

OpenMinds



Reaching for the stars

Exploring space with
The Open University's
Dr Ben Dryer

OpenMinds 2026

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Opening up our future, together

As The Open University's new Vice-Chancellor and a proud OU graduate himself, Professor David Phoenix reflects on the University's enduring mission, his commitment to social justice and equity, and the next chapter of opening up opportunity, impact and belonging for learners everywhere.

Hello, and thank you for welcoming me as your new Vice-Chancellor. As an OU graduate, I know what it feels like when The Open University opens a door to the prospect of a better future.

Our spirit of openness to people, places, methods and ideas has defined us since 1969. It still does, and it always will. Our task now is to advance that mission together, helping to reach more people than ever before through teaching, research and outreach activities.

Since joining the OU, I have been listening and learning from students, colleagues, partners – and, of course, our alumni. I hope to listen and learn from many more of you in the months and years to come, since it's your stories on which the OU's reputation for open learning has been built.

What comes through strongly from everyone I connect with is pride in what we stand for, and a shared determination to make sure we continue to lead with purpose. With inequalities widening, technology reshaping how we live and learn, and trust in higher education being tested, the need for the OU has never been greater.

That is why we are developing our new strategy, to advance our mission more fully than before. In simple terms, that means: bringing high quality learning

to people for whom it may otherwise be out of reach; creating flexible, inclusive courses that help every current and future student realise their ambitions; and working with colleges, employers and communities across all four nations to find local solutions with community and national benefit.

At the heart of this lies my own and my colleagues' commitment to social justice and equity. Providing access to opportunity is not enough, though: we must help every student following in your footsteps to succeed. We can do that by ensuring that they feel they belong, and by supporting their progress as they maximise their own true potential.

Jennie Lee, our visionary founder, always insisted that the delivery of mass education must never come at the cost of quality. I believe that myself today as strongly as she did then, and I am sure many of you will agree with that, too. That is why, alongside the development of our educational materials, we will continue to support research and innovation that help shape society. We want to provide further opportunities for our students to be active participants in this work.

I'd like to pay tribute to your support, generosity and advocacy.

No one speaks with more passion or authenticity about The Open University than those who have studied with us.

Each of your own chapters is part of our story, laying the foundations for further generations. You will always be our greatest ambassadors, and our most inspirational.

Thank you

Professor David Phoenix
Vice-Chancellor

A fond farewell

The Open University is bidding farewell to long-serving Chancellor Baroness Martha Lane Fox, who is stepping down after almost 12 years of commitment and dedication to the OU.

Baroness Lane Fox, who also holds an Honorary Doctorate at the University, will be no stranger to many alumni, having presided over 34 Degree Ceremonies, and congratulated a mammoth 10,500 new graduates as they've crossed the stage into their new lives as OU alumni.

The sixth Chancellor of this historic institution, her contribution cannot be overstated and she will be sorely missed.



Martha's parting words
www.bit.ly/marthafarewell



Being your Chancellor has really been the honour of a lifetime.

Baroness Martha Lane Fox



Euclid's view of the Horsehead Nebula

©ESA/Euclid/Euclid Consortium/NASA, image processing by J.-C. Cuillandre (CEA Paris-Saclay), G. Anselmi



On a mission to map our universe



Dr Ben Dryer

Post Doctoral Research Fellow,
School of Physical Sciences

When you meet Ben Dryer, the first thing he talks about isn't his fascinating research at the cutting edge of space exploration, his team's intricate calibration work on the state-of-the-art cameras mapping our universe, or his esteemed collaborations with some of the titans of the space industry. Instead, it's the magic of the OU.



I did my PhD at The Open University, with the plan that after my training, I would go straight into an industry role. But then I went to my graduation ceremony.



What he saw that afternoon in Ely Cathedral convinced him this was the place to be.



Compared to my undergrad ceremony where it was all 22-year-olds, I was blown away seeing the cross section of society that the OU touches. Witnessing that amazing breadth and diversity of graduates told me that I needed to be part of the OU mission.



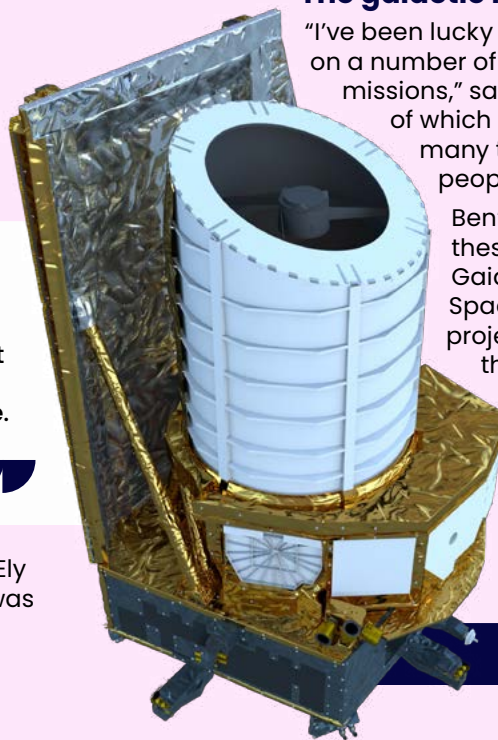
So, instead of focusing on a purely industry-facing role, Ben committed himself to research and teaching. 13 years later, he is now the chair of the postgraduate Space Science module at the University, alongside his practical work.

We sat down with Ben to discuss a few highlights from his remarkable, varied career.

The galactic missions

"I've been lucky enough to work on a number of major space missions," says Ben, "each of which involves many, many thousands of people."

Ben's introduction to these missions was Gaia, the European Space Agency project observing the entire Milky Way, creating the most detailed 3D map of our galaxy by mapping over a billion stars.



Artist's impression of the Euclid spacecraft

©ESA/ATG-medialab



My cog in the huge machine of these missions is to help ensure the sensors photographing our universe are as accurate as possible. On Earth, the sensors can be incredibly precise, but the problem comes when you launch them into space. There's radiation coming from the sun, so that's protons, electrons, particles and more, and they will damage anything in space. Once you get above a couple of hundred kilometres, the risk of these particles is that they will slowly degrade any materials.

We probe the physics of how these particles interact with sensors and cause damage, so we can better predict and reverse unwanted effects in our images. When you launch, your cameras are perfect, so you can do really accurate science. But after five years in space, the accuracy will have degraded to the point where you can't do anything meaningful. And so, through our research, we extend the lifespan of these billion euro missions.



After cutting his galactic teeth on Gaia, Ben's next major mission was the launch of Euclid, an observatory with a 600-megapixel camera, which had the revolutionary purpose of exploring dark energy and dark matter.

Continued overleaf



95% of the universe... We don't know what it is. That's the crux of Euclid's research. Can we harness dark matter in some way to help address some of the concerns we have on the ground? That's what's so exciting. One tiny discovery can expand or alter our knowledge of reality.



A love of teaching

The Space Science module Ben chairs (module code S818) is a 60-credit postgraduate module using Space Science academics' real-life scientific research to explore the challenges of spaceflight, the realities of space exploration and astronomy, and even the science behind spacecraft design.

In both this module and other courses across the School of Physical Sciences, Ben seeks to incorporate his industry experience into teaching materials, inspiring students to see that a career in this field is genuinely possible.

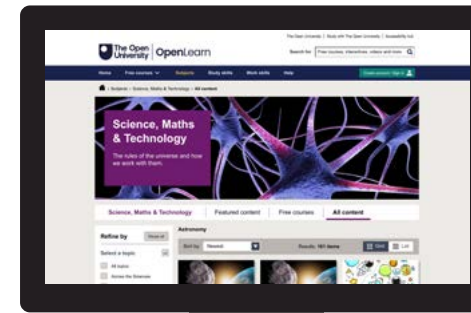
He also endeavours to make the teaching accessible to a wide range of students.



For a postgraduate module, Space Science is pretty penetrable, in that students don't need in-depth knowledge of one particular skill.



These missions would not be possible without an enormous amount of collaboration. Ben is keen to acknowledge not just his own remarkable OU colleagues, but the engineers at Teledyne e2v, who work closely with OU researchers to develop, improve and perfect the hardware used to better understand the universe around us.



Space Science on OpenLearn

"Space Science (S818) is about bridging the gap between your current skills and the demands of the space industry," Ben explains, "It is broad by design, challenging students to apply their existing expertise - whether in coding, geology, or physics - while developing the research skills needed to master new disciplines. The cohort operates as a collective unit, sharing knowledge and solving complex problems together, just as a real-world space mission team would."

If any OpenMinds readers are interested in furthering their own learning through Space Science (or any of the other modules in this fascinating area of study), please follow the links below.



What's next?

Explore the links below to find out more

Watch Ben discuss Euclid
www.bit.ly/euclidcei

Take your learning further
www.bit.ly/s818

Free Space Science courses on OpenLearn
www.bit.ly/openlearnspace

The future

As someone at the forefront of space exploration, it's no surprise that Ben has a wide-eyed wonder about the future of his industry.



You never know where the next solution will come from. The barriers to entry are lowering, allowing diverse talent to enter the conversation. I teach students who followed different paths, perhaps because they didn't see a clear way forward into the space sector. Now, they're seizing the opportunity to pivot. Whether it's writing a novel or coding an algorithm, the skills they bring from those 'other lives' are proving to be the missing pieces in the modern space science puzzle.



Similarly, as far as his students go, Ben believes that their possibilities are almost endless.



Who knows, the next big discovery might come from someone who is currently working in finance or healthcare. Our students prove that there is no single path to the stars!



Euclid's view of the Perseus cluster of galaxies

©ESA/Euclid/Euclid Consortium/NASA, image processing by J.-C. Cuillandre (CEA Paris-Saclay), G. Anselmi

FASS Forward

 More information
fass.open.ac.uk



Change and challenge are always with us, but the pace of change and the scale of challenge mean that seeking responses and finding solutions has to be a collective effort. As individuals and as members of communities, we can use the methods, tools, approaches and values of our arts and social sciences disciplines to help individuals and societies navigate the world around them.

Whether by using our research to address misinformation or by sharing our creative practice to ignite a passion for learning, we know that we all have a valuable role to play in making a positive difference. As alumni, you lead the way. We are excited when you take your learning out into the world and when you share your learning to change lives and places. You are a vital part of this mission; please be assured that you are a constant source of pride and inspiration for all the staff teams at The Open University.



Professor Adrienne Scullion

Executive Dean, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

Student stories

From intern to director in five years

Through her BA (Honours) Politics, Philosophy and Economics degree, busy working mum Rebecca, from the Isle of Ulva in Scotland, has boosted her career and gone from intern to director of a research consultancy firm in just five years.

On graduating, Rebecca used the OU's Careers and Employability Service to successfully apply for an internship specialising in rural affairs and island economies. On completion of the internship, she was offered a permanent job as an analyst, and in just half a decade has progressed to become a director.



Without the OU, I wouldn't be where I am today. I'm now in a role that challenges and excites me, whilst being able to be present with my kids and enjoy a wonderful life on the island.



Read Rebecca's story
www.bit.ly/om26rebecca

Unearthing a massacre the world forgot



Dr David Scott

This year, the county of Lancashire will commemorate an uprising and massacre that was all but forgotten until OU Criminologist Dr David Scott began unravelling its dark past five years ago.

He started disentangling the history of the massacre, often erroneously described as a 'riot', when he walked Flossy, his English cream golden retriever, in Chatterton's Peace Park. Initially curious as to how the park got its name, this casual curiosity soon developed into many years of in-depth research and community activism.

In 2026, the county will commemorate the bicentennial of a bloody event known as the Chatterton Massacre, where at least six people lost their lives at the hands of the state.

The deadly event on 26 April 1826 was the culmination of a dark episode in Britain's history, when workers in the once thriving Lancashire cotton mill industry were forced to protest and rebel. The situation was sparked by a financial crisis, high food prices combined with low or non-existent wages, and the introduction of new 'power looms', leaving hand weavers on the brink of starvation.

More than 10,000 people took part in the march and over 1,100 power looms were destroyed. Soldiers from the 60th Duke of York Own Rifles were deployed with the right to shoot protesters without fear of prosecution.



The bicentennial will be marked by the history of the weavers' uprising being taught in primary schools across the region for the first time, and by a diverse programme of artistic, creative, and community heritage activities starting in February.



Bringing the ancient world to learners

The Open University's Classical Studies department has been recognised by the national charity, Classics for All, for the accessible and innovative ways it is inspiring learners to study the ancient world. The charity particularly singled out the department for its free online courses and bursary schemes – with the financial support of the A.G. Leventis Foundation – to train Classical Studies teachers.

"Historically it has been difficult, if not impossible, for pupils in state schools to study the history, culture and languages of the ancient world," says Emma Bridges, Senior Lecturer in Classical Studies, "The OU Classical Studies team sees it as part of our mission to do what we can to change that."



One of the OU's unique strengths is its ability to connect with learners wherever and whoever they are, and it's wonderful that Classics for All has recognised the efforts we make to maximise the reach and appeal of our distance learning model. We love nothing more than hearing that someone with no previous experience of Classical Studies has found one of our resources and has become as enthused as we are for the subject matter!

Emma Bridges
Senior Lecturer in
Classical Studies



 **Take your learning further**
www.bit.ly/courseq85

Improving debate through political literacy

At a time when political views across the globe seem to be increasingly polarised, an international team of researchers led by The Open University has devised a simple interactive test to help people better understand their own political views and behaviours.

Called i-Attune, this short, anonymised coaching tool aims to help people see their views in a different light and help them move towards constructive debate.

While it doesn't promise to put an end to explosive political debate at home and in the workplace, the Political Attunement Model behind the test is designed to show the public a new way of developing their political literacy and of measuring any extremist views.

Professor Kesi Mahendran, the lead author and social and political psychologist at the OU, believes that i-Attune is an exciting breakthrough in the field of political literacy.



Psychology academics
discuss i-Attune



The Political Attunement Model is designed to skill citizens to enter a healthy political debate.

Opponents don't want to meet in the middle. Both want to win but equally both players accept the rules and rarely attempt to jump over the net to restrict the other player. Political literacy develops through the back-and-forth processing of anticipating and responding to the oppositional player.

Professor Kesi Mahendran



Together with her co-designer Dr Anthony English, they explain, "i-Attune is a virtual coach that allows people to find out a little more of what kind of player they are in a debate and how they can play the game of putting their point of view across more constructively."

The i-Attune test was developed by the OU, alongside academics at 16 other partners across Europe, as part of the OppAttune Project, a €3.16 million EU Horizon-funded initiative to promote constructive debate in the run up to key political events.



Take part now
www.bit.ly/om26attune

FBL Focus



The University's social mission is at the heart of all we do and reflected in our incredible and impactful teaching, learning and research, which includes championing minoritised ethnic leaders, spotlighting the struggles of working parents, and pioneering resources for the safer use of Generative AI in legal settings.

I'd love to take this opportunity to congratulate Krishangi Meshram (featured on page 17) on becoming our youngest ever Law graduate, at just 18 years of age! Krishangi's amazing story truly highlights our ceaseless commitment to making education open to all.

Through research that drives a positive societal change, to providing life-changing learning, the uniqueness of our institution has never been more apparent.



Professor Mark Durkin
Executive Dean, Faculty of Business and Law

Supporting safer AI use in law

This year, the Law School's Open Justice Centre launched a suite of free resources for lawyers and members of the public, designed to enhance the use of Generative AI (GenAI) in understanding legal processes and accessing legal information.

Led by the Centre in collaboration with the University of Lincoln and Citizens Advice, the team discovered an urgent need to equip and educate the public to avoid misleading and erroneous legal advice and guidance from AI tools. These free resources will give users the tools they need to stay safe in legal settings and processes.



 **Learn more**
www.bit.ly/om26law

Innovative partnership empowers future leaders

The Open University and the Henry Smith Foundation have forged an exciting partnership to help foster business leaders of the future from minoritised ethnic backgrounds.

The Minority Ethnic Leadership programme was established to address under-representation in business leadership positions. With recent research* finding that one in four charities have no one from Black, Asian or other minoritised ethnic communities represented across their senior executive leadership team or board, the need to redress this imbalance is as clear as it is urgent, which is why this bespoke, bold partnership was forged to create a more equitable future.

The programme sits within the Business School's Centre for Voluntary Sector Leadership, which supports and initiates action in the voluntary sector

through collaboration and leadership, and is funded by the Henry Smith Foundation, whose mission is to tackle economic and social disadvantage.

Participants on the programme access 150 hours of free learning on the OU's OpenLearn platform, including two bespoke leadership courses, as well as a further credit-bearing course on work-related study. The programme includes in-person sessions at six learning hubs around the UK (Glasgow, Belfast, Cardiff, Liverpool, Bristol and London) featuring motivational speakers, ad hoc mentoring and peer learning opportunities.

 **Discover more**
www.bit.ly/om26mel

**<https://www.charitytimes.com/ct/One-in-four-charities-have-no-global-majority-leaders.php>*



Key stakeholders from across the partnership join forces

Barrister honoured at Croke Park ceremony

The Open University has awarded an Honorary Doctorate to barrister Joy-Tendai Kangere BL at its degree ceremony in Dublin's Croke Park. A practising barrister, advocate for lifelong learning, and former Irish Independent columnist, Joy-Tendai's incredible story is one of resilience and transformation.

Raised between Zimbabwe and South Africa, she experienced racial injustice and financial hardship following her father's death, supporting her family by running small businesses as a teenager. Moving to Ireland during the Celtic Tiger years, she faced isolation and discrimination, balancing jobs from sales to McDonald's while helping educate her sisters.

After the tragic loss of her third child in 2013, education became her lifeline. Through University College Dublin's Access and Lifelong Learning Programme, she rediscovered her passion, progressing to earn a Bachelor of Civil Law, a Barrister-at-Law degree at King's Inns, and the prestigious Denham Fellowship.

Joy-Tendai has also championed learners from disadvantaged communities through her work with The Irish National Adult Learning Organisation and contributed to conversations on adult education's role in anti-racist movements. Her Honorary Doctorate is just the latest in a long line of remarkable achievements.



Education empowered me to rise from adversity and show my children what is possible. I hope my journey inspires others to embrace lifelong learning.

Joy-Tendai Kangere



New money management course

In partnership with MBA alumnus Sir David Harrison's philanthropic Harrison Foundation, the OU has launched a freely accessible online course, *'Managing my money for young adults'*, to help 15-17-year-olds with their financial decision-making.

This five-hour course for beginners has been published through OpenLearn Create, and is available to explore now.



Find the course
www.bit.ly/olcmoney

From MBA to MBE!

OU MBA graduate Rachel Blackburn was awarded an MBE in the King's New Year's Honours List, for services to the Business Community and to Exports.



As a Director of a management consultancy, Rachel's prestigious accolade particularly references her work with local, national and international businesses over many years to support their growth strategies.



I see the achievement of the OU MBA as a critical part of my journey towards being awarded the MBE.

It has opened doors to so many opportunities, not just through the competence gained but also via the confidence and credibility it has given me in the UK and internationally.



Celebrating Rachel
www.bit.ly/om26mba

Student stories

Law alumna makes history

The OU's youngest ever Law graduate, Krishangi Meshram, has made history by qualifying as the youngest solicitor in England and Wales in recent times.

Krishangi was just 15 when she started studying, gaining a First Class Honours Degree in Law at the remarkable age of just 18. Thanks to the University's open entry policy, she was able to begin her degree without A-levels.

Congratulations to Krishangi on this phenomenal achievement.



Read Krishangi's story
www.bit.ly/om26krishangi



I'm incredibly thankful that The Open University gave me the opportunity to begin my Bachelor of Laws (LLB) studies at the age of 15. The flexibility, accessibility and unwavering support offered by the University empowered me to pursue my ambitions with confidence and determination. The Open University didn't just help me start my studies – it helped me believe in my potential.





Dr Julie McElroy

A lifetime of determination and dedication

Meet graduate of the OU in Scotland, Dr Julie McElroy, the assistive technology expert and record-breaking frame runner championing accessibility on and off the track.

Living with cerebral palsy, assistive technologies have enabled Julie to lead a life without limits. Boasting multiple qualifications including a PhD, Julie's commitment to lifelong learning has equipped her to become one of the UK's leading disability rights advocates.

Now embarking on her latest challenge, joining the board of directors for the Glasgow 2026 Commonwealth Games, we caught up with Julie to hear about her mission to create a more inclusive world.

Lifelong advocacy

Attending additional needs schools throughout childhood, Julie's ambition and drive for educational equality developed from a young age.

Later, she discovered The Open University, an institution that shared many of her values.



Despite the challenges that education brings for individuals with disabilities, I always strived to have the same life opportunities as my able-bodied siblings.



The World Health Organisation indicates that more than two billion people will need assistive technology by 2030, but only one million people currently have access to it. Passionate about the benefits of assistive technology, Julie has dedicated her learning and career to addressing the disability assistance gap.

"Over the last few years," she recounts, "I've witnessed unprecedented changes, particularly in how individuals from widening access backgrounds are wanting to progress into executive positions. It's a fascinating and inspiring transformation."

Challenging times

Facing significant health issues during her studies, Julie's resilience was put to the test. Confined to her home following injury, Julie managed to carry on working while undertaking intense physiotherapy sessions and self-motivated OU study. She dug deep and emerged from this challenging chapter with an MBA.



OU study was a lifeline. The way the course was structured offered the flexibility to balance work and study. It provided purpose and structure throughout a very tough time.



From personal goal to professional opportunity

With fierce determination, Julie pushed through her injury, and embraced a new challenge. She took up long-distance frame running, training several times a week with her sights firmly set on completing a marathon. In 2024, this dedication paid off when she became the first female frame runner to complete the iconic London Marathon.

"It felt amazing to make history," says Julie, "I can honestly say that I've grabbed every opportunity that's come my way, and now that attitude has led to me becoming involved in Glasgow 2026."

A long-standing para-sports advocate, Julie had the honour of carrying the Olympic torch in 2012, and in 2014 helped launch the Queen's Baton Relay on its 120,000-mile journey around the Commonwealth. When the Glasgow 2026 organising committee was looking for someone with a great track record of promoting para-sport, Julie was the obvious choice.

"I've volunteered from the age of 16 and it's benefited me in so many ways – from building confidence to even opening up employment opportunities," Julie shares.

Proud to be OU family

Keen to encourage others to discover what they're capable of, Julie has become a vocal advocate for the OU.

"I can't speak highly enough of The Open University; it is truly life-changing," Julie says, "I'm also in no doubt that earning my MBA helped me to secure this incredible role with Glasgow 2026. I'd like to say a huge thank you to the OU for being true advocates for lifelong learning."

Gathering 'Mumentum' to tear down barriers

The Open University has launched vital new practical toolkits for employers and mothers, helping more mothers re-enter the workforce and progress in their careers. Building on its long-standing commitment to accessible education, the OU is now working to dismantle the systemic barriers that continue to hold mothers back at work.

As part of the launch of the toolkits, OU academics conducted an evidence-based review that revealed ten key barriers working mothers and primary caregivers face across the UK, from stalled career progression and wage gaps, to reduced work experience and systemic bias.

To drive change and tackle these barriers, the OU has devised two practical toolkits:

- **For employers:** A toolkit for employers to harness the hidden talent pool of primary caregivers, offering strategies to reintegrate them into the workforce effectively. This resource, authored by OU academics, provides expert guidance on recruitment, retention and career development.
- **For mothers and primary caregivers:** A second toolkit for mothers and primary caregivers, equipping them with the resources needed to navigate their return to work confidently.

In addition to the innovative toolkits overleaf, the OU is addressing the 'motherhood penalty' – the systematic disadvantages mothers face in the workplace – by also partnering with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to train career coaches across its network of Jobcentres.

The drive to support mothers and primary caregivers is part of the OU's '**Mumentum**' campaign. In its first phase, launched in October 2024, the initiative focused on empowering mums to keep moving forward into higher education to further their careers. The second phase, launched in Westminster with the then Minister for Employment, Alison McGovern MP, extended the focus to tackling the workplace barriers mothers face.

The Westminster panel, hosted by Professor Josie Fraser (Deputy Vice-Chancellor), included Justine Roberts, founder of Mumsnet and OU Honorary Graduate, and Joeli Brearley, founder of Pregnant Then Screwed, both renowned advocates for mothers in the workplace.

Despite progress in gender equality, the evidence review underscored that the motherhood penalty remains deeply entrenched in UK workplaces due to structural barriers, societal expectations, and employer practices. The report calls for increased workplace flexibility, and cultural shifts to enable mothers to thrive professionally without compromising their family responsibilities.

Previous OU research revealed that flexible, affordable study options may be the key to overcoming these barriers for those wanting to return to study.



At The Open University, we believe that higher education should be accessible to all. Through the Mumentum campaign, we are equipping both employers and mothers with the tools they need to break down these obstacles and create a more inclusive, supportive workplace.

Professor Josie Fraser
Deputy Vice-Chancellor



Mumentum collaborators at a celebration event in Westminster



The Open University, helping mums find their
Mumentum

39%

Nearly two in five mums are concerned about the lack of flexibility in working hours when considering their careers

27%

Over a quarter are worried about fitting study around their parenting schedule

47%

Almost half said that flexible learning options would most motivate them to retrain



Find your Mumentum
www.bit.ly/mumentum




Alumni inspire students at CareersFest 2025

The ever-popular OU CareersFest made its annual return in November 2025. CareersFest included four 'Ask alumni' sessions: three with inspiring panel members from Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland; and one focusing on 'Life on a graduate programme'.

The alumni panellists, who afterwards credited the engagement and enthusiasm of OU students, offered their advice to the graduates of the future.

"Your path doesn't have to be linear. You've always got to be ready to embrace change and opportunity to grow", said Andrew, from Network Rail, who gained his OU Engineering degree in 2015, "There are a lot of transferable skills that many people have picked up during their lives and during study with The Open University."

The OU's Careers and Employability Services team organise a wide range of employer and careers skills events all year round, bookable up to three years after study.

 Find live and recorded events
opportunityhub.open.ac.uk

Digital tools help students plan their futures

In a recent survey, 53% of OU students cited 'lack of experience' as a career barrier, so in 2025 the Careers and Employability Services team launched the new 'Build your work experience' tool. It leads students and recent alumni through a structured sequence of activities, helping identify and apply for the perfect work experience for their needs.

The popular '3-minute careers check-in' tool was also re-designed for 2025, to help students achieve their potential, whatever their backgrounds, identities and differences. As well as improving the tool itself, the re-design now generates an instant, personalised 'Actions towards goals' checklist to help identify next steps.

 Find these tools and more
opportunityhub.open.ac.uk

Go Wales supports skills and talent

Through committed support and exciting work placements, Go Wales helps students of the OU in Wales develop their confidence and employability.

One recent graduate, Mabel, undertook a film company placement in 2025 through the Go Wales scheme.

"Towards the end of the role, I felt positive that I was able to tackle and figure out almost anything. I would recommend Go Wales to any student; it has been a truly enriching experience."

If you're an employer in Wales and would like to benefit from an OU student placement, please get in touch.

 Declare your interest
gowales@open.ac.uk

Inclusivity award for internship programme

The OU's ambitious Virtual Internship Programme has been awarded an Academic Employability Award in the 'Inclusive Employability Practices' category, run by AGCAS (the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services) and sponsored by Gradcore. The award-winning scheme was described by judges as "inclusive, accessible, and student-led – a standout initiative".



The scheme is making such a positive change for students from under-represented backgrounds.

Diane Butler
OU Professor of STEM Education



If you're an employer interested in hiring an OU student intern, get in touch.

 Contact us
internships@open.ac.uk

The OU and the BBC

Inspiring audiences and enhancing students' learning experiences

The University's unique partnership with the BBC continues to inspire public audiences and enhance students' learning through the inclusion of bespoke and engaging assets within OU teaching.

Academic expertise and wide-ranging curriculum and research underpin these co-commissions, providing an opportunity to raise the profile of the OU's academic excellence, and for the University to provide public engagement at scale. In 2024/25, in addition to the vast amount of high quality television and radio content produced, this esteemed partnership also generated over 34 hours of video, audio and digital assets for 54 OU modules.

Over the past year, the OU has co-produced TV series such as *Jane Austen: Rise of a Genius*, *Inside Our ADHD Minds*, *Make It at Market*, *Secret Genius of Modern Life*,

Hamza's Hidden Wild Isles, and *Change Your Mind, Change Your Life*. On the radio, along with our usual favourites, there were new series to enjoy, such as *Human Intelligence* on Radio 4 and *The Team Behind the Team* on Radio 5 Live Sport.

OU Connect

The OU's broadcast website, OU Connect, continues to highlight the expertise, skills and passion of those behind the scenes of OU/BBC co-productions, including scientific experts, programme makers and contributors. The content varies from animations to short videos, and interactives to articles, as well as high profile interviews which enable OU Connect visitors to explore a subject in more detail.



Explore OU Connect
connect.open.ac.uk

Upcoming productions

New TV co-productions to look out for in 2026 include: *Wilderness with Simon Reeve*, *Hidden Treasures of the National Trust*, *Scam Interceptors*, *Evolution*, *Pilgrimage*, *Emergency 24/7* and *Secret Garden*, along with more from *Word of Mouth*, *Rethink*, *Inside Health* and *Rare Earth* on Radio 4.



Change Your Mind, Change Your Life
BBC / Twenty Twenty Productions

Freddie Flintoff's Field of Dreams, South Shore Productions



Enhancing learning with high quality assets

The OU/BBC partnership is focused on enhancing student experience, with a range of teaching assets accompanying each co-production, be that clips from programmes or specially produced content at the academics' request. In 2024/25, 399 unique video, audio and digital assets were created.

A recent example is the OU's involvement with the return of *Freddie Flintoff's Field of Dreams*.

Following on from the success of the captivating, entertaining, popular first series, Freddie was determined to prove that this wasn't a one-off,

setting his sights on a much more ambitious plan. He embarked on creating several new teams of teenagers from across the North West, including, for the first time, an all-girls cricket team.

This series was commissioned to support OU qualifications in Sport and Fitness. Academics from the faculty of Wellbeing, Education and Language Studies, Dr Jessica Pinchbeck and Dr Jim Lusted were not only consultants on the series and integral to the creation of the OU's supporting content, but importantly both are involved in the development and production of curriculum that will directly benefit from this series.

We sat down with Jessica and Jim in the short interview overleaf, to learn more about how this fascinating collaboration has supported their teaching.

Amazing assets

How academic consultation informed the OU's Sport, Fitness and Coaching courses

For Dr Jessica Pinchbeck, Programme Lead in Sport and Fitness, and Dr Jim Lusted, Senior Lecturer (and lifelong cricket fan), the opportunity to work on the next series of *Freddie Flintoff's Field of Dreams* (BBC One) was one they couldn't turn down.

Not only were they able to provide their own expertise and input to the creation of the programme, but the content and assets created by the production are proving invaluable to the OU's Sport, Fitness and Coaching courses and modules.

Alongside Dr Alex Twitchen, the Media Fellow in the WELS faculty who supported the OU's Director of Broadcast & Partnerships, Caroline Ogilvie, in commissioning the co-production, Jessica and Jim joined us to discuss the academic benefits of working on this inspirational BBC series.

Meet the academics



Dr Jessica Pinchbeck
Programme Lead



Dr Jim Lusted
Senior Lecturer



Dr Alex Twitchen
WELS Media Fellow

Firstly, congratulations on the part you played in such an interesting programme. Looking back, how has this collaboration informed your teaching?

Jessica: When we're developing our curriculum, we like to use a lot of authentic case studies for our students to watch. We don't always present these as 'expert coaching', but instead we ask students to critically analyse them, to look at what works and what doesn't. This series has given us so much brilliant, authentic footage of coaching in action, which we can embed into our courses.

Alex: BBC collaborations always supply such high quality, professional assets, which really raise the level of material we are able to offer our students. While the potential reach of working on a BBC series is clearly an important part of this partnership, the content produced is also invaluable for our academics and students.

OU Connect: Trailblazers
in women's cricket



Why has this series been particularly useful from a teaching perspective?

Jim: *Field of Dreams* explores many themes which are relevant to our modules. In fact, you'd be surprised by just how many ways you can use clips to cover all kinds of topics. For instance, this series highlights the influence of gender, social class and ethnicity on the opportunities young people may have to participate in sports like cricket.

Alex: Many of the challenges that the young people in the series are facing are typical of the challenges our students may be facing as well. I think that some of the topics covered like mental health or lack of opportunity will resonate with a lot of OU students - and potential OU students too.

Is there anything else our readers should seek out if they want to learn more?

Jessica: As part of the series, we worked closely with the OU's Broadcast & Partnerships team and the brilliant OU Connect online producer, Steff Easom, to create an animated video all about trailblazers in women's cricket. It was really fascinating to learn about these pioneers and create an asset that celebrated them so proudly.

Jim: Beyond that, we will look to use footage exclusively in the OU's BSc degree in Sport, Fitness and Coaching [Q76], as well as our brand new Sport and Exercise Science BSc, which launches in October 2026.

Alex: It's an exciting time for the Sport, Fitness and Coaching team here at the OU, as they've recently received a multi-million-pound investment for teaching provision at the state-of-the-art XR (extended reality) studios on the Walton Hall campus. There's never been a better time to learn with us!



Next steps

Take your learning further
www.bit.ly/sfcourses

Discover the pioneers of
women's cricket
www.bit.ly/fieldofdreamsbbc

STEM Spotlight



More information
stem.open.ac.uk



Since joining the OU in March, I've been inspired by the creativity, dedication and collaboration across our STEM community. As the first in my family to access higher education, I understand the transformative power of learning. From analysing Moon samples to exploring ancient woodlands, our researchers are tackling questions of global significance.

As I begin my first full academic year, I'm excited to work with staff, students and alumni to build on these strengths, ensuring our STEM faculty remains a place of innovation, collaboration and real-world impact.



Professor Michael Fernando

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



**Rooftop research
from the STEM faculty**

Rooftop environmental research

On the OU's historic Walton Hall campus in Milton Keynes, 2025 saw the official launch of the fascinating Living Roof Live Lab.

Exploring how green roofs can reduce urban heat, manage rainwater and support biodiversity, this innovative research has been designed to test different materials and plants, identifying the most effective combinations, and helping to shape more sustainable cities worldwide.



Learn more
www.bit.ly/om26roof



**Professor Mahesh Anand
of The Open University**

Moon sample opportunity for OU scientist

In April 2025, The Open University reached new heights in planetary science when Professor Mahesh Anand became the first UK scientist to receive lunar samples from China's Chang'e-5 mission, a milestone in international collaboration. As one of the first scientists in the world to access these lunar samples, Professor Anand is relishing this exciting opportunity.



It is a great honour and privilege for us to be selected as one of the first international teams to receive these lunar samples for research. This is a recognition of our world-leading lunar sample research, underpinned by long-term funding from the Science and Technology Facilities Council and the OU's commitment towards maintaining world-class analytical laboratories.



I look forward to working on these precious lunar samples and building new international collaborations and partnerships.



Professor Anand has been conducting lunar research for over 20 years, working with colleagues at the OU to uncover secrets of the Moon, including the presence of water on its surface. The Chang'e-5 samples are now in the UK and are being analysed using the OU's state-of-the-art laboratories at its Milton Keynes campus.

During this year-long loan, Professor Anand and his team plan to determine the amount and isotopic composition of carbon, nitrogen, oxygen and noble gases in the samples. Their findings will help evaluate the giant-impact origin of the Moon and provide new insights into the history of volatiles in the Earth-Moon system.



Read the full story
www.bit.ly/om26moon



Research reveals threats to woodland

OU researchers have found that Britain's ancient woodlands, some of the country's most important habitats, are facing growing pressure from urbanisation.

The study, analysing historic UK plant records, revealed that urban ancient woodlands are increasingly home to non-native plants spreading from nearby gardens and parks, creating long-term risks for woodland ecosystems. Woods exposed to urban development for longer periods, such as Highgate Wood in London, have shown more pronounced changes than sites urbanised more recently.

Despite these pressures, urban ancient woodlands still support many specialist species and remain vital for conservation. Understanding these changes is key to guiding future

management and protecting these habitats for both nature and people.



The connection between people and nature is so important, particularly in urban areas. We are lucky that we still have some fragments of ancient woodlands close to human populations and within urban areas, but we must take care of them.

Dr Philip Wheeler
Research supervisor



Discover more
www.bit.ly/om26woodland

Teaching triumph: Awards success

The STEM faculty celebrated a double success in the 2025 Advance HE Teaching Excellence Awards. Professor Diane Butler and Professor Carlton Wood were both awarded National Teaching Fellowships in recognition of

their outstanding impact on student learning and innovative teaching.

These highly competitive awards highlight the OU's commitment to excellence in education.



How parrots communicate with humans

Researchers in Animal-Computer Interaction, working with Parrot Kindergarten in Florida, have found that parrots can communicate their wants and feelings with humans using a digital speech board. The OU's Professor Clara Mancini co-authored the ground-breaking study, which showed that a Goffin's cockatoo named Ellie persistently requested, rejected, and located items, demonstrating purposeful, functional communication.



Learn more
www.bit.ly/om26parrots

Student stories

OU study unlocks lifelong dream

At the age of 47, Emilie has proudly fulfilled one of her life's ambitions of studying Chemistry with the OU.

For years, Emilie's time was spent balancing work and family, but she always felt she had missed the chance to pursue her passion. Inspired by her son's graduation, she took the plunge and enrolled at the OU, where she discovered the confidence and support she needed through interactive learning and dedicated tutors.



Read Emilie's story
www.bit.ly/om26emilie



It's never too late to follow your passion!



Even before completing her degree, Emilie secured a post as a laboratory scientist in a cell and gene therapy firm. Looking ahead, she hopes to use her expertise to improve the world, by joining the global movement tackling urgent environmental challenges.

Welcome to WELS



More information
wels.open.ac.uk



Sharing these highlights provides me with a wonderful opportunity to reflect on the diverse network of people and organisations that shape and are involved with our faculty's work.

From students and alumni to tutors, research participants and countless others, the social impact that we create together is truly powerful.

I hope you enjoy these stories that embody our commitment to wellbeing at every stage of life and to ensuring that those who are often excluded have a voice. Personally, and on behalf of my WELS colleagues, I am proud to showcase these examples of staff, academics, students and graduates who make such a vital contribution to our world.

Professor Klaus-Dieter Rossade

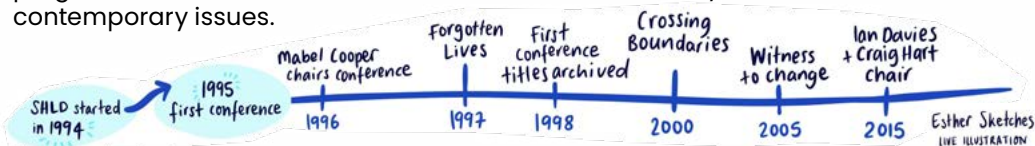
Executive Dean, Faculty of Wellbeing, Education and Language Studies

30 years of inclusive learning disability research

The Social History of Learning Disability (SHLD) research group celebrated its 30th anniversary at its 2025 conference. The group pioneered participatory methods in learning disability research in the 1990s and continues to put people with learning disabilities and their families at the centre of a research programme focused on historical and contemporary issues.

SHLD's inclusive conferences have been at the heart of this approach for three decades, and the 2025 event was no exception, bringing together a brilliantly diverse group of presenters and attendees on equal terms.

"I learned so much about how to make conferences truly accessible and how to co-present alongside people with learning disabilities," one NHS professional who attended the 2025 conference testified, "It was emotional, uplifting and inspiring and gave me so much insight about the challenges that people with learning disabilities have historically faced."



Improving Black women's health and wellbeing

Dr Jenny Douglas has been selected for a prestigious Accelerator Award from the Wellcome Trust, which will fund comprehensive research into improving Black women's health and wellbeing in the UK.

The project will provide a robust evidence base, gathering vital information which is currently limited and disparate.



More information
www.bit.ly/om26grant



We know of some existing inequities in the health and wellbeing of Black women, for example maternal mortality, but there are many more areas where Black women experience poorer health. This important research will bring together a specific and comprehensive database on the intersectional factors that influence the health and wellbeing of Black women.

Dr Jenny Douglas

Graduate wins prestigious award

A huge Open University congratulations goes to Nursing degree apprenticeship graduate, Fay Dudson, who won the Student Innovation in Practice Award at the 2025 Student Nursing Times Awards.

These prestigious awards honour the outstanding achievements of the upcoming generation of nurses, recognising those who consistently go above and beyond in their field.

The judges commented on Fay's deep commitment to tackling health inequalities and improving access to care.



Nursing & Healthcare courses
www.bit.ly/ounursing

Fay truly embodies the essence of a Primary Care Nurse – dedicated, compassionate, and deeply connected to the needs of her local community. A shining example of nursing leadership in action.

Student Nursing Times Awards judges



Fay Dudson

The power of a story



We would go as far as to say this experience was transformative. Having the time, space, structure and resources to think more deeply about inclusion and exclusion and how it had affected our experiences of school, and continuing this learning journey together has changed us.



Ibali works closely with the organisation Transformative Story, and colleagues from across the world, to critically explore the potential of storytelling as a research approach.

When Alison and Jennifer were approached about contributing a chapter on educational inclusion for a forthcoming book, they invited the young people to co-author it with them. This has strengthened the project's recommendations for school inclusion policies, ensuring it is responsive, dynamic, and rooted in young people's realities.

As Alison, Jennifer and the co-authors conclude in the chapter, it is also important to ask young people: what can we do about inclusion, together?



About Ibali
www.bit.ly/om26ibali

The above words were written by four young adults who have been collaborating with OU academics Professor Alison Buckler and Dr Jennifer Agbaire through the Ibali (Story) Network on a project exploring young people's perspectives and experiences of inclusion in schools in the UK, Nigeria and South Africa.



Professor Alison Buckler and Dr Jennifer Agbaire with contributors at Ibali Network showcase event

Royal recognition for tutors

Two beloved OU tutors received awards in the 2025 King's Birthday Honours list, recognising their leadership and commitment throughout their careers.

Diane Powles was awarded the British Empire Medal for her services to nursing and to education, while Dr Diane Swift was awarded an Order of the British Empire for her services to education.

"It is such a privilege to serve alongside others who promote educational opportunity for social justice – something that so many colleagues at The Open University hold dear," enthuses Dr Swift, "This is a very welcome moment to amplify our collective endeavours to be relentlessly ambitious for the positive difference that an informed education can make to all our lives."



Diane Powles BEM



Dr Diane Swift OBE

Moments like this serve as an important reminder of the wealth of experience, expertise and dedication that tutors bring to their work with students at The Open University.



Read Diane Powles' story
www.bit.ly/om26diane



I wasn't fully aware of the opportunities and different specialisms the wonderful world of translation had to offer.

The OU enabled me to build expertise and make contacts in a new industry, not to mention awarding me with a qualification that is world-class.



Student stories

Pursuing a dream of translation

Samantha, 25, had always loved academia, and long yearned for a career in translation.

It wasn't until she enrolled on the OU's Translation MA, however, that she was exposed to the sheer breadth of the subject area, and began to explore her passions more deeply.



Hear more from Samantha
www.bit.ly/om26samantha

Free learning with OpenLearn

Thousands of learners around the world use OpenLearn every day, but the team behind the free education platform rarely get to see or speak to its users. That all changed at a recent OU Degree Ceremony in London.

The OpenLearn team travelled to the Barbican Centre to meet graduates and alumni, and were delighted to discover that many were not only OpenLearn users, but passionate advocates for the platform.

For some, OpenLearn had been the first step back into education. For others, it offered valuable supplementary resources during module study. But the overall message of the testimonials below is clear: OpenLearn makes a difference!

"I found OpenLearn really useful: the use of videos, interaction and the ability to complete tasks as you progress is very powerful. I'm now planning on doing an MA in History, and an introductory OpenLearn piece helped me make that decision."

Joanne

"I'm really impressed with OpenLearn... you just never stop learning! It's a development that you will never lose, at work, at home, in everyday life – there's nothing to lose!"

Dianne

"What would I say to other OU students about OpenLearn? It may seem like 'extra work', because it is! But it's so worth it. It's absolutely brilliant!"

Aimee



 **Inspiring learner stories**
www.bit.ly/olstories

 **Explore OpenLearn for free**
www.openlearn.com

Helping English learners find their voice

An exciting initiative from OpenLearn Champions – a programme delivered by the OU in Wales – is helping staff and volunteers to support the people they work with to follow different learning opportunities with the OU.

OpenLearn Champions has worked with Cardiff and Vale College and the Welsh Refugee Council to help people who are learning English to use OpenLearn to improve their skills and learn new things.

 **Watch the video**
www.bit.ly/om26olc

30th anniversary of Northern Ireland ceasefires marked with free resource

A new OpenLearn resource has been created with Honorary Graduate Brian Rowan, a BBC journalist who reported extensively on the Troubles, based on his latest book *Impossible Peace*, and supported by the Department of Foreign Affairs Reconciliation Fund.

Titled *Ceasefire anniversary in Northern Ireland: 30 years of an impossible peace*, it explores the ceasefires, the peace process, and their lasting impact on society.

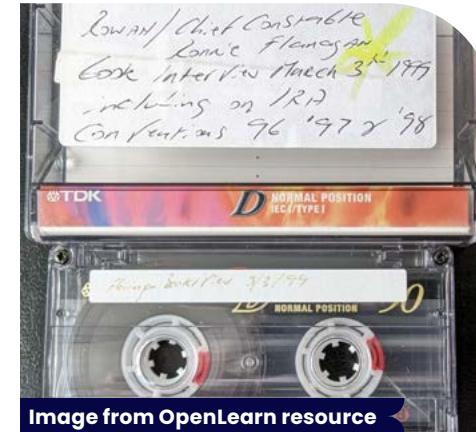


Image from OpenLearn resource



Thirty years ago, I didn't appreciate how the ceasefires would become such a moment in our history. With each year, we learn more about what we have achieved, and the work still to be done. We have a peace-in-progress.

Brian Rowan



 **Explore this resource**
www.bit.ly/om26peace

New course on OpenLearn Create

A new, free, short online course has been launched by The Open University in Scotland and the Scottish Throughcare and Aftercare Forum, on the OpenLearn Create platform.

The course, *Foundations of trauma-informed, relationship-based practice*, is suitable for anyone in the UK working with, supporting, or caring for children or young people who may have experienced trauma, as well as their caregivers, and those who have experienced trauma themselves.

The four-hour course – which launched in April 2025 to five-star reviews – is available to explore online through OpenLearn Create now.



With two in three children in Scotland experiencing at least one adverse childhood experience before the age of eight, we know how urgent the need is for trauma-informed practice.

Jane Grant
Depute Director, OU in Scotland



 **Read more**
www.bit.ly/om26trauma

Challenge-driven and community-first

Open Societal Challenges (OSC), the OU's revolutionary approach to academic research, tackles the real-world challenges affecting our planet and society. Connecting academics, businesses, charities, students and local communities, OSC is the only known research programme to be both challenge-driven and community-first.

Under the themes of Sustainability, Tackling Inequalities, and Living Well, it tackles real-world challenges in a unique, practical, effective way. Over the coming pages, you'll see some selected highlights of OSC in action across 2025.

 **Open Societal Challenges**
www.bit.ly/ou-osc

The Centre for Protecting Women Online

An OSC initiative

While the internet offers connection and opportunity, it also presents serious risks, especially for women and girls. Online abuse, harassment, and exploitation are growing concerns, and the OU is leading the charge to address them through the Centre for Protecting Women Online.

Funded by a £7.7 million grant from Research England, it is the UK's first dedicated research centre focused on protecting women and girls from online harms. Led by Professor Olga Jurasz, the Centre brings together experts in law, criminology, digital

ethics, and policing to understand and combat digital harms.

Professor Jurasz and her team have led three OSC research projects looking at various stages and aspects of online violence. This research revealed that 1 in 10 women in England have experienced online violence, with 13% of those cases escalating to offline abuse. Alarming, 68% of women felt that current laws do not adequately protect them. The Centre is developing evidence-based policy recommendations, practical tools, and technologies to reduce harm and promote accountability.

The Centre also hosts the excellent Cyber Armour podcast, exploring topics including deepfake abuse, dating app safety, and the role of AI in online harassment.

 **Listen to the podcast**
www.bit.ly/cyberarmour

Take Five to Age Well

An OSC initiative

Ageing is inevitable, but *how* we age is something we can influence. That's the message behind *Take Five to Age Well*, a national campaign that ran in 2023 and 2025, in collaboration with Age UK. The campaign encourages people to adopt five simple habits – in the categories of Eat, Drink, Move, Connect, and Think – over 30 days, to support healthier ageing.

Take Five to Age Well is grounded in research led by Dr Jitka Vseteckova, whose work shows that up to 80% of how we age is shaped by lifestyle and environment, rather than genetics. Participants are invited to choose one or more habits to focus on, supported by expert guidance, podcasts and resources. The goal is to make small, sustainable changes with a lasting impact.

The 2025 campaign saw thousands of people take part across the UK. Early data suggests that participants not only felt better physically and mentally, but many continued their habits long after the challenge ended. In fact, 87% of those surveyed nine months later reported maintaining at least one new routine.

Beyond individual wellbeing, the campaign is influencing national conversations. A co-produced policy brief – developed with Age UK, the Centre for Ageing Better, and other stakeholders – is now helping shape future strategies for ageing well in the UK.

 **Take part today**
www.bit.ly/t5aw



The year in research:
Restoring floodplain meadows



TREASURE: Restoring meadows, reviving ecosystems

An OSC initiative

Floodplain meadows are among the UK's most endangered habitats, but also among the most valuable. These landscapes absorb floodwater, support biodiversity, store carbon, and filter pollutants. The TREASURE project (Tools to Realise Socio-Economic Benefits from Floodplains Under Restoration) is working to bring floodplain meadows back.

A collaboration between the OU, the National Trust, and tenant farmers, TREASURE is restoring floodplain meadows across 18 National Trust

sites, starting in Norfolk. The project combines ecological science with cultural heritage, exploring the historical significance of meadows through archival research and engagement.

Two OU interns are playing a key role: one conducting botanical surveys to monitor biodiversity, the other researching artefacts in the National Trust's collections. Their work will culminate in a public exhibition at Attingham Park, connecting past and present to inspire future conservation.

By restoring these vital ecosystems, TREASURE is helping build resilience against environmental threats while reconnecting communities with nature.



Learn more
www.bit.ly/fpmtreasure

Major funding drives Scotland's rural creative economy

The Open University in Scotland is proud to be a core partner in a major new investment from the Arts and Humanities Research Council, as part of its Doctoral Focal Awards programme.

The award is designed to champion the next generation of researchers and academics, offering future-facing training in areas vital to the UK's creative economy and societal wellbeing.

The funding will enable The Open University in Scotland to work in collaboration with Glasgow School of Art and Scotland's Rural College, to create a training college of twenty doctoral researchers, recruited from across Scotland's rural and island communities.

The seven-year programme of doctoral study and enterprise training will support PhD researchers based in these communities, developing talent and addressing regional inequalities in the creative economy.



This innovative programme aligns with our mission to widen access to education and research. We're delighted to be part of a collaboration supporting the development of Scotland's creative industries, ensuring that rural and island communities are at the heart of our research future.

Martin Boyle
Director of The Open University
in Scotland



More information
www.bit.ly/om26scotland

Report sheds light on decarbonisation

A report published by the OU in Wales (with Tai Pawb, a Welsh housing justice and equality charity) has explored and uncovered some of the challenges faced by tenants in social housing in Wales as a result of decarbonisation measures.

The bold report, '*A Fair and Equitable Transition?*', is based on focus group interviews with social housing tenants and compares their experience with current discussions on environmental policy.

During their research, the team found that in many cases low-carbon technologies could help tenants reduce energy bills, but in other cases led to confusion and even increased inequalities.



Read the report
www.bit.ly/om26report

740 lives changed (and counting!)

How OU scholarships are transforming futures

Each year, thanks to the inimitable kindness of the OU family, The Open University welcomes students who have been given the opportunity to pursue higher education through Open Futures Fund scholarships. This groundbreaking programme was designed to continue the University's proud mission to keep education open to all, through essential, targeted financial support.

Only possible due to the generosity and empathy of supporters, the Open Futures Fund offers 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 a new intake of students enrolled for the academic year 2025/26, the total number of students supported since 2018 through the Open Futures Fund reached a remarkable 740.

That's 740 lives changed forever, all thanks to YOU, the OU family.

Opening up education

The OU's vast experience in widening access to education has shown 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 targeted interventions – such as financial support for particular groups of students – plays a fundamental role in keeping education truly open to all.

Scholarship programmes

Disabled Veterans' Scholarships

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

Carers' Scholarships

Providing those committed to caring for others – including young carers – the chance to study for free.

Black Students' Support

Providing scholarships to low-income UK residents who identify as being from a Black background.

Sanctuary Scholarships

Providing education to support people in the UK who have been displaced from their homeland or country of residence.

The Care Experienced Scholarship

Providing full undergraduate scholarships to those aged 30 or under who've spent time in care.
(supported by John Lewis Partnership)

Recipient success stories



Gregg

"Being an OU graduate has changed my life significantly, through new work opportunities, going on to complete a Masters and now pursue a PhD, and even winning a gold medal."



Rebekah

"Before this scholarship, I didn't have any excitement for my future, but now I feel like the world is truly my oyster again."



Sharon

"The scholarship was a weight off my shoulders. The worry and the stress: they left me.
I was just overjoyed."



Olha

"Without the scholarship, I think I would have no educational journey at all.
Now I have a purpose."



Althea

"If I could say one thing to the amazing OU donors, it would be that they have changed my life and the lives of so many others in unimaginable ways."

Stuart's inspiring journey from tragedy to opportunity

When I received the amazing news that I'd been awarded a scholarship place, I was so excited. It gave me a purpose again. The chance to take a new path.



Meet Stuart: disabled military veteran, OU History student, dedicated father, enthusiastic dog owner, aspiring teacher, and proud scholarship recipient through the Open Futures Fund. An inspiring individual who goes by so many labels but refuses to be defined by any of them, Stuart's journey to the cusp of graduation has been a long, challenging one. However, he has never been the kind of person to let adversity hold him back.

As he puts it himself, "The three words to best describe my journey are 'Resilience', 'Struggle' and 'Growth'."

Hearing Stuart tell his story, those words feel like something of an understatement.

I was 20 years into my military career when the unthinkable happened. At first, it seemed like any other day. I was conducting tactical training inside a Challenger Two tank, when there was a sudden breach explosion, causing a huge fire. With two close friends alongside me in the tank, I was the only one who survived the incident.

Rushed to hospital, the sheer extent of Stuart's substantial injuries soon became clear.

I had sustained fourth degree burns to my torso, legs, arms, head, neck and face. I'd also suffered hernias, partial deafness, and lost my left ear and all the fingers on my left hand.

As he started on the long road to physical recovery, further adversity soon followed, with a medical discharge from the military meaning an end to the only career and life he'd ever known.

"Civilian life was hard initially, because you go from being the best thing: sought after, everybody wants you there, they want your advice. And then suddenly, when you get injured in the military, you're almost left behind," laments Stuart, "From nowhere, the only life you know is gone forever."

Thankfully, over time, that future path began to feel slightly clearer. Revisiting a long-standing ambition he'd thought would never be realised, Stuart started to put a plan together. A plan with education at its heart.

Having discovered and developed a passion for history during his time in the military, he decided it wasn't too late to formalise that passion, and follow his dream of becoming a history teacher.

And when he discovered the Disabled Veterans' Scholarships Fund, a key part of the Open Futures Fund scholarships programme rewriting the stories of hundreds of students, made possible by the generosity of donors, his ambitious plan started to come together.

Applying for a History degree, Stuart was thrilled to be awarded a place, gaining access to free, flexible higher education that allowed him to study whenever and however suited him best.

Now, five years on from starting his OU study, graduation is on the horizon.

I honestly don't think I'd be here now, just about to graduate – well, hopefully! – and achieve one of my life goals, without the support. I've just recently got my Diploma of Education too, which I never thought I'd get in a million years when I left school.

Today, after all these years, Stuart has another label to add to that long list:

"I'm OU family," he smiles.

Watch Stuart's story

Stuart's powerful, poignant video story is available to watch now, along with those of many other Open Futures Fund scholarship recipients.

By following the link below, you can hear directly from OU graduates and students whose lives have been transformed by free, flexible, open-access higher education and bespoke student support.



Watch now
www.bit.ly/offvideos

Discover new skills with an OU short course

If you're eager to keep growing – whether to stay ahead at work, fuel your curiosity, or explore something completely new – the OU's comprehensive range of flexible short courses and microcredentials are here to help.

Designed to fit around your life and delivered entirely online, there's a wide range of courses available to help you develop skills you can use straight away. Whether you want to take the next step in your career or simply discover a new passion, there's something for every ambition and interest.

Learn something new in just a few weeks

Want to sharpen your project management or finance skills, develop as a leader, or try out something creative like photography, languages, or writing? With over 100 short courses and microcredentials to choose from, why not make 2026 the year you keep investing in yourself?

Short courses

Bite-sized learning at your own pace. Most short courses start any time and require 10–50 hours of study, all underpinned by the OU's world-class teaching.

Microcredentials

Gain practical career skills and cutting-edge knowledge in 10–12 weeks with a professional development short course.

Available courses include:

Management of uncertainty:

Leadership, decisions and action

Climate change:

Transforming your organisation for sustainability

Teacher development:

Embedding mental health in the curriculum

Find the right course for you

www.bit.ly/discovershortcourses

Stay connected to the OU



Never miss a thing!

One of the best ways to keep in touch with your University is by email. It's easy: just email alumni@open.ac.uk with 'Stay connected' and your name and PI Number to make sure you receive all the latest news, events, exclusive invites and offers, fundraising appeals, campaigns and other ways to get involved.

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