

Creating a level playing field

Empowering students with disabilities

The real life of the Brontës

The BBC drama about the sisters who overcame stereotypes to publish groundbreaking novels

Designing for Mars

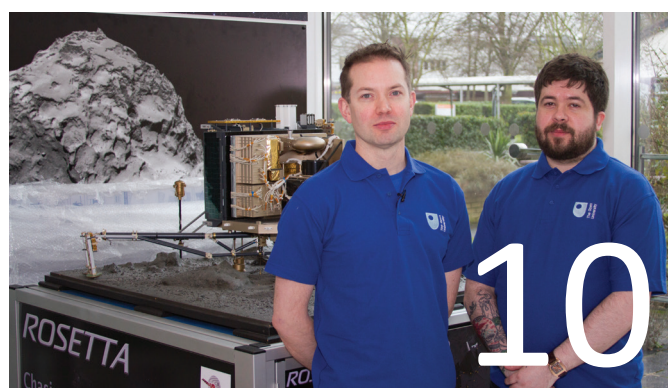
How crowdfunding is helping a team of OU students build a Mars rover



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Welcome and thank you for all your support



Your University is the largest single UK provider of higher education to students with disabilities. Thanks to the generosity of donors like you, we strive to make sure all our students have everything they need to study successfully, whatever their health needs.

Gifts from alumni and supporters mean students have the practical support they need; from voice activated software for students who struggle to use their hands, to mentors who help students find their

strength even on their darkest days.

The OU is hugely popular with students who have a disability. In this issue of Open Door, we explore what it takes to ensure students can focus on their studies, not their disability.

On behalf of the OU and the many students whose dreams you help make a reality, thank you so much for your generosity.

Karen Hart
Deputy Director of Development:
Alumni Engagement

Creating a level playing field for disabled students

Thanks to the generosity of alumni and supporters like you, The Open University supports over 22,500 students with disabilities.

One in eight Open University (OU) students - around one in every tutor group - studies while managing a disability; from physical mobility issues to invisible disabilities, such as hearing loss.

There are as many students with disabilities at The Open University as there are total students at the average campus university. Many students with disabilities choose the OU so they won't have to worry about getting to the lecture hall or taking time off for medical appointments. If an OU student needs to spend time in hospital, their study materials can go with them so they can continue with their studies when they are well enough.

Focusing on the student, not their disability

The focus is not on what kind of disability a student has, but on what they want to achieve. For example, if a student cannot use their hands, perhaps due to arthritis or paralysis, but wants to write essays, special software means they can dictate assignments using just their voice.

Since the OU began in 1969, a revolution in the range of technology available to support students with disabilities has transformed the student experience. Today's practical support, made possible by donors to the OU, now includes:

- Dictaphones for students with memory loss
- Lightweight laptops that won't hurt the legs of students using wheelchairs
- Talking calculators for visually impaired students
- Text magnifiers and audiobooks
- Sign language interpreters at tutorials
- Mentors to help students overcome challenges



Handheld video magnifier



New graduate on stage at his Open University degree ceremony

Accessible residential schools

In addition to support at a distance, the OU also ensures that students have everything they need at face-to-face tutorials and residential schools. Tutors and the Venues Team look for the right location for every student, to ensure wheelchair access, the use of special chairs etc.

Paul King, Manager for Auxiliary Aids and Services, says, "We also adjust the actual method of learning to accommodate a student. For example, at the engineering schools recently, students were required to go out around the campus and collect sound level recordings. We supported a student with a disability to bring their own sound recording data with them to be used in the group analysis."

We also organise for non-medical helpers if required, such as a helper to carry the meal tray of wheelchair users. We also arrange, where appropriate, for a family member or friend to accompany the student for pastoral care."



Dawn Faizey-Webster

Exams wherever students need to sit them

Students who would struggle to complete an exam under standard conditions also receive extra support. Dawn Faizey-Webster, a student completely paralysed by locked-in syndrome and only able to communicate through her eyes and tiny movements of her head, sat her exams at home with a member of OU staff. Using special equipment to interpret her eye movements, her “writing” speed was vastly different to that of her fellow students. Her OU support team calculated the comparable time that would create a level playing field. Dawn says, “It takes me three weeks to finish an exam, blinking out one word a minute - but I’m determined to prove what I’m capable of.”

Support throughout their studies

The generosity of our donors helps the OU support students with disabilities from the moment they register, ensuring that students have what they need throughout their studies. If their needs change, the OU also offers the full range of support to students who develop a disability during their courses, from the moment they let us know about their condition.

The OU has specialist advisers who cover:

- Specific learning difficulties (dyslexia, dyspraxia, etc)
- Mental health issues
- Hearing impairment
- Visual impairment

For example, a student with dyslexia may find that the letters in words appear to switch around when they are reading their course books, slowing their progress and affecting their concentration. By printing course books on an off-white paper, the OU can help students reduce the effect, so they can concentrate on learning.

You are making the difference

Changing eligibility criteria means government support for students with ill health and disabilities is harder to obtain. For example, a student who cannot use their hands could not get support with notetaking at a day school, but thanks to donors, the OU can often provide a note-taker to help them succeed in their studies.

Your support is helping students with disabilities prove that they should never be underestimated. Every student who registers with us knows that, if their health gets in the way of their study dreams, their fellow students, alumni and OU staff will help empower them to focus on what they want to achieve.

How OU support helped Hywel redesign his future after a Parkinson's diagnosis

Hywel Griffiths is one of tens of thousands of students with disabilities who has changed his life through OU study. Hywel had worked his way up as a Police Officer to become a dog handler with Gwent Police in 1998.

Then, age 32, he was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease.

He knew that this progressive brain condition would mean the end of his career as a dog handler, but he refused to become dependent on others or to end his service to the Police, no matter how hard he had to work.

Hywel decided to retrain as an intelligence analyst, staying with the Gwent Police and continuing to protect his local community. He chose to study a combination of computing, statistics, social policy and criminology towards a BSc degree and a diploma.

"I chose to study with the OU for two main reasons. First, it allowed me the flexibility to carry on working full-time and study at times to suit myself. My usual pattern was to get up at 5am and study for a few hours before going to work. Second, OU qualifications are highly regarded in general, not only by employers."

"Parkinson's disease brings with it a number of challenges – among them mobility issues, and problems with speech and communication – and I had to learn to cope with its effects on my day-to-day life."

Thanks to the support of donors over the years, The Open University was able to help Hywel access all the practical support he needed, including a laptop with voice recognition software for when he struggled to type.

Hywel quickly proved how much he could achieve with the right support and his success in his studies led to further achievements both at work and for other people with Parkinson's. "My studies gave me a real sense of achievement. As an intelligence analyst, I played a leading role in a number of high profile investigations. I've caught more criminals with a mouse than I ever would have with a dog!"



"In May 2015 I received the Gareth Hopkins Memorial Award for the courage I'd shown in the face of adversity and a month later I was awarded the Queen's Police Medal for my distinguished police service, my contribution to raising awareness of Parkinson's disease and raising funds for the charity, and for my contribution to raising the profile and value of disabled people in the workplace."

"Being diagnosed with a medical condition or having a disability doesn't mean you can't achieve your dreams. Attending my graduation ceremony at St David's Hall in Cardiff was a very memorable occasion and made me proud."

Thank you for your amazing support for students with disabilities.

Find out more at giving.open.ac.uk.



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Unlocking the full potential of our disabled veterans

Every member of our armed forces is chosen for their exceptional promise. If disability means they can no longer serve, The Open University's new scholarship fund will ensure they can still reach their full potential.

Many of our valued veterans are discharged due to disabilities; from loss or damage to limbs to post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) developed in war zones. Once they leave military life, their skills - developed in a unique environment that demands excellence, accomplishment and personal growth - can make a huge contribution both socially and economically if they have the right support. They represent a vast pool of untapped talent.

A rapid discharge from the Forces can leave many without the opportunity to plan for civilian life. Over 2,000 active servicemen and women already study with the OU – now we want to extend these opportunities to those discharged with an illness or injury, who have not had time to adapt their existing skills for their future.

The Disabled Veterans Scholarships Fund

That's why The Open University has launched a new Disabled Veterans Scholarships Fund, to empower veterans with disabilities to unlock their potential for new purposes.

The Scholarships Fund will offer the equivalent of 100 undergraduate full scholarships, plus a bespoke disability and careers advisory service. Students will have access to innovative equipment to support study with a disability, alongside experienced staff and tutors to personalise their learning journey.

Addressing the real needs of disabled veterans

Open University courses mean that veterans can study while working to support their family, and study at home if injuries make travel difficult. Free access means they can realise just how much they are capable of without any financial risk.



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Offering not only the financial support to embark on HE study, but the vital care and advice, the OU can assist disabled veterans in dreaming new dreams: driving them to achieve the same success that they would have otherwise experienced within military life. Drawing on the OU's expertise in disabled student support, and our work with the Armed Forces, we are uniquely placed to offer this pioneering scheme.

Find out more about The Open University's fundraising campaign and the many ways we are support students together at giving.open.ac.uk.



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Colin Hume: one of the first supporters of the Scholarships Fund

At age 19, Colin Hume was called up for National Service in 1950, spending two years in the Royal Air Force, working in radar operation as a Senior Aircraftman.

Colin came to recognise the positive effects of Forces' life and values - the fostering of mutual trust and teamwork, the self-confidence and responsibility promoted by the maintenance of discipline, and the encouragement to always aim for the best, rather than merely the good. He believed it helped build character, experience and, in many cases, transferable skills.

Study buddies on a journey of lifelong learning

After Forces' life, Colin enjoyed a successful career in the Civil Service. When a severe heart attack necessitated early retirement, he was still keen to tackle a new and mentally challenging project.

Arthur Campbell, an old friend, had the same passion to keep learning, and so the two registered for their first undergraduate OU course in 1992. Colin and Arthur were quickly hooked on learning and the study buddies' journey continued to postgraduate study in their eighties.



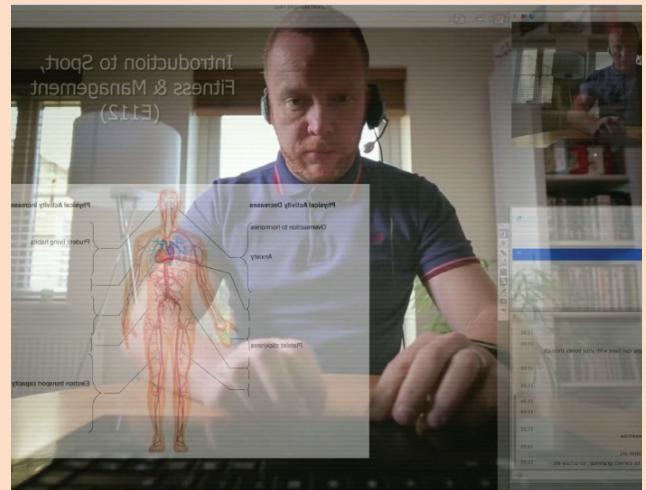
Colin Hume

Arthur says, "For Colin and me, our appreciation of that sense of achievement from studying with the OU was matched only by our admiration for the University's commitment and innovative skill in making learning accessible to those whose opportunities are impaired by illness, physical or mental disability, or other obstacle."

A gift to help fellow veterans study

When Colin passed away in 2015, he left a legacy of over £230,000 which is launching the Disabled Veterans Scholarships Fund. His exceptionally generous gift will provide scholarships and support for disabled ex-service men and women.

Colin has been remembered with a plaque in the OU's Legacy Garden. His gift will go on to support and encourage disabled veterans for years to come.



Simon Hemsworth's life was turned upside down when he was injured in the Forces, but studying with The Open University helped him reimagine his future.

"As a kid, all I wanted to do was be a Royal Marine Commando. So when I finally got to join, it was a dream come true. On exercise one night, I slipped and injured my leg. It turned out to be the injury that ended my career.

I ended up as an assistant caretaker. I couldn't have been any lower at the time. I didn't know what to do."

The Headmaster at the school where Simon worked as a caretaker saw his potential and suggested he use his military fitness as a springboard to train as a PE teacher. Simon did his research and decided to work towards the BSc (Honours) in Sport, Fitness and Coaching.

"I didn't have a degree so that was the next challenge. The OU was the best option for me. They were massively supportive of me. I'm really lucky and I'm really grateful.

Graduating was a massive sense of achievement. It was an opportunity for me to have a new career. Now I am PE teaching, it's my dream job."

To find out more about how gifts in Wills can open up the future for OU students, visit giving.open.ac.uk/make-a-gift/leave-a-legacy



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NEWS IN BRIEF...

From a social media movement of alumni across the nations, to one graduate sailing alone around the world to support the students of the future, our alumni are showing what the OU means to them.

OU graduate sailing around the globe to support students

Antoine Cousot will recreate the first solo voyage around the world, raising £1 million to enable more students to study with The Open University.

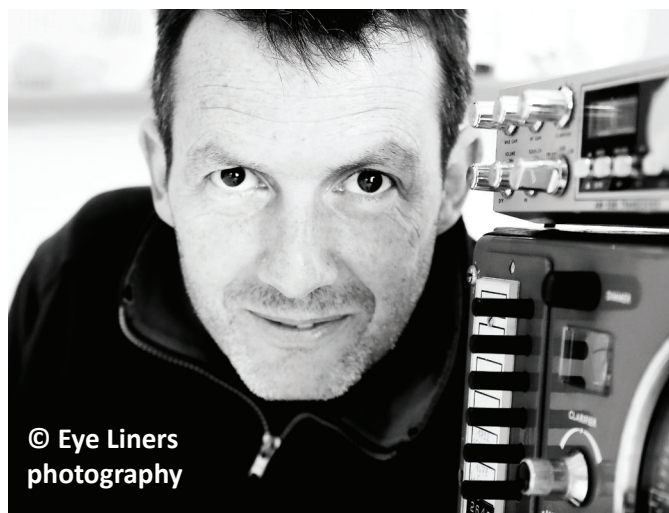
“Education changed my life,” says lifelong sailing enthusiast, Antoine Cousot. Having left school at 17 to travel the world, he chose The Open University over an offer from Harvard, because distance learning was the only way he could study while at sea.

Studying Earth Sciences with The Open University enhanced Antoine’s skills and knowledge as a skipper. Now he wants to use what he has learned to single-handedly circumnavigate the globe, to raise funds for more students to share the opportunities that he had.

The Antoine Cousot Scholarship Fund aims to raise £1 million to give 50 students the opportunity to transform their futures, through flexible, practical education in Environment, Earth and Ecosystem Sciences.

Antoine says, “The OU has changed my openness to the world we’re living in. They came to me with the right tools at the right time, helping me pursue my dreams. Now, I want to share my experience with others.” To mark 50 years since the first solo voyage around the world, and 50 years of education being open to all, through The Open University, Antoine is using only 1960s technology in the Golden Globe Race.

The Golden Globe Race will see 30 sailors race 30,000 miles around the world - non-stop, alone and with no outside assistance. The 2018 race marks 50 years since the first sailor, Sir Robin Knox-Johnston, completed this incredible voyage. The modern sailors will only use technology that was available to Sir Robin Knox-Johnston, including navigating with sextant on paper charts, handwritten logs and ham radios.



In addition, Antoine will be investigating our oceans; gathering research samples along the way and analysing them in real time with OU academics. A sampler dragged behind the boat will measure the presence of microplastics in the water. These tiny plastic beads come from clothing, industrial processes and cosmetics, such as the beads in exfoliating facewashes. Antoine’s research will help OU academics understand the extent of the pollution and its impact on our environment.

To follow Antoine’s mission, visit:
<https://www.antoinecousot.com/accueil-en>



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#IWas shares love of lifelong learning

The OU called on its students and alumni this summer to share how the power of learning can change a life at any age. Fans of the OU posted a photo of themselves on Facebook or Twitter with the #IWas hashtag, saying how old they were when they started study and how it has transformed their lives.

Students across the UK and Ireland are proving how flexible distance education has had huge benefits for their families, careers and communities, helping them contribute to society and the economy.



The campaign was led by Paralympian and OU graduate Darren Harris. He started studying at age 39, refusing to let the visual impairment caused by childhood eye cancer to stop him doing what he wanted to. Darren talked about how fast technology and jobs are changing. "It's clear that supporting people to reskill and upskill, whatever their background and age, will be even more important in the future."

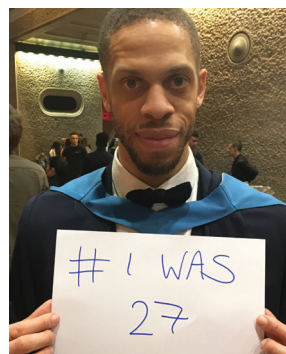
Kerry Gray (right) is one of thousands of students who shared her story as a result of the campaign.

"I knew I wanted to make a difference, but I really lacked confidence at first. Then one of my lecturers at college told me about The Open University.

The Open University gave me the freedom to work a full-time job and study at the same time. I did combined Social Sciences with a speciality in Sociology. No matter what day or time it was, there was always someone to chat to about course work.

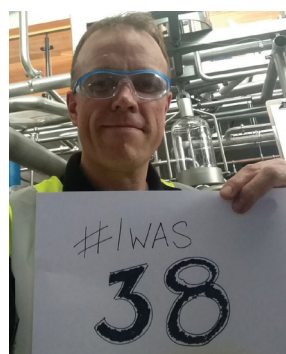
I'm really proud of my degree and that I achieved it with the Open University. I never thought it was something I would have the confidence or ability to achieve, and so just thinking about that achievement brings me happiness.

I am now an Inclusion Assistant at a Further Education college, where my role is to break down barriers to education for people attending college."



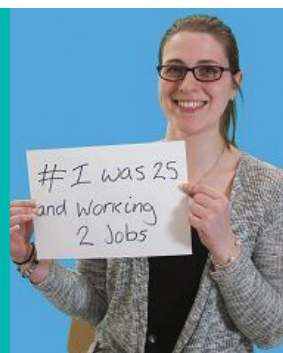
Nathanial Lawrence, from London, was 27 when he began studying IT with the OU. Thanks to his OU degree he is now an IT engineer with Cisco. "If it wasn't for that degree, I wouldn't be with my current employers now. The Open University works."

Sam Evans, from Cardiff, was 26 when she started her OU Physics degree. Her goal is to work in Astrophysics. "I can honestly say that the OU was one of the most positive, life-changing decisions I have ever made."



Graeme Millar, from Carrickfergus, was 38 when he started using his learning to help set up Northern Ireland's first licenced distillery in over 125 years. "I began using the train for work rather than driving, to get 13 study hours a week."

Kerry Gray, from Fife, was 25 when she realised she could learn to make a difference while also supporting herself at work. "I'm now an Inclusion Assistant, breaking down barriers to education for people attending college."



To see more stories of OU students, visit Facebook or Twitter and search for the hashtag #IWas.



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Designing for Mars: Helping students build a Mars rover

The OU's first crowdfunding project has achieved its target, raising £5,000 to help student Rob Adlard and his team design and build a working Mars rover prototype.

Over 80 OU alumni, staff and supporters contributed to help a team of OU students build a rover to compete against leading universities in the 2018 University Rover Challenge in Utah – the closest you can get to the surface of Mars without leaving the Earth.

One of the particularly generous donors was OU graduate Joan Popovic. She says, "I loved that there was an OU team brave and bold enough to compete on a global level."

Distance education changed their lives

Both Joan and team leader Rob Adlard found the OU was a turning point in their lives. Joan says "My education was halted when my mum passed away and I needed to go out to work to support the family. I got up early every day for work and began to notice the amazing OU programmes on TV."

Like Joan, Rob also made up for lost time with the OU. "I had a maths teacher who didn't seem to like maths or to like me! It discouraged me from doing the academic things I wanted to do, as maths is key to space research, but I kept making spaceships out of anything I could get my hands on." Thanks to his OU studies, Rob is now on his way to achieving his dream of becoming a qualified engineer.

Firm friendships from residential school

Rob formed the current Mars Rover Team from the friendships he made at his OU residential school. "We want to build something that would take us to the next step after the moon – Mars."

"I feel so excited! Now we have a real chance to build something that can change the future."



**Rob Adlard, OU student,
with graduate and
donor Joan Popovic**

OU crowdfunding supporters have also helped Bridget Nagomoro study her Masters degree in Development Management. Bridget grew up in extreme poverty in what is now South Sudan, where a girl is more likely to die in childbirth than to finish primary school. She was the first woman in her village to go to university.



Bridget Nagomoro

Bridget is so determined to share the rare opportunity she had with other girls in poverty that she has built a school in South Sudan. Now, thanks to OU supporters, she is studying her Masters to learn how to deliver a high quality education, find sponsors for the girls and expand the school.

Follow the latest news
on the Mars rover
and support our latest
crowdfunding projects at
[https://theoucrowd.
hubbub.net/](https://theoucrowd.hubbub.net/)



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Remembering an OU donor: “David changed my life”

David Doig, whose generosity is changing thousands of lives in developing countries, is remembered in the OU's Legacy Garden.

The Open University celebrated the life of donor and OU graduate David Doig in June, with a memorial which included unveiling a plaque in his honour.

David was Chief Executive of OPITO, an organisation dedicated to helping the oil and gas industry ensure its workforce have all the skills they need. David studied his Diploma in Management with The Open University, saying later, “Without my OU experience, I would not be where I am today”.

Vice-Chancellor Peter Horrocks, welcomed David's family to the dedication, saying, “We hope that this special spot, here in our Legacy Garden, will bear testament to an extraordinary man of vision and commitment. An exceptional man, an alumnus, a donor and a true friend.”

As CEO of OPITO, David led on the creation of a philanthropic partnership worth £750,000. Committed to learning, David and OPITO focused on developing countries, empowering the OU to create programmes for untrained teachers, especially in India.

David's support was vital to TESS-India, a programme which is giving a whole generation of teachers the tools to change lives, through the power of distance learning. More than a million teachers now have the skills to revolutionise their classrooms, giving their pupils a better chance to escape a life of poverty.

David also supported the Malawi Access into Teaching Scholarships (MATS), which aims to break the cycle of lost opportunities for girls in school by helping young women qualify to become teachers themselves.

David was instrumental in creating a unique partnership, one that believed the University is ideally placed to change lives globally. One such individual is PhD research student Andrew Mkwashi. Supported by OPITO, he aims to help develop a system which gets



affordable medical devices into the hands of those who urgently need them more quickly and at a lower cost.

“Before David, I had no funding for my research. Life was so difficult for my family and myself, as I had to work nights, then study during the day.

When my supervisor and I met David, he gave us his business cards and said we should get in touch with him should there be any need at any given point in time. I still have his card in my wallet with me today.

David changed my life. His legacy is engraved into the minds of those whose lives he changed and the stories they share about him.”

David was an extraordinary man. We are looking forward to working with OPITO and the newly formed David Doig Foundation to keep his legacy alive and change many more lives through education.

Find out more about
our teacher education
projects in developing
countries at
giving.open.ac.uk



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The OU and the BBC: the real story of the Brontës

The OU's first feature-length Arts drama with the BBC shows how three remarkable sisters published ground-breaking novels, when only men were supposed to write.

The Brontë sisters have been the subject of countless films, songs, plays and even operas. The Open University and the BBC have brought to life the complex challenges they really faced, including the challenge of getting published as unknown women.

This unique programme, *To Walk Invisible*, brings together the details of their lives, including Emily's inspiration for Heathcliff, Charlotte's fear of going blind and how their brother Branwell's affair with a local employer's wife cost both him and Anne their jobs.

Knowing their Parsonage home would be gone when their ageing father could no longer lead a congregation, the sisters urgently needed to support themselves. Charlotte helped Emily face her terror of ridicule to publish their first poems under male pseudonyms, paving the way for *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre*.

The story of the Brontës features in over a dozen OU literature courses. Videos from the series are a key part of the OU's recently updated MA in Creative Writing.

Dr Sara Haslam, OU Senior Lecturer in Literature, worked closely with the BBC team throughout the making of the film, to ensure that this was no



romanticised version of the Brontës, but an accurate and accessible depiction of their lives. The scripts themselves now feature in the OU's new creative writing course, enabling students to see real examples of how writing is edited before it reaches the screen.

To watch videos with the cast and crew, visit www.open.edu/openlearn and search for *To Walk Invisible*.



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

For general queries or to donate please contact:

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01908 655044
giving@open.ac.uk



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