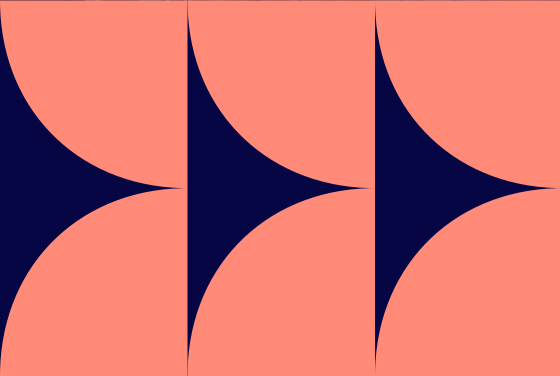
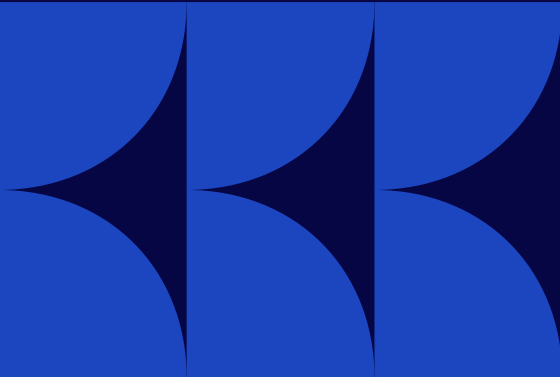


# OpenMinds



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# There is nowhere else like the OU.

In a career as long as mine there are many highlights but I can truly say that the privilege of being The Open University's Interim Vice-Chancellor is right up there at the top. This is an institution I care for deeply and it holds a special place in both my professional and personal life – especially with my daughter now thriving as an OU student.

For more than 55 years, we've been breaking boundaries, disrupting the norm and pushing the limits of how people think about, and access, higher education.

We have helped many people who may have thought that education was a closed door to realise it's not. There is nowhere else like the OU! I know that because I'm simply echoing what many of you have said to me during our graduation ceremonies.

The unique potential of an OU education is epitomised by OU graduate Anushree, who reflects on her journey from Lucknow (India) to NASA on page 6.





Astrobiology is a jewel in the OU's crown, as are several other areas of ground-breaking work that puts 82% of our research in the world-leading or internationally excellent category. We launched Open Societal Challenges to respond to the world's most critical problems, showcasing what our researchers are doing to tackle society's most pressing matters.

From tackling inequalities to climate change, across the four nations and globally, the OU's interdisciplinary and inclusive research empowers communities in the UK and internationally to drive positive societal change. In the same way, each one of our students and graduates transforms not just their lives but those of their families, communities and the world at large.

I am very pleased to also share with you that our mission to make education open for all will be in the safe hands of Professor Dave Phoenix when he takes over as Vice-Chancellor on 1 July. Currently the Vice-Chancellor of London South Bank University (LSBU) and CEO of LSBU Group, he brings

a wealth of experience in higher education and a strong commitment to widening access to education. He, like you, is a proud OU alumnus.

Finally, this is also my opportunity to put on the record the University's heartfelt gratitude to Professor Tim Blackman, who stepped down as Vice-Chancellor in October due to ill-health. It has been a remarkable five years under his leadership. But, as you all know well, the OU is above all a team effort; your successes are very much ours and what keep us committed and dedicated.

Best wishes,



**Professor Josie Fraser**  
Interim Vice-Chancellor



Visit the OU website  
[www.open.ac.uk](http://www.open.ac.uk)

## OpenMinds Live

On 29 April, we will be hosting the next OpenMinds Live online event, bringing to life some of the most exciting articles from this magazine.

Follow the link below to find out more and reserve your space.



Book your place today  
[www.bit.ly/openmindslive25](http://www.bit.ly/openmindslive25)



# From Lucknow to NASA (via the OU)

## The remarkable story of Dr Anushree Srivastava

In 2003, the world was captivated by the tragic tale of the Space Shuttle Columbia, and the seven-person NASA crew who sadly lost their lives upon re-entry to the Earth's atmosphere over Texas.

Yet of all the people glued to their TVs across the globe, none were more transfixed by the events on screen than future OU alumna Anushree Srivastava.

"I wasn't really aware of space travel before I tuned into that mission, so my mind was blown by the fact astronauts could conduct scientific experiments in space," Anushree explains, "I was absolutely gripped. It was a terrible tragedy, but the legacy of the Columbia crew sparked something within me."

For the teenage Anushree, an immediate and all-encompassing love of science - particularly regarding the human capacity to explore space - was born.

### Discovering a role model

While the shuttle's fatal mission was gripping on its own, there was an added layer of interest for this ambitious young girl thousands of miles away in Lucknow, India: the added interest that comes with representation.

"One of the crew members, Kalpana Chawla, was the first woman of Indian origin to fly to space," Anushree proudly recalls.



**Dr Srivastava at work**



My mind was blown by the fact astronauts could conduct scientific experiments in space.



Space Shuttle  
Columbia launch,  
January 16, 2003



As the old adage goes, you can't be what you can't see. And as soon as Anushree saw images of Chawla aboard Columbia, her own path began. Of course, like most paths, it wouldn't be completely straight.

In such a niche field, opportunities for studying space-related sciences were understandably difficult to come by, meaning that all research had to be part-time, extra-curricular and decidedly self-motivated. Thankfully, self-motivation was never a problem for Anushree.

After school came a degree in History and Anthropology, yet that fascination with space exploration never dampened. Post-graduation, it actually intensified.



I discovered Astrobiology, taking short courses and devouring a range of resources to build my scientific knowledge. Everyone expected me to pursue a career in civil services, which is highly respected back home, but my fascination with space never left me.

**Anushree Srivastava**



Read more  
overleaf...

Dr Anushree Srivastava at the Houghton Impact Crater, Devon Island in the High Arctic, as part of The Mars Society's Mars 160 mission.



Fascination is one thing, but there was still the not insignificant matter of convincing her parents this was the right career to pursue. To Anushree's great relief, she was eventually able to win them over.

"For my mum and dad, it was like sending their daughter to an unknown world. Nobody in my family had ever pursued science, so it was a really big deal," she reflects, "They took some convincing, but my parents saw my ambition and believed in me enough to take a risk."

They surely couldn't have imagined where that risk would eventually take her.



## Discovering the OU

Following a Biotechnology Masters degree in the UK, which included a short-term placement at NASA's Goddard Space Flight Centre, Anushree's attention was drawn to a PhD opportunity at the OU's Walton Hall campus in Milton Keynes. The PhD closely matched her area of interest and expertise, and she applied immediately.

"I had no idea if I would be selected. Finding out I was successful was a truly amazing moment.

"Fully funded PhDs are hard to come by, especially for an international candidate like me, and I feel so lucky to have been part of AstrobiologyOU. We were experts across a variety of disciplines, working together to understand where life may be found and considering the ethics around space exploration. The whole experience was like a dream come true."

Leaving the OU with a newfound sense of identity and belonging, and a doctorate to her name, Anushree didn't have to wait long to find her next dream opportunity.



## Discovering Mars

It goes without saying that this next opportunity – joining NASA’s world-famous, trailblazing Mars Rover programme – wasn’t a decision Anushree had to spend much time mulling over.

Having come a long way from that wide-eyed teenager in Lucknow, Anushree was now a Post Doctoral Fellow, an astrobiologist, and an employee of one of the greatest space programmes in human history.



I couldn’t believe that I was accepted to be part of such important research. My work centred around understanding the habitability of early Mars environments, so it was a great fit.

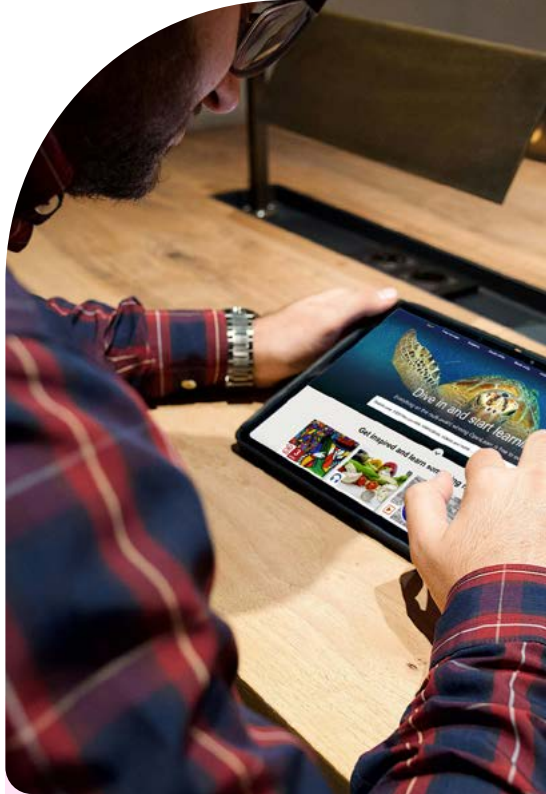


“I’m part of two big missions,” she explains, “Analysing and deciphering data sets direct from Mars, and providing mission-critical support for operations on the surface.”

### Next up?

“We’re looking to answer the big question: was there life on Mars?”

A huge question, of course, but given every barrier that was smashed along the way, it would take a particularly fool-hardy person to bet against Anushree finding the answer.



## Free Astrobiology courses on OpenLearn

Bringing together academics from the Faculties of Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths; Business and Law; and Arts and Social Sciences, AstrobiologyOU is a multi-disciplinary research group committed to developing the next generation of space sector workers, by harnessing an inclusive, ambitious approach. With a dedicated collection on OpenLearn, the OU’s free learning platform, anyone can start their journey to space exploration today.



Explore the range  
[www.bit.ly/olastrobio](http://www.bit.ly/olastrobio)

# FASS Forward

 More information  
[fass.open.ac.uk](https://fass.open.ac.uk)



I'm thrilled to note the way staff and students in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASS) continue to be responsive and inclusive agents of positive change in and through the arts and social sciences, locally, nationally and internationally.

The work of colleagues across FASS, with partners throughout the wider University and other institutions and agencies, continues to deliver transformative teaching and exciting research with initiatives inspiring us all.

The new School of Creative Industries launched and is developing its new curriculum, and this year, our first cohort of students studying through the Open College of the Arts (OCA) graduated. Our collaborations across the nations continue to bring huge success via projects such as Time to Think, and our work with the BBC and other broadcasters brings new discoveries and fascinating ideas to wider audiences.



## **Professor Adrienne Scullion**

Executive Dean, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

## OpenARC opens its doors

A groundbreaking new research centre within the School of Arts and Humanities, OpenARC, was launched in June 2024.

Also known as the Arts & Humanities Research Centre, this bespoke research hub facilitates a broad range of research and discussion. It proudly champions the value of arts and humanities research, in a world where there is increasing inequality of access into this exciting field.



Learn more  
[www.bit.ly/fassopenarc](https://www.bit.ly/fassopenarc)



## Awards success for psychology researchers

Professor Sarah Crafter and Dr Nelli Stavropoulou from the School of Psychology and Counselling won 2024's Open University Research Excellence Award (REA) for 'Outstanding Open Research', alongside their UK team member Professor Guida de Abreu from Oxford Brookes University.

The award celebrates and recognises their work as part of Networking the Educational World: Across Boundaries for Community-building (NEW ABC).

This work involves engaging children and young people with migratory experiences, using arts-based approaches to explore their own lives. Following this exploration, young people get the opportunity to co-create resources aimed at raising awareness and driving change.



**Read more**  
[www.bit.ly/ou-rea](http://www.bit.ly/ou-rea)

## First OCA students graduate

Students learning through the Open College of the Arts (OCA) celebrated at the Royal Festival Hall in July 2024, in the first graduation ceremony since the College, its staff and students became part of the OU family in August 2023. OCA students are studying a wide range of part-time distance learning courses, from graphic design to painting and textiles.



**Find out more**  
[www.oca.ac.uk](http://www.oca.ac.uk)



— part of The Open University —

# Global Development Annual Lectures

The Open University is a longstanding hub for interdisciplinary, critical, and forward-looking research on international development. Celebrating its work and engaging with current debates, the OU Global Development Annual Lecture series began in October 2024. The inaugural lecture, 'Abolition and International Aid and Development: Retreat, Repair and Dignity', was delivered by Dr Olivia Umurerwa Rutazibwa, Belgian/Rwandan International Relations scholar, former journalist, and

Assistant Professor in Human Rights and Politics at the London School of Economics and Political Science. She offered reflections on what it means to take anti-colonial and decolonial critiques of international aid and development seriously, arguing it requires a genuine engagement with abolition rather than reform; and repair and dignity rather than aid and development. This unique event was recorded and livestreamed to YouTube.

 **Watch the event**  
[www.bit.ly/outalks](http://www.bit.ly/outalks)

**Dr Olivia  
Umurerwa  
Rutazibwa**





## Friendship and flexibility

When 19-year-old Izzy James opted for flexible study with The Open University, she worried that, being younger than your archetypical distance learning student, she would struggle to make friends. Since then, Izzy has built lasting friendships, completed her degree and is on her way to achieving her career goals.

Over three years, Izzy studied while working. Having just finished her third and final year with the OU, Izzy was thrilled to learn she had gained a 2:1 in Criminology.

 [Read Izzy's story](http://www.bit.ly/fassblog1)  
[www.bit.ly/fassblog1](http://www.bit.ly/fassblog1)



The OU has massively helped me to progress while ensuring I have an income and has helped to expand my experience. I feel on top of the world.

Izzy James



## New School of Creative Industries

The Faculty's new School of Creative Industries launched this year, with its inaugural Head of School, James Blake, who has a background in documentaries, television and radio news, multimedia production and mobile journalism, joining the OU from Edinburgh Napier University.

This new School will explore opportunities for new creative, vocational qualifications linked to the creative arts and industries, and is developing a new degree in Film and Media, and a Higher Education Certificate in Media Production.





In my first year as Executive Dean of the Faculty of Business and Law, I have been incredibly impressed with the dedication and passion of my colleagues across both schools – Business and Law – particularly in their commitment to research-informed teaching and student success.

2024's many highlights include Professor Keith Schofield joining as Head of the Business School, as well as celebrating the 10th anniversary of the Centre for Policing Research and Learning, and the launch of a new Centre for Protecting Women Online, both of which aim to benefit wider society.

Our alumni continue to act as catalysts for both new thinking and action; the power of individuals to make a positive difference can never be underestimated.



**Professor Mark Durkin**  
Executive Dean, Faculty of Business and Law

## OU alumnus joins '100 Faces'

Sir David Harrison, MBA alumnus and OU honorary graduate, was named as part of a campaign led by Universities UK, championing 100 notable people who were the first in their family to attend higher education.

The '100 Faces' campaign celebrated the positive impact of 'first-in-the-family' graduates, with Universities UK research showing the transformative impact of going to university.

Sir David is a successful businessman and completed his MBA with the OU in the 1990s. He is a consistent champion of education and social mobility through his foundation, the Harrison Foundation.

Commenting on his personal philosophy, Sir David says, "I believe everyone needs a second or third chance, so if things don't work out at school there should still be opportunities available – skills, education and creating confidence in an individual are key."



Learn more  
[www.bit.ly/100facesnews](http://www.bit.ly/100facesnews)

## Protecting women online

The OU launched a pioneering Centre for Protecting Women Online thanks to a £7.7 million grant from Research England. It aims to mitigate the online harms faced by women by focusing on research to inform legislative, policy-based, and technological solutions.

The new initiative follows a significant research report by Professor of Law Olga Jurasz, which revealed shocking levels of online violence against women and girls in the UK.

 [Learn more  
www.bit.ly/cpwo1](https://www.bit.ly/cpwo1)



The programme aligns with the OU's social mission and builds on research from our Centre for Voluntary Sector Leadership (CVSL) on the leadership of racialised minority voluntary sector organisations.

**Dr Fidèle Mutwarasibo**



## Empowering Black leaders

The Black Leadership and Empowerment Programme (BLEP) is an initiative designed to empower the next generation of Black leaders in business and the community. Launched in 2024, and led by Dr Fidèle Mutwarasibo, Senior Lecturer in the Business School, the programme aims to equip participants with the skills needed to thrive in leadership roles.

In the first year of the two-year programme, the Manchester BLEP got backing from The King's Trust (formerly The Prince's Trust), AutoTrader, Manchester Airport Group and Inclusive Companies. The programme included in-person peer learning sessions and motivational speeches by prominent business leaders. Participants were also able to access 150 hours of free learning on the OU's OpenLearn platform, including two bespoke leadership courses developed exclusively for BLEP. The second year of the programme will involve participants from across the four UK nations.

Fidèle said, "BLEP emerged from discussions between community partners concerned with racial inequity and the OU. The programme explores how we can be more effective in calling for and fighting for change.

"Black employees hold just 1.5% of top management roles in the UK private sector (according to 'The Race at Work Black Voices Report', 2020), while the number of Black executives working at the leadership level of the UK's top 100 companies fell to zero in 2021 (according to 'Green Park Business Leaders Index', 2021).

# MBA graduate improves air travel

James Boyce, 30, completed his MBA while working as a full-time pilot for British Airways (BA) and chose The Open University for its flexibility around his irregular flight schedules. James's entrepreneurial enthusiasm, passion for improving air travel, and determination to use his learning to benefit society, has led him to launch his new organisation, Access-air-bility, an organisation whose mission is to improve air travel for people with disabilities.

“When I first started the MBA, I remember feeling a large degree of imposter syndrome as I felt like all the other students already had vast amounts of management experience. Discussing business with experienced senior executives from a diverse range of industries felt daunting at first, but turned out to be a huge learning curve and reshaped my thinking entirely.”

In the final MBA module, students are required to conduct a research project aimed at leading change in their organisation. Driven by his goal to make a positive social impact on the world, James decided to examine how the airline service that assists people with disabilities could be improved.

James has since co-founded Access-air-bility, which aims to raise awareness of the difficulties that some people with disabilities

face when they fly and to develop innovative solutions to help improve their travel experience.

In 2024, James was shortlisted and highly commended in the ‘Student of the Year’ category at the prestigious AMBA (Association of MBAs) Awards, which recognises students who have shown exceptional career potential. James describes this as one of his proudest career highlights so far.



Watch the event  
[www.bit.ly/jamesboyce](http://www.bit.ly/jamesboyce)



# Determination triumphs over adversity

Despite facing a brain tumour diagnosis and life-saving surgery, 32-year-old Michael McGreevy has completed a Diploma in Higher Education

Diagnosed in May 2022, Michael, from Belfast, refused to let his condition hold him back. After undergoing surgery, he continued his studies in Criminology and Law at The Open University, balancing his recovery with academic demands.

Michael's road to recovery was challenging, with both physical and emotional struggles, yet he remained committed to his education,

supported by family, friends, and tutors. His perseverance paid off as he completed his diploma with outstanding results, becoming an inspiration to others facing adversity.

Reflecting on his journey, Michael said, "Life threw a curveball at me, but I refused to let it stop me from pursuing my dreams. With determination and support, anything is possible." He now plans to continue his educational journey, showing that the human spirit can triumph over even the toughest challenges.



## Student stories

# A second chance

After years of torment from bullies, Shayda Darwish was forced to leave school before finishing her A-Levels. Now, thanks to the OU's open entry approach, Shayda has finished her first year of a Law degree with distinction, and is pursuing her dreams of becoming a barrister.

Through Shayda's studies, she's been able to embrace new opportunities, including volunteering at her local court and speaking in front of a women's networking group.



The OU has given me a chance to start again. No one can take my education away. I've proven to myself and to everyone else that I can do it.



Read Shayda's story in full  
[www.bit.ly/shayda](http://www.bit.ly/shayda)



# CareersFest

Last November's OU CareersFest 2024 was the most ambitious yet, with over 50 employer showcases, panel sessions and careers skills sessions taking place.

Students were particularly inspired by the popular alumni panel session 'Career transitions: success stories and lessons learnt'.

"I enjoyed this because it discussed issues like finding employment when you're a little older, as well as if you have disabilities," commended one student.

The session's alumni panel were equally effusing, with Mat Schencks (who gained his MBA and MA in Education at the OU), saying, "I very much enjoyed it and it seemed helpful for the students, who were very engaged."

Alumni and current students can book onto a wide range of employer and careers skills events all year round in the Events section of OpportunityHub.

 **Explore the OpportunityHub**  
[www.bit.ly/ouoppub](http://www.bit.ly/ouoppub)

## Social Work graduates celebrate milestone achievement

The OU celebrated the graduation of its first cohort of BA (Honours) Social Work students in Northern Ireland. Fourteen students, employed across Health and Social Care Trusts (HSCs) and the voluntary sector, graduated at the Belfast Waterfront Hall in May 2024.

This innovative programme allows social care staff to train as social workers while continuing their jobs,

offering a blend of online learning and practical placements. Funded by the Department of Health, successful graduates can register as social workers, gaining both academic and hands-on experience.

With 139 students currently enrolled, The OU's programme is helping address Northern Ireland's social care workforce needs.

## Helping OU alumni search smarter

“Can you help me find opportunities where I live?” is something recent alumni and current OU students often ask.

Continually innovating to help alumni achieve their goals, the OU’s Careers and Employability Services have introduced a new, integrated service to help search for career opportunities using Labour Market Information (LMI). It includes a new geolocation search function within OpportunityHub’s job search tool, a new instructional set of LMI pages in the Help Centre, equipping alumni to adapt to a changing job market, and a new LMI tool providing up to date regional information and job profiles.

“We’ve covered future-proofing your career, how to weather changes and how to use Artificial Intelligence (AI) in your search for LMI,” says Careers and Employability Consultant Fiona Munday.

 **Careers on the Help Centre**  
[www.bit.ly/oucareers](http://www.bit.ly/oucareers)

## Go Wales goes live

Go Wales helps students of the OU in Wales develop their confidence and refine their employability skills through one-to-one support and work placements in Wales.



We had a complete win-win with having a student on placement. We were able to deliver more tours and to organise the library that we have here. The things we like seeing most when we have students on placement is watching them grow in confidence, developing the ability to apply skills and knowledge to a real-life situation and going through the process of juggling priorities.



**Craig Owen**  
Heritage Advisor, Welsh Centre for International Affairs

## Could you employ an intern?

**If you’re an employer in Wales and would like to benefit from an OU student placement, contact us at [gowales@open.ac.uk](mailto:gowales@open.ac.uk)**

**For employers offering internships in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland, contact the internships team at [internships@open.ac.uk](mailto:internships@open.ac.uk)**



# The OU and the BBC

## Unique partnership continues to thrive

The OU and BBC's partnership began in the early 1970s as an innovative way to allow thousands of students to access learning remotely, via late-night lectures on their televisions.

Over the following five decades, this fledgling collaboration grew and grew, and now inspires millions of people worldwide to learn new things through a broad range of co-produced (and multi-award-winning) content, across TV, radio, podcasts, digital and social platforms.

OU academics are on hand to consult throughout the entire production process, and a great many of these co-productions have received international acclaim. We're immensely proud of this ongoing collaboration between two world-renowned institutions.

To find out more about the partnership, explore the breadth of engaging and inspiring content supporting all of the OU/BBC output and delve deeper into the subjects, visit [OU Connect](https://connect.open.ac.uk).

 **Get started today**  
<https://connect.open.ac.uk>

## BBC Morning Live

2024 saw the establishment of an exciting new branch of the OU/BBC partnership, with the co-production of several short films to be featured on BBC One's popular magazine show, Morning Live.

Three series of films were produced across the year, with the input and expertise of the OU's leading academics in the faculties of Wellbeing, Education and Language Studies (WELS), Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) and Arts and Social Sciences (FASS).

Each of these pre-recorded items were born out of ideas from OU-nominated academics, based on their research and area of expertise, and brought to life by the experienced Morning Live production team. Many of the films featured our very own academics conducting experiments on screen, which is not only an exciting, enviable promotion of our teaching and learning, but also helps to support students with new, tangible case studies.



Watch on iPlayer  
[www.bbc.in/4fpsTiV](http://www.bbc.in/4fpsTiV)





# Exploring psychology

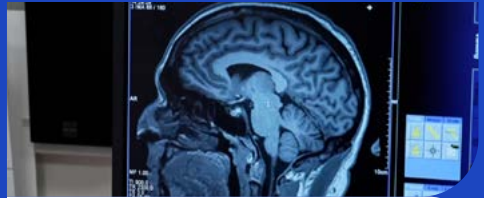
Short films co-produced with the support of academics from the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASS)



## Eco Wins

*featuring Dr Trudi Macagnino, Staff Tutor in Psychology & Counselling*

This seven-minute film discusses how we can all take small, tangible actions to help the environment, limiting the damage caused by our own lifestyles, while allowing us to shed 'eco dread' around the climate crisis.



## Brain Health Hacks

*featuring Dr Sinead Eccles, Staff Tutor in Psychology & Counselling*

Learn about the four chemicals we need to keep us happy and motivated: dopamine, oxytocin, endorphins and serotonin. Radio One's Katie Thistleton takes part in an experiment showing the instant benefits of looking after your brain.



## Distracted Driving

*featuring Prof. Gemma Briggs, Professor of Applied Cognitive Psychology*

This fascinating piece delves into recent research suggesting that, despite it not being prohibited by law, conducting a hands-free phone call while driving is just as dangerous as physically using a mobile phone handset.



## Everyday Extremism

*featuring Prof. Kesi Mahendran, Professor of Social & Political Psychology*

With first-hand testimonies from presenter Zara McDermott, and international rugby referee Wayne Barnes, this film explores the blurred line between acceptable social media discourse and online abuse.



Watch all six FASS films  
[www.bit.ly/fassfilms](http://www.bit.ly/fassfilms)

# Exploring wellbeing

Short films co-produced with the support of academics from the Faculty of Wellbeing, Education and Language Studies (WELS)



## Language Learning

featuring Dr Zsuzsanna Barkanyi, Senior Lecturer in Spanish and Dr Ursula Stickler, Senior Lecturer in German

With learning a new language now more accessible than ever, this film puts two methods head to head. Retirees Jon and Steve both want to learn Spanish, but after only a week of studying, will they be able to spend a whole evening using only their newfound language?



## Lonely Bereavement

with Dr Joanne Jordan, Research Fellow in Health, Wellbeing & Social Care

Death is a natural part of life, but research shows we don't talk enough about grief; many people find it difficult to start a conversation with friends or family who have been bereaved. Presenter Jacqui Joseph learns how acknowledging loss can be a huge help.

## Demystifying CBT

with Dr Chris Kubiak, Senior Lecturer in Health & Social Care

In the streets of Manchester, this film explores how well-known Cognitive Behavioural Therapy is among the public. An expert practitioner explains the science behind CBT, alongside testimony from a patient whose life has benefitted greatly from the technique.

## Healthy Options

with Nigel Wright, Lecturer in Sport & Fitness

More than half the calories eaten by an average UK adult are from ultra-processed foods (UPFs). Yet, despite evidence that UPFs could have associated health risks, many are sold in packaging promoting them as "healthy". This film explores these contentious claims.



Watch all six WELS films  
[www.bit.ly/welsfilms](http://www.bit.ly/welsfilms)

In November, the OU further co-produced six new films featuring STEM academics, released to support the BBC's official 'Scam Safe Week'



Watch all six STEM films  
[www.bit.ly/stemfilms](http://www.bit.ly/stemfilms)



© Wall to Wall Media

## D-Day: The Unheard Tapes

OU alumnus Joshua Leese (pictured), who graduated with an MA in English Literature, was thrilled to land a starring role in 2024's gripping OU/ BBC docudrama D-Day: The Unheard Tapes.

Joshua plays a central role in the three-part documentary TV series, commemorating the 80th anniversary of the D-Day landings.

Bringing to life the words of former servicemen, Joshua and his fellow castmates are featured lip-syncing to soldiers' audio recordings, as they relay their experiences of the day that changed the Allies' fortunes. Joshua was chosen to inhabit the world of American serviceman Tom Porcella, from the 508 Parachute Infantry Regiment, 82nd Airborne Division, who featured in the rare, and previously unheard, tapes.

Reflecting on his experience as an OU student, Joshua says, "Taking an English Literature Masters with the OU was one of the best decisions of my life. The course was so fascinating, especially with the broadening of 'English literature' into the works of the Commonwealth and other English-speaking nations."



**More info**  
[www.bit.ly/ddaytapes](http://www.bit.ly/ddaytapes)



**View or  
download  
the OU's  
D-Day booklet**  
[www.bit.ly/ddaybook](http://www.bit.ly/ddaybook)

# Behind the scenes



## In conversation with Professor Lara Frumkin

Course lead for the OU's BSc (Honours) in Forensic Psychology

To celebrate the Morning Live collaboration, we sat down with Professor Lara Frumkin, the academic behind one of the FASS short films, which explored juror bias around different accents in the courtroom.

In a wide-ranging conversation, we asked Lara about her experiences working with presenter Riyadh Khalaf and the Morning Live team, discussed the findings of her very first TV experiment. We also learnt a little more about her fascinating research career.

### How did you first get interested in the concept of accents?

I grew up in a suburb near New York City, where lots of families would come in for work from different places, or other countries, and stay for three or four years. I would hear the different accents in my friendship group and in my school, and often would try to imitate them.

### Are you good at impersonations?

No! And I'm so amazed when people can do them.

### Does the concept of accents differ around the world?

The UK loves accents, I think because you have so many. Globally, there's a lot more focus on the difference between native and non-native accents, whereas in the UK, there's a strong link between somebody's regional accent and their perceived class status.

### Much of your research explores how different accents can lead to biased responses. Can you expand on that a little?

We all judge people on what they're saying, obviously, but also the way that they're saying it. In the US, where I studied for my PhD, I learnt that there are some accents that are seen as very desirable, and people tend to like those – like the British accent, for example. But there are other accents that many people simply don't like, and this dislike can lead to sweeping judgements on how certain people may be uneducated, how they can't be trusted, or even that they sound like they are a criminal!

Later, I started to think about how to translate my interest in how we judge people based on their accents into courtroom settings. I started designing studies around that, and now it's my main area of research.





## How did the Morning Live piece come about?

The OU Broadcast & Partnerships asked the media fellow in the School of Psychology & Counselling to invite academics to submit one-paragraph proposals for potential films. I suggested an experiment around extra-legal factors in the courtroom, which means any factors that aren't directly relevant to the case, including a defendant or witness's accent.

The OU broadcast project team met with the Morning Live team, who gave constructive criticism over what would and wouldn't work in a televised study, then helped us to devise a loose script, and find suitable participants. We filmed the piece at a mock courtroom they'd sourced in the University of Bradford, which was beautifully designed.

## The experiment explores how jurors might respond to witnesses with different regional accents; did any of the findings surprise you?

The whole thing went better than I could have expected. There were dramatic differences in how the participants rated the witness testimonies. I've conducted several experiments of this kind before, but the rating differences were the most marked I've ever seen.

## Had you ever filmed anything for TV before this? How did you find the process?

I hadn't, and it was fantastic! Being in front of the camera was weird at first, but I eventually got used to it. Riyadh, the host, was really supportive and encouraging, the production team made me feel comfortable throughout, and importantly, the people from Morning Live were totally open to being led by the science. As soon as it finished, I said that I'd love to work with them again.



**BSc Forensic Psychology**  
[www.bit.ly/ouq82](http://www.bit.ly/ouq82)



**MSc Forensic Psychological Studies**  
[www.bit.ly/ouf73](http://www.bit.ly/ouf73)

## OU Connect

OU Connect, the home of the OU/BBC Partnership, is a fantastic place to take your learning even further! It's the home of a variety of engaging content including animations, short videos, interactives, articles and interviews, all produced in collaboration with our amazing academics.



**Explore the partnership**  
[connect.open.ac.uk](http://connect.open.ac.uk)

# STEM Spotlight



More information  
[stem.open.ac.uk](http://stem.open.ac.uk)



I am pleased to share just some of the latest achievements from the STEM Faculty. Our work continues to break new ground, from AI innovation with the Department for Education to ground-breaking planetary science and medical research. Our Queen's Anniversary

Prize-winning OpenSTEM Labs remain central to our goal of delivering innovative, authentic and accessible STEM education by distance learning. Our teaching, research and knowledge exchange aims to address challenges relating to sustainable environments, digital thinking, life and health, data and information.

With our engagement at the forefront of environmental sustainability, climate, health and disease, and AI, we are tackling some of today's most critical global challenges. As always, these advancements are woven into our teaching, empowering students and alumni to excel in a fast-changing world.



## **Professor Nicholas Braithwaite**

Executive Dean, Faculty of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics

## Pain tracker wins STEM award

Researchers in the STEM faculty have developed an award-winning physiotherapy device to enhance recovery for patients.

Developed by OU Professor Blaine Price and Dr. Daniel Gooch (pictured), along with Professor Oliver Pearce from MK University Hospital, the revolutionary device enhances patient care by providing real-time pain tracking data to clinicians. It also eases the workload for nurses by allowing patients to monitor their own pain levels, particularly after surgery.

Called the PainPad, this innovation earned the team the Changemaker/ Lightbulb Award at the inaugural MK STEM Awards in February 2024.



Learn more

[www.bit.ly/paindatanews](http://www.bit.ly/paindatanews)



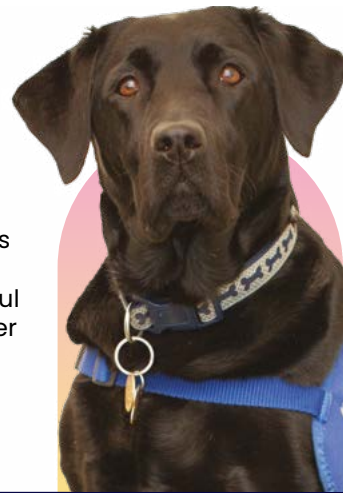
# Dogs trained to sniff out bowel cancer

The Open University's Professor Clara Mancini and her team are working with the charity Medical Detection Dogs to train dogs to detect bowel cancer through urine samples.

Using interactive technology developed by the OU's Animal-Computer Interaction Lab, the project captures detailed data on how dogs interact with cancer-positive samples.

This could lead to a non-invasive, more accessible cancer screening method, improving early detection rates and health outcomes.

The dogs' extraordinary olfactory abilities have already proven successful in detecting other diseases like prostate cancer, Parkinson's, and COVID-19.



Learn more  
[www.bit.ly/medicaldogs](http://www.bit.ly/medicaldogs)

# Haircare matters in breakthrough research

Dr James Bowen, a chemical engineer at the OU, is collaborating with CURLiD to find the best hair products for people with curly and textured hair. The research focuses on reducing potential health risks, especially linked to certain chemicals in straightening products that may be connected to cancer.

Dr Bowen's research also highlights the lack of affordable and accessible products for textured hair and the stigma surrounding it. The team has already analysed hair samples from 34 people to recommend safe and effective care routines. Their goal is to study 1,000 samples by 2027 to empower individuals with textured hair.



Learn more  
[www.bit.ly/hairresearch](http://www.bit.ly/hairresearch)



## Celebrating 20 years of the Centre for Electronic Imaging

The Centre for Electronic Imaging (CEI) celebrated its 20th anniversary in September. This unique partnership with technology manufacturers Teledyne-e2v has advanced space imaging technology, contributing over 1,000 sensors to more than 200 missions.

These missions have allowed us to explore the solar system, our planet Earth, and the universe in unprecedented detail. We're delighted that a renewal of a further five-year collaboration with Teledyne e2v has also been announced.

 **Learn more**  
[www.bit.ly/20cei](http://www.bit.ly/20cei)



## International COSPAR Planetary Protection Week

In April, AstrobiologyOU hosted the inaugural International COSPAR (Committee on Space Research) Planetary Protection Week, funded by a project awarded to Professor Karen Olsson-Francis from the International Bilateral Fund of the UK Space Agency. The event brought together global experts from 17 space agencies, 40 research institutions and several industry and commercial partners, to discuss the protection of planetary environments including Mars and the icy worlds while safeguarding the Earth.

 **Learn more**  
[www.bit.ly/cospar](http://www.bit.ly/cospar)





## Andy's Antarctic adventure

After being made redundant at 54, Andy Palin embarked on a new chapter by enrolling in the OU's Natural Sciences degree.

He thrived with the flexible interactive learning and, four years into his studies, he applied for a role with the British Antarctic Survey, where he worked at Rothera Research Station in early 2024.

Andy continued his work maintaining electrics at the station, all while continuing his OU studies and completing tutorials from the most remote continent on Earth!

"I'm such a big advocate of the OU experience, it was exactly what I needed," said Andy.



Some people would be looking to the end of their career at 54, but I didn't want that. I feel like the OU threw me a lifebelt; it made employers sit up and take notice. I'm so glad I went for it.



**Andy Palin**



Learn more  
[www.bit.ly/andypalin](http://www.bit.ly/andypalin)

# Welcome to WELS



More information  
[wels.open.ac.uk](https://wels.open.ac.uk)



I am endlessly inspired by how our OU alumni take their learning out into the world to be positive forces for change. Whether it is in their professional lives through progressing their careers, or in inspiring and supporting their friends and family to pursue their own study, our alumni are an important part of our OU family. In our rapidly changing world where misinformation is increasingly getting harder to navigate, and inequalities continue to grow, it is vital that we as a collective OU family continue to stand for social justice which lies at the heart of the OU's mission.



**Professor Klaus-Dieter Rossade**

Executive Dean, Faculty of Wellbeing, Education and Language Studies

## Inspiring student ambassadors honoured

Three student ambassadors in the School of Education, Childhood, Youth and Sport have been recognised for their significant contributions to student voice and wellbeing, successfully gaining the SEDA (Staff and Educational Development Association) Student Partnership Impact Award, an international recognition of students who have had an impact on their universities.

Charon, Nichola and Imogen (pictured) received the award for the impact they have had as part of the School's Student Voice and Wellbeing group. They have been involved in the creation of a student wellbeing handbook, presented at conferences,

introduced Neurodiversity Cafés, participated in student recruitment, and contributed to the development of learning materials.



Learn more

[www.bit.ly/seda-award](https://www.bit.ly/seda-award)





# Demystifying contraception

The innovative Bodylore research project investigated the link between folklore and reproductive health. Led by Dr Victoria Newton and funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), this participatory research examines the stories people tell each other about contraception and the reproductive body, and the active role these stories play in decision making.

In a departure from a traditional academic setting, learnings from the research were used to create

an interactive exhibition in London's Truman Brewery, aiming to empower individuals with the knowledge and perspectives they need to make informed contraceptive choices. In the future, the study will help to influence the priorities of relevant organisations and encourage health care professionals to consider some of the wider influences at play.

 **Watch the video**  
[www.bit.ly/bodylorenews](http://www.bit.ly/bodylorenews)



Student stories

## My language dreams

Eilidh, 21, from Fife, who was born with Cerebral Palsy, is non-verbal and uses a device to communicate. Yet even with additional challenges, Eilidh has embraced a love of languages through her BA (Honours) degree in Language Studies with the OU. After learning German and French, she's now on her way to mastering Spanish, Polish and Italian.

"Although I enjoyed school, I only managed to receive a maximum of a C in my subjects until I discovered German. I'd found what I was good at and excelled at the subject. It was the first time I'd ever been awarded an A for my work," Eilidh shared.

"However, without an English A Level or Scottish Higher, it wasn't possible for me to study languages at a traditional university. This was when I discovered



the OU. Its open entry policy meant that I could pursue my dreams of becoming a German teacher for children with additional support needs."

Having a disability hasn't stopped Eilidh from seizing every opportunity, and she is now well on track to achieving her career goals.

"Pursuing my dreams of becoming a teacher wouldn't be possible without the OU – it means everything to me. Since studying with the OU, I am more confident and willing to make friends. I've even run for an election. There's nothing stopping me!"

## Training course embeds Scots language

For the first time in the history of Scottish education, there is now a professional learning course for teachers on how to include and embed Scots language and culture in their classrooms, delivered in partnership with the OU in Scotland and Education Scotland.

The online programme helps teachers to understand not only the

educational benefits of embedding Scots language and culture in the classroom, but also the equality, diversity and inclusion aspects which are increasingly relevant to modern Scottish education. Funding for teachers who choose to study the course has been made available by the Scottish Government.



## Earning while learning to teach

Emma Tate was working as a Learning Support Assistant in a school when she decided she wanted to progress to become a qualified teacher. She chose to study a PGCE at the OU in Wales to become a secondary school maths teacher.

Emma studied the PGCE in Wales via the salaried route, which allows students the opportunity to work in a school and earn a salary whilst also studying for a PGCE.

“The salaried PGCE route was flexible enough because it allowed me to have the time to study and work at the same time, so perfect for me,” said Emma, now a fully qualified teacher.



It made it so much easier and more accessible to be able to follow my dreams and my passion because I had that flexibility.



Emma Tate



OU Wales PGCE programme  
[www.bit.ly/ou-pgce](http://www.bit.ly/ou-pgce)

## OpenXR progress

In 2022, the OU's OpenXR Studios project received £5.8million from the Office for Students, to build capacity in ground-breaking immersive technologies for teaching and learning.

'XR', which stands for 'extended reality', is recognised as a huge part of our technological future, and the OU is proud to be leading the trend of harnessing its capabilities.



Work has begun to transform part of the OU's Walton Hall campus, creating studios for virtual production and motion capture technologies, with further spaces being designed for the housing of volumetric capture systems.

New fitness equipment has been installed, enabling sports and fitness activity to be remotely monitored, recorded and analysed by students, supporting a growing on-site research programme with practical activity and analysis.

This exciting and innovative project is initially focusing on Sport, Nursing, Environmental Science and Biomedical Science curriculum. The OpenXR Studios are due to go live in early 2025, with the aim of developing local partnerships and collaborations to build community use.

# Free learning for all

Over the last 12 months, OpenLearn (the OU's free learning platform), has passed a number of enormous milestones, including boasting an incredible three million course completions, helping learners around the world boost their knowledge, skills and career development prospects.

OpenLearn provides accessible online education to all, from free courses to articles, interactives, videos and podcasts, across a vast range of subjects and specialities. With around 900 courses now available on the platform, there truly is something for everyone, as proven by the huge number of self-motivated, independent learners who flocked to the platform this year.

Those three million course completions led to another milestone: the awarding of 300,000 digital badges. These badges act as online signifiers of achievement, helping users to celebrate and demonstrate new skills and achievements. 80 OpenLearn courses are now badged,

and these badged courses are all CPD (continuing professional development) approved, at 24 CPD points per badge. This CPD approval allows users who are expected to attain a certain number of points per year through their employment to earn as they learn, with the added benefit of being able to share the badges on LinkedIn - or other e-portfolio platforms - for prospective employers to see.

The OpenLearn website attracted seven million visitors this year, the highest total reached since the height of the pandemic. There were also almost four million views of the exclusive content on OpenLearn's dedicated YouTube channel, with new content going out weekly to around 300,000 subscribers.



Discover more  
[www.openlearn.com](http://www.openlearn.com)





If you're following the OU on Instagram or TikTok, you might have seen our recent series of videos from OU academics, discussing their latest OpenLearn content, and sharing information and insight. From how the brain works, to the technology used in the Euro 24 football tournament, to the ethics of AI, the scope of OpenLearn's digital output continues to grow and diversify.

## Stay up to date

The best way to stay up to date with all of OpenLearn's latest and most topical content is to subscribe to our monthly newsletter, or to follow our social media channels.



Subscribe today  
[www.bit.ly/newsol](http://www.bit.ly/newsol)



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# Top up your skills with an OU short course

Who says your learning journey needs to end after your qualification?

If you still have the learning bug or want to continue growing your skills to help you stay ahead, the OU has a range of flexible short courses and microcredentials to support you.

Each online course is designed to fit around your life and can help you upskill, progress further in your career, or explore new interests and hobbies. Plus, you can be confident that each course meets the OU's world-class standard of education you know so well.

So, wherever you are in life, **why not make 2025 the year you continue to invest in your future?**

## Upskill in just a few weeks

Looking to improve your project management or financial skills, develop as a coach or leader, or try something new like photography or languages? There are over 100 short courses and microcredentials to explore, from creative writing to artificial intelligence.



Find the right course for you

[www.bit.ly/discovershortcourses](http://www.bit.ly/discovershortcourses)



## Short courses

Bite-sized learning at your own pace. Most start any time and require 10–50 hours of study.



## Microcredentials

Gain practical skills and cutting-edge knowledge with a professional development short course. These run for 10–12 weeks, starting in March and October.

Just some of the available courses:

### Business management:

Develop in-demand project management skills

### Climate change:

Transforming your organisation for sustainability

### Teacher development:

Embedding mental health in the curriculum







# A greener future

## Preserving biodiversity with Dr Kadmiel Maseyk

While he may be officially listed as the Senior Lecturer in Environmental Sciences at the OU, Dr Kadmiel Maseyk also goes by many other job descriptions.

He's an ecosystems scientist. A plant ecophysiologicalist. An expert in biosphere-atmosphere interactions.

And while those terms may sound complex to many of us, his body of work all sits under one clear remit: making the world a better place through the incredible power of nature.



The modern world is dominated by the strong impact of humans on the environment.

I'm interested in our response to that, whether that's the response to climate change, nature recovery, or protecting biodiversity.

**Dr Kadmiel Maseyk**



This issue of biodiversity is a particularly important strand running through much of the work carried out by Kadmiel and his colleagues in the School of Environment, Earth and Ecosystem Sciences (EEES).



In short, biodiversity is at the basis of so much we depend on. From the role of pollinators in preserving food systems, to the way different species help regulate carbon and water cycles, varied ecosystems are vital. The richer an ecosystem, the greater its resilience, meaning that nature is more likely to survive. However, we're living through a global biodiversity crisis, which is getting to a critical point.



Amplified by the climate crisis (through factors such as wildfires and extreme events), the biodiversity crisis poses an urgent threat to our planet. However, it's through research, collaboration and direct action that Kadmiel believes we can come through this crisis, and use the knowledge gained to build a better, greener, more biodiverse future.

While the fascinating, vital work taking place within EEES is wide-ranging, we asked Kadmiel about two projects in particular: the groundbreaking Weston Open Living Lab, and an early-stages venture known as Green Roofs.

[Read more overleaf...](#)



# Weston Open Living Lab

Established in the heart of the OU's stunning Walton Hall campus in Milton Keynes, the Weston Open Living Lab was founded in 2022 through a generous grant from the Garfield Weston Foundation. The basis of the project was the regeneration of a riparian woodland, existing of 350 trees and covering almost two hectares of previously unused land.

Using cutting edge technology and data collection tools, the site exists to monitor biodiversity, provide tangible findings to inform future action, and engage the wider community in the idea of nature recovery.

It's hoped that this research will then be used in the vital drive to solve the climate and biodiversity crises



**Night vision cameras**  
capture a range of species in the Open Living Lab

**With special thanks to:**  
Philip Wheeler, Sarah Davies,  
Julia Cooke, Miranda Dyson,  
Clare Lawson and Yoseph Araya.

affecting our world. Essentially, the more we know about how our natural world works, and how different plant and animal species interact, the more effectively we can build a sustainable future and limit the negative human impact on the natural world.

"The Weston Open Living Lab exemplifies what we do at the OU," explains Kadmiel, "It fosters interdisciplinary work across the University, provides an educational space for students to conduct their own research, and has truly international reach."

In the first two years alone, the project has already made a huge number of unexpected discoveries and quite remarkable findings.

"Even I was amazed by how much biodiversity there is on campus. Our cameras have spotted species including deer, foxes, badgers, otters, bats and even buzzards. In such a small area, this was really surprising, but also encouraging."

Camera traps even caught a magpie tackling a crayfish from the river, although it's unclear whether the magpie caught the fish itself, or managed to steal it from another animal: a strategy that's quite brilliantly known as "kleptoparasitism".

The next phase for the Weston Open Living Lab entails community outreach, starting with engaging local school children and community groups. By aligning the programme with existing secondary school curricula, the hope is that the next generation of activists, researchers and educators will be inspired by visiting the site, improving the wider societal response to the biodiversity crisis.



# Green Roofs

Part of the OU's game-changing Open Societal Challenges (OSC) approach - in which academics are partnered with external organisations, charities and policymakers to tackle real-world challenges - the upcoming Green Roofs project aims to establish planted areas on urban rooftops (initially on the OU campus, then hopefully further afield).

This architectural approach aims to aid nature recovery in built-up areas, improve biodiversity by encouraging plant and animal species to convene in one place, and encourage people to spend time among nature, a vital tool in improving public engagement with environmental causes.

"Green Roofs is a collaboration with Milton Keynes-based green roof experts Bridgman & Bridgman, who proposed the project. It will involve carbon capture, water infiltration, data collection and thermal buffering, but will also provide a beautiful natural space for people to enjoy at their leisure."

While currently at a nascent stage, the project is developing quickly, thanks in large part to the knowledge and passion of the EEES team and their industry-leading Bridgman & Bridgman counterparts.

"Come back in six months and we'll hopefully have some lovely photos!", jokes Kadmiel.

Having seen the wide-reaching impact of his other work, you can safely bet they'll have accomplished a lot more than that.

 **The Green Roof Project**  
[www.bit.ly/greenroofproject](http://www.bit.ly/greenroofproject)

A green roof that has been constructed on the YMCA building in MK



**With special thanks to:**  
David Gowing, Yoseph Araya,  
Alice Fraser-McDonald,  
Caroline O'Rourke, Sneha Ravji  
and Sonia Barthaud-Newman.

## Open Societal Challenges

A revolutionary approach to academic research, the Open Societal Challenges is powered by collaboration, passion and an over-arching goal of tackling the real-world challenges affecting our planet and society.

Connecting OU academics, external businesses, charities, students and local communities, Open Societal Challenges is the only known research programme to be both challenge-driven and community-first.

Under the three themes of Sustainability, Tackling Inequalities, and Living Well, it tackles real-world challenges in a unique, practical, effective way.

 **More information**  
[www.bit.ly/researchosc](http://www.bit.ly/researchosc)

# The Open Futures Fund

As an institution that's proudly widened access to education for over 55 years, we know that offering everyone the same support, regardless of their identity, background or challenges they face, doesn't always result in equitable outcomes. That's why providing targeted interventions - such as financial support for particular groups of students - plays a fundamental role in promoting equity across higher education and beyond.

That's why we launched the Open Futures Fund, which provides scholarships to students facing barriers to education.

This groundbreaking scheme opens up the opportunity of an OU education by offering full fee-waiver scholarships to five distinct groups: disabled military veterans, unpaid carers, low-income Black students, people who have spent time in the care system, and those seeking sanctuary in the UK.

As we enter 2025, the Open Futures Fund continues to go from strength to strength, with over 600 students financially supported since 2018. Many previous scholarship students are now gaining their qualifications, starting new career journeys, or progressing in their current fields of work.

The Open Futures Fund only exists due to the kindness and generosity of our incredible donors and supporters.

 **Find out more**  
[www.bit.ly/openfuturesfund](http://www.bit.ly/openfuturesfund)

## Disabled Veterans' Scholarships

Providing free study with disability and careers support to veterans injured or disabled in or due to service.

## Black Students' Support

Providing scholarships to Black, low-income students who are UK residents.

## Carers' Scholarships

Providing carers - including young carers - the chance to study for free.

## Sanctuary Scholarships

Providing scholarships to people seeking refuge or sanctuary in the UK.

## The Care Experienced Scholarship

Supported by the John Lewis Partnership, provides full undergraduate scholarships to people aged 30 and under who have spent time in care.

# Going for gold

Regular readers of OpenMinds may recall the remarkable story of Gregg Stevenson, an Open Futures Fund recipient through the Disabled Veterans' Scholarships Fund (DVSF).

In this edition, we're delighted to bring you an update to his ever-inspiring story, and a truly incredible feat of achievement he accomplished last summer.

We previously told you how Gregg (whose future was thrown into uncertainty upon losing both legs while on military duty in Afghanistan) had thrived in OU education. He'd graduated in 2022 with a BSc in Sports, Fitness and Coaching, become a highly-respected mental health practitioner in the NHS, and even begun training for a potential appearance at the 2024 Paralympic Games in Paris.

Anybody who watched the Games will know exactly how that ended.

Alongside his experienced rowing partner Lauren Rowles, Gregg brought home a gold medal for Team GB in the Mixed Skulls, a life-changing triumph that is further testament to his tenacity, bravery and determination.

As a result of his Paralympic success, another incredible achievement was soon to follow, with Gregg being awarded an MBE in the 2025 New Year Honours, for services to rowing.

Everyone at the OU offers their heartfelt congratulations to Gregg Stevenson MBE!



I'll never forget that I owe all of these incredible opportunities to wonderfully caring and thoughtful OU alumni.



**Gregg Stevenson**  
OU graduate and scholarship recipient



Read more stories  
[alumni.open.ac.uk/stories](https://alumni.open.ac.uk/stories)

# “I never thought I’d become a refugee. Ever.”

These are the poignant words of Tinta, an OU student and Open Futures Fund scholarship recipient.

Becoming a refugee is undoubtedly something few expect to happen in their lifetimes, but for Tinta, this is the stark reality. Furthermore, his path to being granted refugee status in the UK has been complex, lengthy and incredibly difficult.



My story is a very long one. I’m originally from Ivory Coast – or Côte D’Ivoire, as we call it – but I’ve been in the UK for many years. Before I left, there was a civil war in Côte D’Ivoire, which threw the country into chaos.



Devastatingly, one of the many fatalities of the conflict was Tinta’s father, a man he has always seen as his role model and mentor. Not only that, but the death of such a close family member left Tinta fearing for his own life. He was determined to leave the country and seek sanctuary elsewhere.

“My Dad always told me he wanted me to go to England,” he recalls, “Where I would be able to get a good education.”

So, in 2010, that’s exactly what he did.

Shortly after his arrival in the UK, he claimed asylum, but the process was far less straightforward than he had first envisaged. What followed was years of uncertainty, with refusals, appeals, and a pending application decision which left him in a state of limbo.



**Tinta Alli**  
OU student and scholarship recipient



In total, it took over ten years for Tinta's refugee status to finally be granted, a period during which he wasn't eligible to study for a formal education.

"I'm very academic," he tells us, "And I love to read. I think that side of me came from my Dad. But I couldn't study in the UK, which is all I wanted. Instead, I did a lot of voluntary work, and I waited."

Once that long wait was over, and his approval was eventually granted, he immediately began applying for higher education scholarships - including the Sanctuary Scholarships programme at the OU - but life continued to bring its challenges.

"The day before I was offered the scholarship, somebody stole my bike from my flat. That was terrible. I was devastated. That bike was everything and I had no money to replace it. Then the OU called me and BOOM - I've been given the keys to my future!"

All those years later, he'd finally been given the chance to work towards an education in the UK, and pursue the dreams of not just himself, but his father.

"I waited 24 hours to tell anybody I'd got a place at the OU. But as soon as I did, the word spread like wildfire through my community. 'Did you hear - Tinta finally got something!'"

With the pride of his community behind him, he commenced his undergraduate degree in Politics, Philosophy and Economics (PPE), a subject which combines his love of academic learning with his lifelong desire to better understand people and society.

"When I submitted my first assignment, my tutor told me I was on the right track," Tinta beams, "I'm a francophone, and this was my first ever essay written in English, so their



words really encouraged me. Now when I submit an assignment, I know I shouldn't panic, because I'm on the right path."

Tinta's patience and resilience are truly extraordinary.

But, having seen his life transformed through the opportunity to secure a degree, he is also keen to show gratitude to those who support Sanctuary Scholarships, and provide opportunities to those who need them most.



'Thank you' is a very simple English phrase, but for me it's got a deeper meaning. Because you gave me the purpose never to give up and to believe that anything is possible in life. And that is what I call a miracle.



**Find out more about students like Gregg and Tinta**  
[www.bit.ly/openfuturesfund](http://www.bit.ly/openfuturesfund)

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