

OpenDoor

Issue 21

The magazine for supporters and friends of The Open University



Project Deep Blue

Phytoplankton: The unsung
superheroes of our planet



Creating futures full of hope and potential

Welcome to the latest issue of Open Door, the magazine created especially for you, our wonderful family of generous donors and supporters.

In this edition, we celebrate the collective power of philanthropy and the amazing sense of community demonstrated by the OU family who took part in the Giving Day. On 7 and 8 July you joined together across 36 hours raising thousands of pounds for the Open Futures Fund. You made the day a huge success which will have a long-lasting impact on students and their futures. You can read more on page 3.

We are also delighted to share an update and developments from Project Deep Blue on page 6, our wonderful cover story about the University's important research to secure the future of our oceans. You can also discover more about some of the other projects that philanthropy makes possible, from work to increase education opportunities for girls in Zimbabwe to the creation of an innovative new Open Living Lab to encourage the public to better engage with nature.

Last but not least, it was incredible to be able to welcome back alumni, supporters, and guests remembering their loved ones, for the Legacy Garden celebration, our first on-campus event since the pandemic. The sun shone and it was a beautiful opportunity to remember, with deep gratitude, those whose legacy gifts have been received over the last three years.

Thank you so much for all your support. I hope you'll be immensely proud of the difference alumni and donor support makes to OU students, projects and research. You are truly creating futures full of hope and potential.

With best wishes,



Karen Hart
Deputy
Director of
Development

Inside your Open Door

- 3 Giving Day 2022**
An even bigger success than last year – and it's all thanks to your support.
- 4 The Open Futures Fund**
Two scholarship recipients share how the OU family have helped change their lives with the gift of an OU education.
- 6 What is happening to our planet and oceans?**
How research from the OU's Project Deep Blue is helping us better understand climate variability and its effect on our planet.
- 8 Fighting education inequality**
An update on the Supporting Adolescent Girls' Education (SAGE) programme which is opening up access to learning in Zimbabwe.
- 10 The Wolfson Analytical Centre**
The OU receives grant to develop pioneering research centre.
- 11 Making better connections to our natural world**
The creation of a living science laboratory for teaching and learning about our ecosystems.
- 12 Legacy Garden celebration event**
A special occasion to honour the memory of our legacy donors.

Get in touch

-  alumni.open.ac.uk
-  giving@open.ac.uk
-  01908 655 044
-  **The Development Office**
The Open University
Walton Hall, Milton Keynes, MK7 6AA

Donate now at alumni.open.ac.uk/donate

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

Our latest privacy policy at giving.open.ac.uk/privacy sets out how the Development Office obtains, manages, uses and protects your data.

36 hours of transforming lives and rewriting futures

On 7 and 8 July 2022, we held our annual Giving Day, an incredibly special 36-hour fundraising challenge to help raise vital money for the Open Futures Fund. The response from our OU family was fantastic, with 1,479 donors joining together to raise an astounding £217,399. Thanks to the generosity of the donors and friends who took part, more scholarships and bursaries will be provided to help students in need transform their lives through education.

After the success of the Giving Day 2021, there was huge anticipation and excitement surrounding the Giving Day this year. Once again, our incredible community came forward from the second the clock started ticking at 9am on 7 July (and some of you many weeks in advance!). We are incredibly grateful to everyone who donated – we couldn't have surpassed last year's total of £158,000 without your amazing generosity!

What helps to make a Giving Day unique is the opportunity to take part in match-funding challenges. Thanks to the support of generous donors, we were thrilled to be able to include some very exciting challenges that made donations go even further and helped to inspire as many people to get involved as possible. The OU family truly stepped up to every challenge, unlocking amazing additional funds to provide even more scholarships and bursaries, ensuring that greater numbers of students are reached than ever before.

More than £80,000 was raised towards the Disabled Veterans' Scholarships Fund, of which the first £30,000 of donations was matched to double the value of gifts!

Thank you to everyone who took part in this special day and embraced the community spirit and collective power of philanthropy – we continue to be inspired by the OU family's passion to keep education open to all. The money raised will provide life-changing opportunities for disabled veterans, carers, Black students from disadvantaged backgrounds, and people seeking refuge.

OPEN FUTURES FUND
Over £80,000
raised towards the
Disabled Veterans'
Scholarships Fund



One
OU family

36
hours

£217,399
raised to
rewrite futures

38%
more raised
than last year

1,479 donors
from across
the OU family

OU Staff Challenge unlocks £20,000!

For this year's Giving Day, we introduced an ambitious new challenge to inspire further donations and involvement. Twenty members of OU staff from across the four nations came together as a team of *Futuremakers* to walk or run the equivalent distance between the University's offices in Milton Keynes, Cardiff, Dublin, Belfast and Edinburgh (and back to Milton Keynes) – 1,000 miles in total between 1 June and 8 July.

The challenge was very special, thanks to a wonderfully generous alumni donor who offered to make a gift of £20,000 on the successful completion of the challenge. We are delighted to report that the team of *Futuremakers* exceeded the 1,000 mile target and secured the brilliant £20,000 donation towards the Open Futures Fund.

The Open Futures Fund

At the heart of The Open University's social justice mission is the belief that everyone – regardless of background or circumstance – should have the opportunity and support to transform their lives through education. With thanks to generous alumni and donors, the Open Futures Fund, which relies solely on philanthropic donations, was created in 2018 to provide life-changing scholarships and bursaries.

Now well-established, the Fund continues to grow to support a diverse range of students who may otherwise miss out on education and all the opportunities it brings.

This year, we have continued to receive more applications for support than we have places available, demonstrating again how vital scholarships and bursaries are in helping people desperate to change their lives through the power of education.

Students Matthew and Hollie share their experiences so far of the life-changing impact of an OU scholarship and what this means for their future.

OPEN FUTURES FUND

The Open Futures Fund currently includes four key programmes which benefit the following disadvantaged people looking to study at the OU in the hope of re-writing their futures:

Disabled Veterans' Scholarships provide financial support to disabled veterans, injured in or due to military service, empowering them to rebuild their lives and reskill for the civilian jobs market.

Carers Scholarships offer support for unpaid carers, or those who have recently stopped being a carer, helping them develop a sense of identity outside of caring, and retrain towards seeking employment.

Black Students' Support was recently created to provide 50 scholarships and 50 bursaries to Black students from disadvantaged backgrounds, supporting them to overcome barriers and inequalities in Higher Education.

Sanctuary Scholarships give students seeking refuge the opportunity to build a new life and hopeful future through education by providing 12 scholarships each year for the next three years and up to 50 Access Modules.

We are delighted to welcome the latest cohorts of scholarship recipients who will be starting their OU journeys in October 2022.

OPEN FUTURES FUND

DISABLED VETERANS' SCHOLARSHIPS

MATTHEW'S STORY

An exciting new career for veteran Matthew

Matthew* served in the British infantry for 15 years, undertaking posts in conflict zones across the world. After sustaining a spinal injury during his service, Matthew was unable to fully recover and was discharged from the military in 2019. After leaving, Matthew wasn't sure in which career direction he was heading, until a doctor treating his injury encouraged him to apply for the Disabled Veterans' Scholarships Fund (DVSF).

"I wanted to do a degree course that both suited my mindset and also something that really interested me. Criminology and Law seemed like a good fit, especially as I wanted to better understand some of the things going on in my personal life.

"I found the OU's Disability Support Advisers so supportive. I was also lucky enough to get the equipment I needed - a laptop and specialist study-related equipment such as a desk, chair and keyboard, all provided by the OU which really helped me.

"When I originally started studying, I thought I could complete 60 credits a year, but when COVID-19 hit I made the decision to study full-time. I am glad I did because I was awarded my degree in the summer of 2021, much sooner than I had anticipated.

"Since completing my degree, I applied for a few jobs. I really want to work for the Civil Service in either active or criminal investigations, and I was astounded that I had job offers in both of these areas. My degree and my new-found confidence have made this happen.

"I am so grateful for the support of the DVSF. Without it I wouldn't have been able to retrain and change to a new area of expertise. Being supported by the DVSF has been the most honest gift that I've ever received."

Matthew is now continuing his studies with the OU, working towards an MSc in Forensic Psychological Studies.

**We have changed Matthew's real name to protect his privacy*

HOLLIE'S STORY

Mathematics student Hollie on her 'priceless scholarship'

Hollie is the main carer in her family, supporting her mum, dad, and younger sister, while at the same time coping with her own health issues. She is enjoying her studies with the OU and looks forward to achieving her dream of graduating with a degree in Mathematics.

"I was very fortunate to be awarded one of the first Carers Scholarships by The Open University – I felt like I had won the lottery! However, two years into the programme I believe the award was better than winning the lottery. It has provided me with a means of studying for a degree level qualification, in a subject of my choice, with flexibility around when and how to study, the opportunity to reduce and increase my studies to meet my own health and caring needs.

"I have had access to outstanding resources, outstanding academic staff and outstanding support staff. When I compare my experience of Primary, Secondary and Further Education to that of my studies with the OU, the OU is without question, the most supportive, diverse and encouraging.

"Since starting my course my own health issues have had many ups and downs, while my caring role has seen significantly increased demands at times. I have neuro-developmental disabilities including autism and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) as well as significant anxiety. I have multiple physical illnesses and since starting the programme I have required investigation for suspected cancer, thankfully the issue was not cancer, but I did require invasive treatment. The OU have been very quick to respond and support in times of significant stress for me and my family.



To the donors of the scholarship, thank you from the bottom of my heart, from me and all of the other students in my situation who are now benefiting from this priceless scholarship.

Hollie
Carers Scholarship recipient



"I am now 50% through my degree in Mathematics and often have to pinch myself to believe that I am achieving this. Life as a carer is very hard and very often limits the opportunities for people in this situation. Carers often have higher costs and much lower income because of their situation. I would advise anyone in this situation to look at my story, believe in themselves, take the opportunity and apply for the scholarship.

"To the donors of the scholarship, thank you from the bottom of my heart, from me and all of the other students in my situation who are now benefiting from this priceless scholarship."

Find out more about the Open Futures Fund

alumni.open.ac.uk/donate



Project Deep Blue

The progress being made thanks to you!

In 2018 the OU established the incredibly exciting Project Deep Blue. Following the hugely successful OU BBC co-production *Blue Planet II*, the aim was to address the urgent need to learn and understand more about exactly what is happening to our planet and our oceans. This groundbreaking research project especially involves assessing the impact of climate on marine phytoplankton evolution.

The research from Project Deep Blue is critical as microscopic phytoplankton, often known as the 'superheroes of the planet', underpin the entire marine food supply, as well as the oceans' vital role in the carbon cycle that regulates our climate. It's an incredibly delicate balance that literally affects all life on earth, and right now it's under serious threat.

More than £84,000 has been raised thanks to kind and generous alumni and friends of the OU like you. We're delighted to report that the key research elements of Project Deep Blue are making very encouraging progress. The Project was initially set up by the OU's polar Oceanography expert, Professor Mark Brandon, together with Dr Pallavi Anand, a lecturer in Ocean Biogeochemistry, both of whom worked as special advisers on the BBC's award-winning *Blue Planet II* television series.

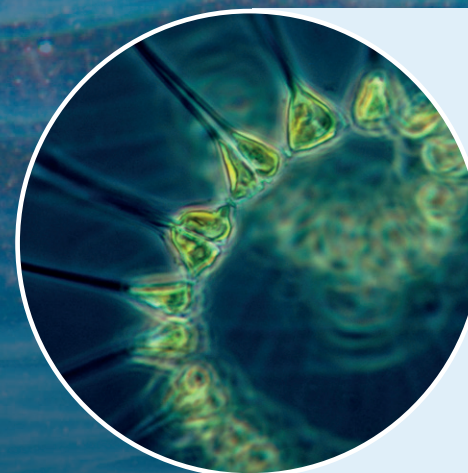
Today, the research continues, carried out by Pallavi and Emmeline Gray, the PhD student awarded her scholarship through funds raised for the Project.

Through their combined efforts, your support is making a fantastic difference in pushing the boundaries of scientific knowledge for the benefit of us all.

Reconstructing the past to better understand the future

Taking a highly innovative, pioneering approach, Emmeline's research is focused on laboratory based reconstructions of the Pliocene age (about 1.9 to 2.8 million years ago) when environmental conditions closely mirrored those that our planet is currently experiencing. These climatic reconstructions will be combined with data relating to phytoplankton's diversity and structural changes to assess the impact of climate and/or seawater chemistry changes on phytoplankton evolution.

To do this, calcium carbonate fossil shells of organisms which once lived on the surface of the ocean and sink to the sea floor when they die, were used to extract climatic and phytoplankton data from sediment taken from a site in the Bay of Bengal, an Indian Ocean monsoon region. Changes in the fossils' forms and the chemical composition of their shells can tell us about the primary productivity of phytoplankton and monsoon-influenced seawater chemistry changes, as well as helping us reconstruct climate from the same sample.



The unsung superheroes of our planet

Phytoplankton are vitally important because they use light energy (photosynthesis) to create carbohydrates to become the organisms that form the base of the entire ocean food chain. Not only do phytoplankton sustain the ocean's fish, but also, through the same process of photosynthesis, they consume harmful carbon dioxide and produce oxygen. That's why phytoplankton are the unsung superheroes that are so crucial to the survival of life on earth.

In fact, our oceans produce over half of all the oxygen that we breathe. By learning more from a similar climatic period in our past, we can hopefully understand what may be happening in our oceans now and what the effects may be on our environment as a whole.

Exciting early results

Emmeline's PhD studies included a seven-week visit to the Kochi Core Centre in Japan where she used their state-of-the-art ITRAX core scanner to collect bulk sediment chemical composition data to assess changes in deep sea sediment. She has since been combining this with extensive analysis in the OU's chemical laboratories alongside computer reconstructions.

Initial results from Emmeline's PhD studies are revealing fascinating new insights into glacial-interglacial cycles and phytoplankton evolution in response to climate and/or seawater chemistry changes – especially relevant to the world situation today.

Once Emmeline completes her PhD this summer, another PhD student will pick up the baton in October to continue with the great progress that Pallavi and the team are making. There is still much they want to research and analyse, but progress to date is very encouraging and will hopefully very soon play a key role in the world's response to our changing climate and its implications for all life on our planet.

We will keep you updated on further Project Deep Blue progress. Thank you for your fantastic support in helping to make this happen.



Field studies now underway!

Project Deep Blue also encompassed the provision of places for field school studies to help give undergraduates in Environmental Science hands on experience.

After delays due to the pandemic, we're delighted to report that, thanks to the funding provided by alumni and friends like you, field school studies in Environment, Earth and Ecosystem Sciences are once again able to take place. Field studies are vital in enabling our undergraduate students to gather field experiences of environmental science to become aware citizens. They can then evaluate the changes that are happening in nature and what these could mean for the future of our planet.

“

The support for Project Deep Blue has been immensely valuable in supporting postgraduate students to collect research data to better understand past climate variability and Earth System processes.



Dr Pallavi Anand
Senior Lecturer
in Ocean Science

”



Fighting education inequality faced by girls and young women in Zimbabwe



30 girls

from Mutasa district have been supported to open bank accounts by Empower bank.



55 girls

have transitioned into formal education. For some, it will be their first time in school since the age of 13.

How OU academics are helping girls access life-changing education



Professor Liz Chamberlain
SAGE Academic Director

For many girls and young women in the world, access to education is underpinned by pervasive gender inequality. Girls face specific, additional gender adversity; they are at increased risk of sexual exploitation, child labour, forced marriage, gender-based violence and trafficking, along with unequal domestic burdens, all of which present barriers to learning. Girls also struggle to access social care and health infrastructures essential to preventing young pregnancy, and in many countries, adolescent mothers are banned from attending school, and so denied the right to education.

In Zimbabwe, one in five secondary school-aged girls do not attend school, and half of school-aged young people with disabilities have no access to education. As many as 600,000 children in Zimbabwe are living with some form of disability and girls with disabilities are disproportionately excluded from education compared to their male counterparts.

Supporting Adolescent Girls' Education

Involving girls and young women and finding authentic ways to represent their hopes for the future has been a key driver in the learning design and implementation of the Supporting Adolescent Girls' Education (SAGE) programme in Zimbabwe – a five-year programme funded by UK aid through the Girls' Education Challenge, now in its final year.

SAGE, which began in 2018, seeks to address the barriers in accessing education faced by girls in Zimbabwe by offering an accelerated non-formal literacy and numeracy skills programme for over 13,200 marginalised adolescent girls (aged 10-19). They have either never been to or have dropped out of school, and include girls with disabilities, young mothers, those who are already married, girls from the Apostolic community, girls from minority ethnic communities, and girls engaged in labour. As well as focusing on girls' educational development, the programme supports the development of girls' self-efficacy and life skills. On completion of the programme, graduates transition onto clear pathways to further training, income generation, or are supported to return to education.

In a partnership led by Plan International UK, the SAGE learning programme delivers non-formal education through 88 accessible, girl-friendly, community-based Learning Hubs in 11 districts of Zimbabwe. The programme is being implemented by a consortium of diverse partners, with the OU as academic lead, in collaboration with the Apostolic Women's Empowerment Trust, Christian Blind Mission, Econet (Zimbabwe's largest telecommunications company), and Plan International Zimbabwe. In addition, the project works alongside officials from the Zimbabwe Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education – at both national and district level – to ensure that the programme reaches the most marginalised girls.

“ I am happy Empower Bank is here. I never thought we could have a bank coming in our community to talk to us about how we can get financial help. I always thought banks are for the most educated in towns. ”

SAGE graduate



SAGE Learner exhibiting her products to potential buyer during a market fair event.
© SAGE project Plan International



The learning programme

The OU team worked with the consortium to design and implement a girl-friendly accelerated learning programme to enable SAGE learners to acquire foundational skills in literacy, numeracy and English. The two-year, non-formal education programme (240 hours of learning) has been designed around individual workbooks with learning materials written specifically for the girls within SAGE, containing real-life applications of learning and stories that mirror the lives of girls and young women in Zimbabwe. Through the stories, SAGE learners also learn financial and business-focused skills to encourage their career aspirations, and how they might imagine their futures. The careers featured in the stories (for example, hairdressing, baking and welding) complement the programme's integrated skills training component, where SAGE learners undertake a further 32 hours of vocational training to enhance their technical skills development with local tradespeople. Early indications show that many of the young women involved in SAGE are beginning to pursue their dreams of setting-up their own businesses: one of the aspirational goals of the programme.

In addition to the learning sessions, two hours of SAGE are dedicated to Plan International's Champions of Girls' Education programme. This is the life skills component of the programme involving girls, boys and men, which is led by facilitators close in age to the young people and aims to mobilise girls and communities to challenge the social norms and values that currently hinder access to education for girls.

At the height of the pandemic, the SAGE resources were endorsed and adopted by the Zimbabwean government and made available to all out-of-school learners across the country.



Graduation stories

In May 2022, SAGE started hosting graduation ceremonies for its first cohort of 2,500 girls who joined the programme in 2019. The ceremonies are characterised by celebrations and graced by the community leadership and the girls' families.

Graduating girls exhibited some of the products they made as part of their SAGE learning journey, showing their level of seriousness and readiness to get further support from relevant stakeholders. Exhibitions by the girls also helped in boosting community confidence in their potential and is expected to unlock more community support for the girls.

Obert Chigodora, SAGE Project Manager argues, "Without creating such opportunities, the question that will continue to linger in girls' minds is 'So what from now?'" Therefore, as part of Graduation Day, different stakeholders and service providers linked to transition pathways came together to offer post-graduation support.

From listening to the SAGE learners and their communities it was never going to be enough just to build knowledge about what they could do in future. It is vital to create real opportunities for them to interact with institutions that could offer them the support they need to realise their ambitions and successfully transition into their preferred pathway.

From January 2023, the SAGE learning hubs will transfer over to community ownership under the direction of the local school and Hub Development Committees, and we hope to see future cohorts of marginalised girls benefit from the programme in perpetuity.

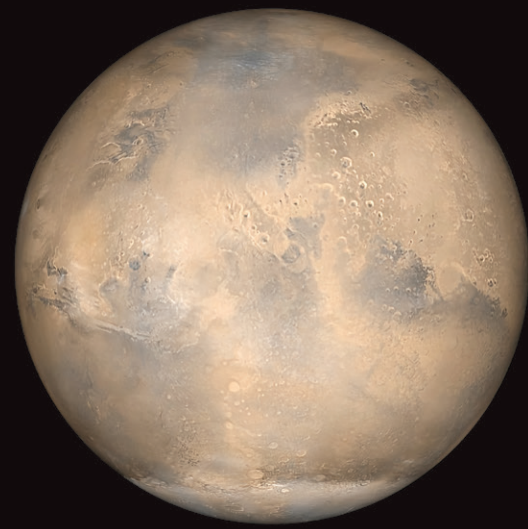
Explore the SAGE resources on OpenLearn

www.bit.ly/sageprogramme

The views in this article represent those of the author and are not necessarily those of the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office.

SAGE learners posing for a photo after successfully opening bank accounts with Zimbabwe Women's Microfinance Bank.
© SAGE project Plan International

Developing a pioneering research centre



The Weston Open Living Lab



OU receives grant from the Wolfson Foundation

The Open University is one of the top university planetary science centres in the UK, recognised for expertise in planetary exploration, lunar science and astronomy. Space Science and Exploration is a Strategic Research Area within the OU, and the University works closely with the world's leading space agencies to develop instrumentation and concepts for breakthrough space science missions, including Cassini-Huygens, Rosetta and the upcoming ESA ExoMars.

We are delighted to have received £750,000 in funding from the Wolfson Foundation to develop the Wolfson Analytical Centre, a world-class research facility with an initial focus on planetary, environmental and space sciences.

The Wolfson Foundation is an independent charity with a focus on research and education, with an aim to support civil society by investing in excellent projects in science, health, heritage, humanities and the arts.

The first project, The Environmental Boundaries of Life, will bring together academic expertise to ask one of our most fundamental questions: are life and habitable environments unique to Earth?

To do this, the Centre will provide a base for specialists to explore the origin, evolution and sustainability of habitable environments on Earth and, using samples from space, explore conditions for life in our Solar System.



The Dallol hydrothermal system in the Danakil depression (Ethiopia) is deemed one of the most extreme environments on Earth
© Alex Pritz/Europlanet

The **Wolfson Analytical Centre** will act as a hub for UK and international teams to study samples from the Earth's surface, the geological archive, analogues for Mars and icy moons, meteorites and samples returned from space missions.

Professor Nicholas Braithwaite, Executive Dean, STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) Faculty, said:

"We are delighted and grateful to have been awarded funding from the Wolfson Foundation.

"The OU has pioneered planetary science research for many years – creating leading research teams in several areas, for example the interdisciplinary group AstrobiologyOU, which is now the largest of its kind in Europe and will drive much of the initial work planned for the Centre.

"This grant will enable us to develop this even further, bringing together a diverse and skilled team of academics to ask vital questions about the habitability of planets in our solar system and the pressing environmental challenges we face on Earth."

Paul Ramsbottom, CEO of the Wolfson Foundation, added:

"The OU has assembled an impressive range of terrestrial and extra-terrestrial samples, offering intriguing insights into fundamental questions. We are delighted to help them purchase advanced analytical equipment to support their excellent research."

Following the initial project and as the Centre evolves, new areas of focus will be developed including using research and expertise to tackle societal challenges.



Professor Nicholas Braithwaite

Inspiring connections with the natural world

The Weston Open Living Lab is a new and exciting public education innovation from the OU, established in summer 2022 with a founding gift from the Garfield Weston Foundation. The Lab will offer an immersive educational and community space to investigate environmental issues and encourage a better connection between humans and nature. This will allow people of all ages and levels of learning to develop the knowledge and skills to inspire nature-based solutions to climate change and nature recovery.

Situated on land adjacent to the River Ouzel on the OU's campus in Milton Keynes, the Weston Open Living Lab will regenerate the ecosystem of a floodplain woodland, using that and adjoining habitats to form a living science laboratory for hands-on teaching and learning. It will provide a physical, dynamic living laboratory environment for observing a range of processes, habitats and nature, and will offer our online community the opportunity to explore and learn from the Lab – anytime, anywhere - through virtual experiments, interactive content and real-time observation.

Research has shown that people are becoming increasingly disconnected from our natural world. They're also less likely to be able to appreciate and understand human impact on the environment and climate. By encouraging people to spend time exploring the Lab (through a series of field trips, schools outreach programmes, and via our digital learning portal) and helping them to understand the value and impact of their own actions on the environment, we hope to inspire change and catalyse nature recovery: even the smallest actions can start to create a positive global impact.

On campus, there will be a dedicated visitor centre open to schools and community groups, where we'll host talks and experiments. A guided learning walk will offer visitors the opportunity to take part in practical science activities in the living laboratory, for example estimating ecosystem carbon stocks through tree growth measurements, biomass and soil sampling. The walk will also be open to the public to explore independently, with signage highlighting how green spaces and nature recovery actions can help mitigate climate change and enhance biodiversity.

The **Milton Keynes Natural History Society** reports that otters have been sighted on the River Ouzel in 2022 – will our Open Living Lab provide a floodplain habitat for a healthy population to establish themselves?

89% feel nature is valuable to them
92% think it is important to help nature

Recent survey by the **Wildlife Trust**

Another benefit will be that all data collected from the Weston Open Living Lab - through a range of environmental sensors, instruments and web-connected cameras and microphones - will support learning around ecosystem processes, ecological activity and change. It will also be used to generate interactive learning content for our online learning portal (hosted on OpenLearn and supported by our award-winning OpenSTEM Labs technology), in OU environmental science modules, and for wider sharing in the higher education community.

The OU is the largest provider of undergraduate environmental science education in the UK, and a hub for innovation in environment and ecosystems teaching, research and knowledge exchange. Through the Open Living Lab, we can use our unique position to mobilise and deploy our research and experience into impactful conservation activity; to build capacity, inspire action, educate climate changers of the future, and challenge the effects of human activity on our natural world.

Explore the **OpenSTEM Labs**

www.bit.ly/openstemlabs



Honouring the memory of our legacy supporters



On 20 July The Open University hosted its Legacy Garden Celebration Event. After being unable to hold in-person events on campus since 2019, due to the pandemic, the event was a truly special occasion to honour the memory of members of the OU family whose generous legacy gifts were received between 2019 and 2021.

The Open University's Legacy Garden is located in the walled garden of the former manor house, Walton Hall, and is a beautifully tranquil space that includes seasonal flowers, scented walkways, shrubs, perennials, reclaimed seating and repurposed Victorian gates. It is also home to memorial plaques and is a lovely place of peace, reflection, and immense gratitude.

Alumni, supporters and families took time to come together to remember and honour 94 people who had generously supported the University, and its students, with the unveiling of special commemorative plaques in the Legacy Garden. Before unveiling the plaques, Professor Tim Blackman (Vice-Chancellor), Professor Marcia Wilson (Dean of Equality and Diversity) and Jhumar Johnson (Chief of Staff to the Vice-Chancellor) took time to share, with guests, a little about many of those being recognised.

One donor remembered on the day was Olga Rosamund Easy, who passed away in 2021 aged 95. Starting her OU journey in 1975, Olga studied History and English Literature modules, achieving a BA with Honours at the age of 55.

Olga missed out on going to university straight from school, despite passing matriculation, because her family couldn't afford it. Instead, in 1941, Olga joined the monitoring service at the BBC, working in London during the Blitz, to provide communiques to motorcycle despatch riders to take to Bletchley Park.

Her daughter Rosamund, who attended the unveiling of her mother's plaque shared with us that Olga was "an avid reader, writer and linguist, the OU gave Olga the opportunity she longed for, to study and get a degree." Rosamund also told us about her very own OU family; her father was a Pioneer student, in the very first OU intake, and she too studied with the University, gaining a BA and MSc.

By leaving a gift in their Will to the OU, each donor remembered is helping to create wonderful ripples of positive change that will touch many lives and have a long-lasting, far-reaching effect for generations to come. We are incredibly grateful to them for their wonderfully thoughtful generosity.

Legacies to The Open University have had a life-changing impact on so many who have been able to benefit from the generosity of those who remembered the University. They have been vital in establishing the Open Futures Fund, which has helped to support disabled veterans, unpaid carers and those from disadvantaged backgrounds to transform their lives and re-write their futures, unlocking their potential through the power of education.

Get in touch today

If you would like more information about remembering The Open University in your Will, or if you have left a legacy and would like to know about how you can be remembered, please contact us.



giving@open.ac.uk
01908 659 141