Thames Valley, the Partnership is restoring and reconnecting fragmented floodplain habitats along three watercourses, building bigger, more resilient habitat networks that support robust gene pools and create stepping-stones into the wider landscape. In the Outer Hebrides, the Partnership is working with crofters to investigate wet meadow plant communities. In Wales, the Partnership is investigating the scale and the historic context of floodplain meadows, to model potential restoration.

 **Learn more about floodplain meadows**
www.floodplainmeadows.org.uk



Sustainable Silvopasture Cattle Farming in the Peruvian Amazon

Unsustainable cattle ranching has led to deforestation and subsequent degradation of over 30 million hectares of pastures in the Amazon. Pasture degradation drives further deforestation and leads, ultimately, to unproductive and unprofitable land. On top of this, climate change is increasing the incidence of drought and flooding, which is hastening the degradation of land.

The three-year project seeks to address these issues by training cattle farmers in the Peruvian Amazon in silvopasture practices. Silvopasture is a concept of combining grazing livestock, forestry and pasture management practices. Particular types of rapidly growing tree are grown and managed to provide food for the cattle, slowing and ultimately, we hope, stopping the practice of deforestation to clear land for cattle grazing.

Due to the degradation and deforestation of land in the Amazon, farming families in Peru are struggling, trapped in poverty and possession of unproductive land. The project will run family-orientated practical farming field schools, enabling new productive and profitable silvopasture practices to be learnt and established.

In Peru, women are 34% less likely to have equal economic participation than men (Gender Gap Report, 2022). This project provides a unique role for women to play; widespread adoption of silvopasture will generate demand for tree seedlings, which will be supplied through female enterprise.

The project will educate, train and support women through economic empowerment workshops, hands-on training in tree nursery establishment and paid internships at established nurseries. Both the women's and farming families' training will be developed into freely accessible online courses, remaining available beyond the length of the project.

Thanks to the support of The Old Dart Foundation, this extensive project will begin work in two regions of Peru; Madre de Dios and Ucayali. In total, we aim to reach 680 farming families and 2,300 women in rural communities.

Together with its sustainability as a profitable and productive system for agricultural land management, the widespread introduction of silvopasture enabled by this project will have a significant and lasting impact on the rural communities in the Peruvian Amazon.



Democratising urban tree data

When we think of iconic urban scenes, trees are often at their centre, whether it's New York's Central Park, the Champs Elysée in Paris, or The Mall in London. Away from these global cities, trees play a vital role in our own urban landscapes on streets, in parks, and gardens. Collectively they comprise what is called the 'urban forest' and can shape the character of urban areas: they reduce flood risk and temperatures, improve air quality and store carbon, provide amenity and links to history.

In the UK our urban trees are made up of a diverse mix of native species, non-natives from across the world, and horticultural varieties. The urban environments in which they grow can be challenging because of poor soils and restricted space for roots and branches. Climate change and novel pests and diseases are adding to these challenges. In the face of these threats, it is more important than ever that we understand how many trees there are, which species are growing where, what size and condition they are and how we can best manage them for society's benefit. Unfortunately, very little data exists on the make up of the UK's urban forest.

Over the past decade the OU has been working to create a UK-wide open urban tree map through our citizen science platform Treezilla: the Monster Map of Trees. We have amassed over a million tree records, making this the largest public tree map in the UK, but it is still just a fraction of more than 150 million UK trees.

We know that tens of millions of tree records are sitting in tree inventories of local authorities who are not resourced to make them public. We want to work with these organisations to standardise their datasets and combine them into a single massive database. This unified database will allow researchers to carry out the first large-scale analyses of risks to our urban trees from pests, diseases, and climate change. We will also make the data public and accessible through Treezilla, enabling members of the public to learn more about the trees around them, and engage better with local authorities in shared consideration of the benefits and challenges of looking after our urban forests.

Sustainability at the OU

 **Read more**
www.bit.ly/sustainability-ou



Tackling online violence against women and girls

Online violence against women and girls is an increasing societal problem worldwide, and there was a marked increase during the pandemic. It can take many forms, including harassment, threats of rape, and revenge porn. Perpetrators can be partners, ex-partners, colleagues, schoolmates, or anonymous individuals expert at covering their tracks. Some women are particularly exposed, for example, public figures, women's rights defenders, bloggers, and politicians, but all women are at risk. Sadly, there is growing evidence of the scale and impact of online misogynistic violence, with real life implications for women's and girls' mental health, safety, and ability to participate in public life, both online and offline.

The Open University's Observatory on Online Violence Against Women is an impactful unit of academic excellence headed by Professor Olga Jurasz and Dr Kim Barker, leading experts in this field. The Observatory aims to provide solutions to improve law, policy, and societal responses. Dr Barker and Professor Jurasz are often called on by governments, non-governmental organisations, charities, and international policy bodies to advise on reducing online and digital violence against women and girls.

The Observatory is rapidly establishing itself as a leading centre in the UK and internationally for interdisciplinary research in this area, and aims to shape research, law, and policy to tackle this growing issue.

 **Learn more about the Online Observatory**
www.open.ac.uk/ovaw-observatory



Sharing knowledge for a better future

PolicyWISE is a major new UK and Ireland initiative that will change and improve how governments and academics work together in and across nations to help solve policy challenges. It draws on strengths and best practice from across the nations to make a difference to lives and communities, through comparative policy research and knowledge exchange.

The OU has been awarded £1 million in funding from Dangoor Education to spearhead this initiative and partners from



Cardiff University, Trinity College Dublin, Queen's University Belfast, The University of Edinburgh and University College London are helping to shape its development.

An initial series of workshops with policymakers, civil servants and academics from across the nations have already explored the differences and commonalities in public policy across themes such as violence against women and girls; mental health; and post-Covid educational inequalities. The PolicyWISE team is currently working with policymakers across the nations to identify further shared challenges.

Celebrating OU family success

OU graduate and tech entrepreneur James Markey has won a €10,000 prize at the Santander X Global Awards. The awards bring together the best start-ups across Europe and South America to compete to win funding and support to help develop their businesses. James' company, UNI SIM, was the only UK business accepted to compete in the Global Awards in the 'Accelerate' category (for growing businesses).

UNI SIM designs haptic training solutions (technology that can create an experience of touch) and virtual reality (VR) simulators, which are revolutionising medical education. The technology they develop is being used to train the next generation of dentists, nurses and doctors around the world, and includes kits that teach everything from how to administer a lumber punch to oral surgery.

Founder James, who has an Open degree and is now studying for an MBA with the OU, devised the idea while he was studying and he used the knowledge gained from his OU qualifications to write and submit his business plan to the OU's Open Business Creators Fund, a competition which gives OU students the opportunity to win a grant to kick start their ideas. He won £1,500 which enabled him to buy equipment to turn his plan into a reality. Since it launched in 2019 the company has gone from strength to strength.

Pictured above: James Markey, founder of UNI SIM, using a haptic device



I am over the moon to have won this award. It's huge for UNI SIM to be recognised in front of more than 700 university leaders and Vice-Chancellors and it has already led to an influx of enquiries.

The support from The Open University has been phenomenal and we wouldn't have been able to achieve everything we have done without it.

James Markey
OU graduate and tech entrepreneur



As public policy creation becomes more diverged, PolicyWISE will give people the opportunity to gather insights, key learnings and best practice from across the nations.

Tim Blackman
Vice-Chancellor



Our focus and way of working makes us unique. We create constructive spaces for policymakers and researchers. We share ideas from across these islands, and we help governments and parliaments focus on evidence-informed policy solutions.

Dewi Knight
Director of PolicyWISE and former Welsh Government specialist adviser





Ten years of remembering and honouring our legacy donors

Every year the Legacy Garden Celebration event brings the OU family together to honour and remember those who have passed away and left a gift in their Will to support the work of The Open University and its students. On 19 July, alumni, family members, friends, supporters and OU staff joined together to unveil this year's legacy plaques, to recognise and remember those whose legacy gifts were received by the University in 2022.

The event is always a very special occasion, filled with deep gratitude for the members of the OU family whose plaques are unveiled. Their lives and gifts are

truly inspirational. The next generation of OU students, and the work of the University, will continue to flourish thanks to their thoughtfulness and wonderful generosity.

This year's event was a particularly special occasion as it marked the tenth anniversary of the Legacy Garden. The idea of a garden as a visual testament of gratitude was developed in 2012 and our then Grounds and Safety Manager Alan Marham, who has since retired, developed a design that truly captured the essence of what it means to leave a legacy.

Alan was keen to develop the walled garden, built around 1830 as part of the Walton Hall estate, into the home of the Legacy Garden. He set about designing the layout and the planting schemes that would make it a special place on campus, where visitors could enjoy the flowers, wildlife and tranquillity of the Garden.

The Legacy Garden was opened by the then OU Vice-Chancellor, Martin Bean, in 2013 and each year we join together to celebrate the lives and generosity of the OU family, whose names appear on the plaques that adorn the walls of the garden.



As a 'plantaholic' I was enthralled by the Legacy Garden. It has grown from a master plan on paper into a delightful place for memories, contemplation and enjoyment.

This year's event has highlighted the importance of funding future generations.



Carolyn Hampson BA (Hons) MA
OU alumna and Legacy Garden Celebration
Event guest, July 2023

Find out more about how you can support future generations with a gift in your Will



giving.open.ac.uk/legacy
01908 659 141