

# OpenMinds



**Proud to be part  
of the OU family**



Joining the OU was one of  
the best decisions of my life.

**Ruby Raut**  
CEO of WUKA and  
Open University graduate



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# The OU family, making a difference

This issue of OpenMinds is full of inspiring student stories. With the flexibility to study anywhere at any time, we can enable students like Ruby Raut, our entrepreneurial cover star, and Emily Jackson, one of our incredible nursing apprentices, to realise their ambitions.

The Open University plays a very special role in higher education, with our unique open access and the flexibility of learning online with a tutor. As alumni, you will have had first-hand experience with our model and the opportunities it creates, especially if you are wanting to learn while working, bringing up a family or living with a disability. More and more young students are also choosing the OU as a way of earning a respected qualification while working and keeping the cost down.

Yet this is a tough time for our students, hit by the cost-of-living crisis which, in turn, is affecting our recruitment and retention. We will do everything we can to see them through, so they also have stories like Ruby's and Emily's, and can be proud of their University. There is so much to be proud of, as you can read in the next few pages.

An important part of our offer is the free learning we provide to millions of people who take one of our free courses on OpenLearn, or watch or listen to one of our BBC programmes. We also provide access courses that are free to many students and scholarships for students who are carers or who themselves have been in care, as well as for refugees, disabled veterans, and Black students who we know are less likely to consider the OU than other students despite often facing multiple disadvantages. I am also immensely grateful to the colleagues who worked to produce online courses for Ukrainian refugees and those hosting refugees from that terrible war.

There are many ways that you can support the OU. Donating towards our scholarships is one way, and life-changing for the students, but you can also encourage your friends and family to consider the OU. 'Live and learn', as it says on the University shield, is a lifelong call to action.

Stay learning and do keep in touch!

*Tim Blackman*

**Tim Blackman**  
Vice-Chancellor

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

## Stay connected

Make sure you 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](mailto:alumni@open.ac.uk) with 'Stay connected' and your name to make sure you receive information about the latest news, events, fundraising appeals, campaigns and ways to get involved.

 Email us  
[alumni@open.ac.uk](mailto:alumni@open.ac.uk)

## OpenMinds Live 2023

Watch this space! In April, we will be hosting the next OpenMinds Live which is our opportunity to bring to life some of the most exciting articles from this magazine. Make sure you've opted in to receive emails so you can be the first to hear about it!

 Watch the last OpenMinds Live  
[alumni.open.ac.uk/openmindslive](http://alumni.open.ac.uk/openmindslive)



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# Meet the OU graduate behind the UK's first period pants

**Successful businesswoman and OU Environmental Science graduate Ruby Raut is the creator of the UK's first reusable period pants. The founder and CEO of WUKA (Wake Up Kick Ass), Ruby was listed in the 2019 Top Women in Femtech and has won a Queen's Award for Sustainable Development as well as a Great British Entrepreneur award.**

Ruby moved from Nepal to the UK in 2010 and began working as an Online Teaching Assistant while studying for a Certificate in Health and Social Care at a London graduate school. Yet she knew she could do more.

"As time went on, I saw all my friends graduating," she said. "All my siblings in Nepal had a degree, and I knew I wanted a bigger career. The Open University was the best opportunity for me – I could work while I studied, which meant I could graduate debt-free. I could also study from home."

## A growing passion for environmental sustainability

In 2014, Ruby registered to study for a BSc in Environmental Science with The Open University.

"I was interested in nature and the environment," she said. "The best part of my degree was the practical study element. During the practical study I met like-minded people and began volunteering at a local sustainability group in St Albans."

On graduating, Ruby planned to find a role in the environmental sector, working within a non-governmental organisation (NGO) or similar. She said: "I thought perhaps I could go home to Nepal and work on a project for WaterAid or go to California and become a forest ranger! But I didn't instantly find my dream job, so my husband said to start volunteering."

One of her volunteer roles was for the Women's Environmental Network, which involved campaigning about women's health and rights. This would become the seed from which Ruby's business idea began to grow.

"One day I was telling them about how I used rags from my mum's old saris as a sanitary product when I was in Nepal. Back home, when you get your period, you can't stay in the family home as you mustn't be near your father. Nobody will pass you food by hand – it's a bit like Covid isolation. Women must stay away from the kitchen for four days each time they get their period. Because I'd been talking about this, I was asked to work on a pilot project talking to girls about reusable sanitary products."

Armed with a community grant from Sainsbury's – she set up an award-winning project called Food Waste Ninjas educating schools and pupils on food waste, inspired by an OU project she'd been part of, looking at waste management at Heathrow.

"Working on Food Waste Ninjas, I realised that if I put my heart and soul into something, people responded. It was then that I started looking into other waste problems – one of which is in disposable sanitary products," she said.

"In studying for my Environmental Science degree, I'd discovered that more than 200,000 tonnes of tampons and pads were sent to UK landfills every year, contributing to the mounting tide of plastic pollution. I knew something had to change about the way we handled menstruation."

## The lightbulb moment

"One day, I was talking about how I would pin my reusable pads into my underwear in Nepal and I suddenly thought 'Why can't we stitch fabric into our underwear and make a reusable sanitary item?' I had a lightbulb moment."

That night, Ruby – who had never sewed before – bought herself a £60 sewing machine and set to work making and testing prototypes. She researched the market and found there was nothing similar available. She spent weeks sourcing appropriate absorbent

Ruby Raut



fabrics and liaising with manufacturers, before putting her project on Kickstarter. Within two weeks it was fully funded, and WUKA was born. The brand was all about affordable underwear as well as sustainability, smashing taboos and body inclusivity.

WUKA pants have a carbon footprint that is at least five times lower than disposable pads and tampons.

After being contacted by a news organisation and doing an interview, she woke up to discover that her brand was being shared by news channels around the world.

"We went viral!" she said. "We sold everything before our first shipment had even arrived in the UK. It was a real baptism of fire into the world of business. It was a long time before we actually had stock in our hands, because it would all sell out on pre-order every time."

WUKA now employs 14 staff members, has offices and a warehouse and is stocked in supermarkets and high street stores and on wuka.co.uk. Ruby's husband Dave has even left his job to work for the brand.

## Proud to be part of the OU family

"I was determined to find a job in the subject I studied, I loved my experience of studying with the OU. I am so proud to be an OU graduate. If I hadn't studied Environmental Science I'd never have set up this purpose-driven business which has become my career," said Ruby.

"The OU changed me. My determination to do well came from my OU studies as I learnt that you have to put the work in to get the results. I now make a difference to the world every day and I am so excited to think I might encourage others to do the same."

"Who knows what's next, perhaps an MA. But I've always wanted to be a doctor. Maybe in a few years the business will be in a good enough position that I can study again!"

"Although joining and graduating from the OU was one of the hardest things I've done, it was also one of the best decisions I've made in my life," she admits.

"Remember that you made your decision to join the OU for a reason, and you will achieve your dreams. If you have the passion, determination and resilience for OU study, you can achieve anything you want in life!"

 **Learn more about WUKA**  
<https://wuka.co.uk>

 **Explore environmental science courses**  
[www.open.ac.uk/courses/environment](http://www.open.ac.uk/courses/environment)



I am so proud to be an OU graduate. If I hadn't studied Environmental Science I'd never have set up this purpose-driven business which has become my career.

**Ruby Raut**  
CEO of WUKA and OU graduate



# FASS Forward

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



The Faculty, its staff and students continue to adapt to ever-changing circumstances, and I'm pleased we've been able to move to a new blended tuition model; one which adopts the best elements of practice from both before and during the pandemic.

We've added brilliant new short courses, qualifications and modules, with further curriculum developments planned for this year. Our acquisition of the Open College of the Arts, which was agreed in July 2022, also offers exciting opportunities for the future. Our research goes from strength to strength, reflected in the results of the Research Excellence Framework 2021.

**Professor Ian Fribbance**  
Executive Dean



## Welcoming the OCA to FASS

We're delighted that the OU has acquired the Open College of the Arts (OCA), an institution grounded in the same ethos and values as the OU. Working closely with colleagues across FASS, OCA has a wide range of undergraduate degree programmes and two complimentary postgraduate degree programmes, as well as many short courses and foundation programmes in the creative arts.

Building on the distance learning expertise the OU brings, the acquisition offers significant and exciting prospects for us to further expand our capabilities in the creative arts. Widening our offering, particularly in the fields of visual, applied, and graphic arts gives the prospect of a direct creative industry offering in the future, as we also explore and build into the area of film and media. We look forward to welcoming the first enrolments of OCA-taught students as OU students from 1 August 2023.

 For more information  
[www.bit.ly/fassoca](https://www.bit.ly/fassoca)

## Award-winning innovators

Senior Lecturer in History, Professor Rosalind Crone, was awarded an Innovation in Teaching Award from the Royal Historical Society for development of her *Exploring the History of Prisoner Education* course. The free course provides flexible learning for prisoners as well as continuing professional development for staff. It offers credit towards a degree through *Making your learning count* (YXM130).

Professor Naomi Moller, Head of Psychology, and Dr Andreas Vossler, Deputy Director of Teaching (Counselling), were shortlisted for a Times Higher Education Knowledge Exchange/transfer Initiative of the Year "Oscar" for their online course *How to do online therapy: A coronavirus primer*, which attracted over 22,000 learners with over 14,000 course-completion badges.

Dr Donna Smith, Senior Lecturer in Politics, was awarded the Jennie Lee Prize for Outstanding Teaching by the Political Studies Association. The judges were particularly impressed by Dr Smith's central role in the 'Changemakers' project, launched in 2020 with partner UK Parliament Week, which impacted upon students well beyond the OU.

 Further details of the Changemakers project  
<https://fass.open.ac.uk/polis/outreach>

## New centre established

The Centre for Global Challenges and Social Justice (GCSJ) was established to provide critical, interdisciplinary insight from across the School of Social Sciences and Global Studies (SSGS). Our aim is to develop innovative, social justice-driven solutions to challenges faced by contemporary global societies by understanding the historical and structural underpinnings of contemporary societies; the systems of oppressions and inequalities they reproduce; and the resistances and struggles they generate.

From refugees to fiscal policy, citizenship to sport ethics, conflict to sustainability, the research of members of the Centre from across the School's academic disciplines is producing incisive, holistic analyses and practical resources. Follow developments in SSGS with the third edition of the SSGS magazine.

 More information  
[bit.ly/fassgroups](https://bit.ly/fassgroups)



Enniskillen Castle

 For more information  
[www.bit.ly/armybarracks](https://www.bit.ly/armybarracks)

## Uncovering the fascinating history of army barracks across Ireland

Ireland has the remains of around 400 army barracks built between the 1690s and 1921. These sites can be contested areas of historical memory, especially in border areas; varying attitudes towards the military and political perspectives can lead to different understandings of these buildings and their place in Ireland's history and culture.

An OU research project in collaboration with University College Dublin (UCD) is now making these historical buildings more accessible, with a grant awarded by The North-South Research Programme in Ireland. The project will involve mapping and recording an inventory of the Army Barracks of Ireland, 1690-1921, aiming to spark a renewed public interest in these sites.

Dr Suzanne Forbes, a Lecturer in History at the OU, co-leads the 18-month project, which began in September 2022. Together with UCD, Dr Forbes will use these studies to inform interpretation, preservation, social and economic value of historic barracks sites in the future.

It is hoped this project will strengthen research, innovation and collaboration between the OU and UCD and deepen links between higher education institutions in Ireland and Northern Ireland.

## From documentary film to the music of Dolly Parton

### Our exciting new short courses

We are expanding our provision of short courses, catering for a variety of learners. These innovative virtual learning environment based courses offer the opportunity to discover topics with 50 hours of study and a certificate of completion.

In partnership with the British Film Institute, *Media, Politics and Society* and *Reading the Screen: An Introduction to the Art of Film* launched in 2021, followed by *Film and the Environment* in October 2022, with the latest course *A Story of Documentary Film* starting in 2023.

Three new short courses from Music – *Sound Systems in popular music: from Jamaican Dub to Stadium Rock*, *Dolly Parton: Music, Identity and Culture*, and *Computer Audio: sound and music in the digital world* – also launched in October 2022.

These new courses join *Introduction to Creative Writing and Travel Writing*, with future courses in Counselling, Environment and Sustainability in development.

 For more information  
[www.bit.ly/fassnewcourses](https://www.bit.ly/fassnewcourses)

### Student Stories

## "I thought I'd lose my mind to grief, then I found the OU"

In the summer of 2016, Helen's life changed overnight after the sudden loss of Rich, her husband of 31 years. Three months later, feeling lost and looking for a bolthole, Helen started a Classical Studies degree at The Open University. What began as a distraction during the most turbulent time in her life became a sanctuary where she could escape over the next six years. "I had started an OU degree 20 years earlier, but the combination of young kids and Rich's business meant it wasn't the right time, so I never continued. This time I had a powerful motivation: the fear of losing my mind to grief."

For Helen, her lifelong interest in history and the classical world, which she shared with her husband, brought her comfort. "I just love the Ancient Greeks. I love the myths, the history, the archaeology – everything! Rich was mad about the Greek philosophers, and I love archaeology." Leaning on her studies, Helen rebuilt her confidence.



"The OU is just the best thing I ever did; the confidence it's given me is amazing. It is the best thing I've ever done for myself. I have no other qualifications, and I didn't do well at school due to personal issues, but I knew I could do it. This degree has proved so much to me. I'm now ready to continue my life and face whatever it brings, but I'll be forever grateful for having the OU to distract me. I cannot thank the OU enough."

# FBL Focus

 [business-school.open.ac.uk](http://business-school.open.ac.uk)  
[law-school.open.ac.uk](http://law-school.open.ac.uk)



There is much to be proud of in the Faculty of Business and Law; our students and alumni remind us that there are inspiring individuals in the world, our wonderful tutors continue to change lives, and academics show us their research is impactful.

The Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2021 results rated 92% of the Business School's impact cases as 'internationally excellent' or 'world-leading' and the Law School submitted to REF for the first time, with two-thirds of its impact cases rated as 'internationally excellent'. A fantastic achievement!

This year brings some exciting milestones with the Business School celebrating its 40th anniversary and the Law School marking 25 years of teaching law.

**Professor Devendra Kodwani**  
Executive Dean



## Student Stories

### GO Wales provides opportunity for Candace

Candace Louison decided to jump straight into work rather than taking up her place at University. Not wanting to put her life on hold to gain a degree, she began studying with the OU in Wales; providing her with the flexibility to take on a new OU internship opportunity when the pandemic struck.

"Unfortunately, during my second module, I was made redundant from my retail job. That was a really anxious time because I wasn't sure where I was going to go from there. Thankfully, an opportunity came up within the OU through their GO Wales virtual internships."

GO Wales aims to support students under the age of 25 access opportunities to grow their experience.

"I started the internship to gain business marketing and management experience and worked directly with the OU in Wales marketing communications team. I felt like I had the opportunity to learn some real tangible skills. And most importantly, I got a real confidence boost. I feel like I'm competent enough to apply for administration jobs because of the valuable experience that I received during the placement.

"I'd say the OU has changed me as a person. I feel that I have become more confident and proactive in shaping my future. I've now secured an internship with a start-up business as a Partnerships Coordinator. I'm currently gaining lots of experience and really enjoying my role."

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



Allan Kavuma

### Supporting forced migrants

Allan Kavuma was forced to migrate from his homeland of Uganda to the UK. He is now studying for an OU Certificate of Higher Education in Business Management following the completion of an introductory level OU Access module.

"Having moved to the UK with all the dreams and aspirations of making a life for myself, I never anticipated the challenges that lay ahead such as adapting to a new environment, culture, and dealing with immigration. I'd lost my confidence and motivation and procrastinated about whether further study was a viable option for me," Allan says.

"The OU rekindled my enthusiasm to study and offered me the chance to arrange my studies around my work. The OU also offered financial support for me to do the Access module, which was a welcome relief.

"With credit to my tutor and the systems put in place by the OU, I can always find help."

 [Read more  
www.bit.ly/valueofaccess](http://www.bit.ly/valueofaccess)



### Student and Alumni Awards

The 2022 Student and Alumni Awards was a brilliant celebration of achievements, success and academic excellence. Held on campus in Milton Keynes, the ceremony was the first face-to-face awards event since 2019, offering many students and staff the chance to meet in person for the first time.

Celia Morris, one of the 29 winners awarded, was the Business School's Alumni of the Year 2022 winner, having turned her life around following her studies with the OU. Celia is from a low-income, working-class background and by 30, was homeless, a single parent, unemployed, and suffering from depression.

At the age of 41 she decided to study with the OU and said that her MBA changed her life: "I had low self-esteem and didn't expect to succeed, so it gave me huge boost in self-confidence. I was able to pursue a career to financially support my family, travelling to Europe, Asia and the US with work and I now have a job as a Learning and Development Manager where I pass my learning onto others daily. My studies have opened so many doors for me and have been truly life-changing." Celia also won the 'Inspirational Woman of the Year Award' at the Women in Rail Awards earlier in the year.

Gordon MacKay and Brigadier Phil Prosser were the Highly Commended Alumni of the Year. Gordon progressed from project delivery to training project manager and leader on some of the most complex nuclear remediation projects on the planet, while Phil led his team to deliver vital supplies to the NHS and distribute vaccines across the UK during the Covid-19 pandemic.

 [Read more  
www.bit.ly/studentalumniawards](http://www.bit.ly/studentalumniawards)



### Law's triple success

The Law School celebrated pupillages for three of its graduates, Harrie Austin-Jones, Laurie-Elizabeth Ketley and Liam Chin. We wish them every success with their apprenticeship in becoming a member of the Bar. It's a great achievement as only 400 are available annually and 6,000 law students vie for them.

Additionally, two students, Thomas Barry and Kurt Tavares, were offered a prestigious Stephen Lawrence Scholarship at Freshfields, which is designed to address the under-representation of Black and Black mixed-race men from less privileged backgrounds in large commercial law firms.

For the second successive year, an OU student, Kathryn Der Gregorian, is a Lincoln's Inn Neuberger Prize winner, which awards exceptional students starting the final year of a law degree.

Hugh McFaul, Head of the Law School, said: "Improving access to the profession through scholarships and awards is an excellent way of opening up the legal profession to diverse groups of people. We are incredibly proud of each and every one of these students and graduates – their achievements are so well deserved."

 [Read more  
www.bit.ly/lawschoolsuccesses](http://www.bit.ly/lawschoolsuccesses)

### Finance guru's words of wisdom

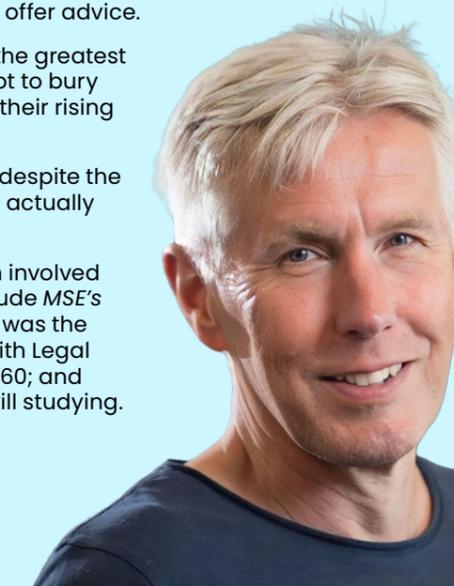
With the cost-of-living crisis and concerns of a recession dominating the headlines, personal finance expert Martin Upton (pictured) became the OU's spokesperson to offer advice.

Senior Lecturer in Finance Martin said: "The current cost-of-living crisis is the greatest challenge to households for more than 40 years," as he warned people not to bury their heads in the sand and provided guidance and tips on how to tackle their rising household costs.

Martin urged young people not to be put off university study, saying that, despite the financial commitment of higher education, having a UK university degree actually increases average lifetime earnings and so pays off in the long run.

To help people with their personal finances, the Business School has been involved in the creation of several free courses available on OpenLearn. These include MSE's *Academy of Money* which is a joint initiative with MoneySavingExpert and was the most popular course on OpenLearn in 2021; *Midlife MOT*, a collaboration with Legal and General, which is a wealth check-up for those aged between 40 and 60; and *Managing My Money For Young Adults*, a course aimed at young adults still studying.

 [View the \*Managing My Money\* course  
www.bit.ly/openlearnmoney](http://www.bit.ly/openlearnmoney)



# STEM Spotlight

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



Sustainability is never far from our thoughts in STEM - whether that involves the sustainability of our journeys through life, the sustainability of our curriculum, the coverage of sustainability in our learning or the sustainability of our planet.

The common thread is about ensuring that in meeting our needs we don't compromise the opportunities for future generations to meet theirs. We are always ready to learn from the past as we go about realising our aim to equip society for tomorrow's challenges.

**Professor Nicholas Braithwaite**  
Executive Dean



## How many leaves on an urban tree?

### PhD researcher, Kate Hand is trying to work out the answer to this question

Leaf area is an important metric to help us estimate the benefits provided by urban trees. But we don't have a lot of information on the leaf area of urban trees; it's a difficult thing to measure, and many methods of estimating leaf area haven't been validated for urban trees yet.

Kate's project aims to address this by using a range of methods to estimate the leaf area of urban trees, then validating these against a destructive sample of a tree. "This uses a tree which is already planned for felling and is plucked of every single one of its leaves to calculate the total leaf area of the tree.

"If we knew the leaf area, we'd be able to better manage these urban trees. This would mean we could plan more sustainable urban forests, but also forests which provide people living in urban areas (most of us), with the most benefits, such as removing air pollution and combating climate change to start."

By partnering with the local community, the Urban Forest Research Group, Park's Trust, and Milton Keynes Council - whose trees are being counted and measured in the study - Kate can start to better understand these urban trees.

The research will also help scientists predict the value and benefits urban trees can offer us in the future. In London, for instance, urban trees are estimated to store over 2 million tonnes of carbon, worth £147 million. These monetary values for the benefits trees provide can help us demonstrate their vitality, helping protect existing trees in our neighbourhoods and encouraging the planting of new trees where they are needed most.

 For more information  
[www.bit.ly/katehand](http://www.bit.ly/katehand)



Kate Hand

## A new integrated masters qualification – Master of Physics

The School of Physical Sciences has recently launched a new qualification, the Master of Physics (MPhys), to help students make the transition from undergraduate study to conducting research at the forefront of physics, astronomy and space science. The integrated masters programme is an exciting and accessible opportunity for more Open University students to engage with cutting-edge research in the physical sciences. This is an integrated masters, a degree that combines 360 credits at undergraduate level with 120 credits of postgraduate level study.

Students on the MPhys can choose from two specialisms: MPhys (Astrophysics with space science) and MPhys (Physics). On both specialisms, students study core topics including electromagnetism and quantum physics while developing the mathematical and experimental skills expected of a physics graduate. Students conclude their studies with a research project using facilities such as the OU's robotic telescopes.

The MPhys programme has been designed to be suitable for students with different academic backgrounds. Most students will start with some interdisciplinary science before focussing on physics and maths, however, there is also a start route aimed at those with A-level (or equivalent) physics or maths. It also offers a route that allows students who need to build their maths up from a very basic level to complete an MPhys.

 For more information  
[www.bit.ly/m06physics](http://www.bit.ly/m06physics)

### PhD student involved in the excavation of the Rutland 'Sea Dragon'

Research Student Emily Swaby was part of the team who worked on the excavation of the Rutland Sea Dragon: the largest, most complete marine reptile skeleton ever unearthed in Britain.

The specimen was discovered by Joe Davis, Conservation Team Leader at Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust, during the routine draining and maintenance of a lagoon at Rutland Water, owned and run by Anglian Water, in January 2021.



This ichthyosaur is likely to be the first of its species (*Temnodontosaurus trigonodon*) found in the country and is a sister taxon (a group of one or more populations of an organism or organisms) to *T. crassimanus*, a species that Emily and her supervisor researched whilst undertaking a Master of Philosophy at The University of Manchester.

 For more information  
[www.bit.ly/rutlandseadragon](http://www.bit.ly/rutlandseadragon)

## Success of aperiodic tiling exhibition

In November 2021, the School of Mathematics and Statistics sadly, and unexpectedly, lost a valued colleague. Uwe Grimm, professor of mathematics, joined the OU in 2000 and was an active member of the academic and associate lecturer community. He had an infectious enthusiasm for communicating his area of research expertise in aperiodic order.

To continue his legacy of actively engaging audiences with theories of aperiodic order, an exhibition was designed in his memory. Originally hosted at the OU campus in June 2022, the exhibition has since engaged and entertained hundreds of people at public events in England and Scotland.

The exhibition brings together mathematicians, engineers, scientists, and artists to share research and communicate artwork in the subject of aperiodic tilings. This included talks from leaders in aperiodic tilings and related subjects, with fascinating artwork, sculptures, 3D printing, musical art and hands-on activities produced by academics and renown artists. It highlights the interconnected relationship between mathematics and art.

 For more information  
[www.bit.ly/aperiodictilings](http://www.bit.ly/aperiodictilings)

### Student Stories

## Surprise new direction



After leaving school, Jordan pursued a degree in physiotherapy, however, the practical experience of the course didn't live up to her career expectations and she decided not to continue.

Feeling lost, Jordan was offered a job as a singing teacher some months later, and after a year in this role realised her passion for teaching.

There were, however, barriers to consider, "I realised I had a decision to make: apply for university and give up some of my teaching work or continue teaching music and never study at university at all."

Jordan had never considered The Open University until a friend suggested it. "Finding out about The Open University could not have come at a better time. My friend Alex explained that she would be able to study at home and fit her studies around her job without having to compromise on either. I couldn't believe it. I looked into the OU and the degrees they had to offer, and quickly set my mind to the mathematics degree."

Jordan says her degree has put her career path into perspective and says "Once I complete my degree, I am hoping to complete a PGCE. I still have to decide whether that will be in Primary or Secondary, but one step at a time."

# Welcome to WELS

For more information  
[wels.open.ac.uk](http://wels.open.ac.uk)



Through both our teaching and research, the work of our Faculty is taking on today's challenges by working to improve the everyday lives of people across the globe.

From our newly launched free Ukrainian language course to support UK-based host families (see page 18), to influencing the reading lives of over 180,000 children in the UK, and working in partnership with healthcare providers across the four nations to address skills shortages, we are actively making a positive difference.

**Professor Fary Cachelin**  
Executive Dean



## Reading for Pleasure celebrates fifth anniversary



In 2022, the Reading for Pleasure (RfP) coalition celebrated five years of incredible growth and successful social justice-driven projects and initiatives!

The RfP coalition was created in 2017 to ensure more young people become childhood readers, thus reaping the associated academic, social and emotional benefits and advancing social justice.

It is estimated that the group's research has influenced the reading lives of over 180,000 children thanks to its hugely popular Teachers' Reading

Groups. In 2022 a badged online course was launched on OpenLearn, to enrich participants' understanding of reading for pleasure and how it can affect children's life chances.

### Highlights from the past five years:

- ▶ Over 5,000 people participated in the Teachers' Reading Challenge, our joint initiative with The Reading Agency
- ▶ We have supported 150 schools through our school development programme since 2019
- ▶ Our work with amazing partners including UK Literacy Association, The Reading Agency, World Book Day, the School Library Association and Coram Beanstalk
- ▶ We are co-founders of the Farshore, Open University and UKLA Reading for Pleasure awards which are now in their fifth year

For more information  
[www.ourfp.org](http://www.ourfp.org)

## Balancing family, work and study

Wayne Williams from Newport decided to change his career and chose to study a PGCE with the OU in Wales to become a teacher, whilst balancing his existing commitments to his family and his job as a graphic designer.

"The part-time course can be demanding, with a lot of time spent reading and developing the necessary skills to succeed, however the teaching staff and curriculum tutors were always on hand to offer their guidance and expertise to alleviate my worries. I've successfully delivered a lesson and managed to bring all my learning and planning together. When this happens, I know I've made a difference to my learners in the classroom.

"I've always told my children to follow their passion and be happy with their actions, so I followed my advice and made the leap. I believe you'll get much more satisfaction from a job you love."

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



## Launch celebrations

An exciting new research centre, the Centre for the Study of Global Development (CSGD) has launched at an event which featured a special message of endorsement from the Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ms Amina J. Mohammed.

CSGD aims to advance human wellbeing through global development research and will support researchers, practitioners, thought leaders and policy makers to share knowledge and research evidence.

The Centre's five hubs – health and wellbeing; language and society; learners and learning; professional learning and technology; and youth and transitions – will house research projects that aim to achieve progress for, and improve the lives of, disadvantaged and marginalised groups across the world.

The core objective of research from the Centre is to advance aspects of the UN's sustainable development goals within and across all countries that relate to poverty, health, wellbeing, education, decent jobs, and employment, while also critiquing globalised development agendas.

Find out more  
[www.open.ac.uk/csgd](http://www.open.ac.uk/csgd)

## Meet the Tutor, Stuart Wroe



Stuart has been part of the OU family for 25 years, joining as an undergraduate. Today he's supporting others as a tutor on Education modules, drawing on his experiences as a student to try and be the tutor he would have valued.

Stuart was nominated by his students for a WELS Tutor Award. They described Stuart as "a wonderful tutor" and "so approachable and friendly".

Stuart, who also studied for a masters in International Development Management, has worked for many years with children, young people and their communities globally before becoming an Associate Lecturer at the OU himself.

"Global learning's personal, local and global perspective is at the heart of my teaching on *Comparative and international studies in primary education* (E309), exploring learning and teaching around the world, as well as my freelance work as a global learning specialist".

Read Stuart's story  
[www.bit.ly/stuartwroe](http://www.bit.ly/stuartwroe)

## Student Stories

### "I'm looking forward to making a difference to people's lives"



Nominated for the prestigious Student Nurse of the Year at the Student Nursing Times Awards, OU nurse apprentice Emily is following her dreams of a career helping others. After witnessing the 'amazing' end of life care her grandad received from nurses, Emily knew that she found her vocation.

"Being nominated is such a massive achievement and I'm so proud of myself. I always strive to be a role model for student nursing as I feel very grateful for the opportunities I have been given. I'm proud to represent the OU, NHS apprentices and my employer."

Emily completed a Registered Nursing Associate Foundation Degree with a brick university then just two years later, she signed up for a Registered Nurse Degree Apprenticeship, delivered by the OU at the North Cumbria Integrated Care Foundation Trust.

She shares, "My colleagues are so supportive, and my employer understands the OU really well as they employ many apprentices who are studying."

Emily says, "I can't wait to graduate next year! Completing the course will have a huge impact on my career and I'm looking forward to making a difference to people's lives."

For more information  
[www.bit.ly/studentstoryemily](http://www.bit.ly/studentstoryemily)

# A unique partnership: The BBC and the OU

The OU's unique partnership with the BBC provides us with the opportunity to educate and inspire millions of viewers, listeners and users of OU/BBC content. Sustainability and the impacts of climate change have been a key part of content commissioning in recent years. We seek to inform audiences and to provide them with online resources to explore their interest further and to find out more about the possibility of studying with the OU.

Of course, the natural world in all its environments is pretty awesome and our programmes showcase the amazing diversity of our planet, whether that's most recently from *Frozen Planet II* or from *The Green Planet*. The partnership enables us to support the University's social mission at scale with OU/BBC programmes reaching millions of people every year, but it is also important for us that we motivate audiences to take their interest in the subject matter further. There are a variety of ways for viewers to engage – whether it's by requesting one of our famous posters, which are also shared with schools and prisons; or the interactives, videos and articles from our academics; our aim is to make finding out more about the world around us and the challenges we face as accessible as possible.

 Find out more  
<https://connect.open.ac.uk>

© BBC Studios / Florian Ledoux



Sir David Attenborough

© BBC / Alex Board / Silverback Films

## Wild Isles (BBC1, March 2023)

Whilst we are all in awe of our natural environment, we also appreciate we need to actively engage to protect it, and to help restore our Wild Isles. Our new co-production for Spring 2023, presented by Sir David Attenborough, has captured some never before filmed behaviours from some of our most familiar species. The series will amaze and hopefully act as an impetus to motivate us all to appreciate and to look after our natural environments which are in significant decline. Just as in 2017, when the enormously popular *Blue Planet II* highlighted some of the disasters in our oceans, and particularly the impact of plastics, we hope that *Wild Isles* will inspire people to find out more and help look after the natural world around us for future generations. We are working with the BBC, the RSPB and WWF to launch public engagement activities across all the Nations of the UK. The OU has also produced another fantastic poster (shown right) to accompany the series, which will be available to order at the time of broadcast.



## Frozen Planet II (BBC1, September 2022)

*Frozen Planet II* was supported by the OU's academic expertise from the School of Environment, Earth & Ecosystem Sciences and revealed life in the most remote and seemingly hostile corners of our planet – not just the Polar Regions, but across all the surprising and diverse cold wildernesses on Earth.

This frozen landscape is undergoing great changes, and in Greenland, you can see the effects that planetary warming is having on the largest body of ice in the northern hemisphere.

### OU Academics

Dr Miranda Dyson  
Dr Kadmiel Maseyk  
Prof. Clare Warren  
Prof. Mark Brandon

### Supporting Curriculum

BSc (Hons) Environmental Science  
BSc (Hons) Geography and Environmental Science  
BSc (Hons) Natural Sciences (Earth Sciences)

## The Green Planet (BBC1, January 2022)

This exciting series allowed viewers to dive into a world where a single life can last a thousand years. Exciting technology and filming techniques allowed the viewer to see things no eye has ever seen, and discover Earth's dramatic, beautiful plant life.

The series travelled to remote deserts and underwater worlds. New filming techniques allow us to enter the plants' world and see it from their perspective and on their timescale. From fast-growing trees to flowers that mimic dead animals, this is a journey into a magical world that operates on a different timescale to our own.

### OU Academics

Prof. David Gowing  
Dr Julia Cooke  
Dr Yoseph Araya

### Supporting Curriculum

BSc (Hons) Environmental Science  
BSc (Hons) Geography and Environmental Science  
BSc (Hons) Natural Sciences (Biology)



Greta Thunberg

© BBC Studios / Matthew Gormly

## Greta Thunberg: A year to change the world (BBC2, April 2021)

This series followed climate activist Greta Thunberg as she took a year off school to explore the science of global warming, calling for action on climate change. In 2019 Greta embarked upon a mission that would take her across the globe to demand world leaders meet their promises to try and limit global warming. With unique access, this series followed Greta over an extraordinary year in which she comes of age and takes her fight against climate change to a global stage.

### OU Academics

Dr Emma Dewberry  
Prof. Neil Edwards  
Prof. David Humphreys

### Supporting Curriculum

BA (Hons) Environmental Studies  
BSc (Hons) Natural Sciences  
BA/BSc (Hons) Design and Innovation

## Short videos for curious minds

BBC Ideas is a platform for curious minds and our co-produced videos often feature OU academics and help support their research.

The OU's playlist features topics relating to sustainability, including

- *Is it Time to re-assess our relationship with Nature?*
- *Three Pioneers who predicted Climate Change* (also supported a Radio 4 series)
- *Could you be suffering from plant blindness?*

©BBC  
Bitesize



## Green Careers (BBC Bitesize, September 2022)

This online series meets the next generation of workers making their jobs more sustainable. 86% of children say they're serious about helping to tackle climate change (National Grid survey, 2021). Choosing a career that has a positive impact on the environment can be challenging with so many options on offer.

Inspired by and featuring some of the contributors from the recent OU/BBC Bitesize series, *The Regenerators – Green Careers*, is a series of digital videos featuring young professionals in careers as diverse as engineering, gaming and teaching, in conversation with OU colleagues from across our Faculties. Together, they challenge preconceptions around 'green' careers and demonstrate how becoming more sustainable is a responsibility that applies across all roles and industries.

# Upskill and futureproof your career

## “Flexible learning of this quality is great for professional development”

OU microcredentials are created by our world-class academics, with many endorsed by industry partners. Taking just 10-12 weeks to complete on our partner platform FutureLearn, courses cover a range of in-demand subject areas: Computing and Digital Technology, Leadership and Management, Climate Change, Environment and Sustainability, Health and Social Care, and Teacher Development and Inclusive Learning.

When Craig Finnie started his first microcredential in Online Teaching during the pandemic, he expected to learn some new skills to use at work. What he didn't expect was to complete a further three microcredentials and go on to secure a promotion.



Craig Finnie

With two undergraduate degrees already under his belt, including one from the OU, Craig was well aware that lifelong learning doesn't stop after your graduation and OU microcredentials proved to be the perfect learning solution from an organisation he trusted.



Microcredentials are a perfect solution for anyone who is serious about lifelong learning as part of their career. They suit those who want to gain new skills or prove capability in a particular subject area.

Across every sector, the pace of change in skills, training and development is increasing and we've seen a key drive from employers to deliver new training opportunities around emerging skill gaps. OU microcredentials offer high quality learning with academic credit, which can meet both employer and employee needs at speed.

**Tim Plyming**  
Managing Director, Paid Short Courses and Microcredentials, The Open University



Craig said: “I was so impressed with the quality of OU microcredentials, which I found both stimulating and challenging.” As a Development Officer for Scottish Union Learning, Craig quickly saw the benefit of his learning. “I was able to use my new skills and knowledge right away and improve my practice.”

“Microcredentials put a strong emphasis on collective learning, and I took a lot from the ideas and perspectives of the diverse group of learners on the course. Not only are microcredentials flexible, the learning is rigorous and relevant. They also carry university credit, which has provided a great boost to my CV.”

**96% of those surveyed in the last year rated the skills they gained on a microcredential as good or excellent.\***

Advance your career, develop new skills and unlock potential. Check the course pages for more information.

 **Find the right course for you**  
[www.bit.ly/oumicrocredentials](http://www.bit.ly/oumicrocredentials)

\*OU microcredential end of course survey August 21-22.

# Environmental sustainability in action

The OU places sustainability at the heart of our teaching, research, and knowledge exchange, and, as a four nation University – we champion best practice across all of the UK.

We are excited to share some projects which are helping conserve our natural resources and protect global ecosystems.

## TreeView

A part of the UK's national response to the climate change emergency is a significant increase in tree planting for carbon sequestration and storage. The OU's response includes TreeView, a fascinating project that has received funding from the UK Space Agency, which aims to improve the UK treescape through monitoring it from space. Having completed two phases of work, the team are seeking funding to build a first demonstration satellite which will provide new insights into the response of trees to our changing climate, improve our knowledge of the UK's tree population and its health, and support our understanding of changes in carbon sequestration and biodiversity.

TreeView will answer questions about the size, species distribution and potential of the UK's tree-based carbon stores and the current state, resilience and vulnerability of the UK's tree biodiversity. TreeView will provide unique new data that will assist UK scientists to pioneer world-leading services in carbon storage and ecosystem services.

 **New research funding**  
[www.treeview-mission.com](http://www.treeview-mission.com)



## Understanding climate challenges

An important new online tool which can help organisations and communities around the world adapt to climate change has been co-developed by The Open University in Scotland.

The *Traction Framework* has been piloted in very different locations, from Scotland's Outer Hebrides, which are vulnerable to storms, to Malawi in Southern Africa, where climate change threatens to increase droughts and flooding. The online tool is designed to have widespread applications around the world, at local, regional and national levels, and focuses on five key areas to help its users understand what is helping or hindering them in adapting to their climate challenges.

Funded by Scottish Government, the framework was developed by sustainability charity Sniffer, the International Institute for Environment and Development, and the OU in Scotland.

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

## The Weston Open Living Lab

The Weston Open Living Lab is an exciting new public education innovation designed by the OU. Established in summer 2022 with a founding gift from the Garfield Weston Foundation, the Lab will provide an engaging, immersive educational space to explore and challenge environmental issues and encourage a better connection between humans and the natural world. People of all ages and levels of learning will be able to develop knowledge and skills that support the conservation of the natural resources around them.

The Open Living Lab will be based on the River Ouse by the University campus in Milton Keynes (pictured left) and will regenerate the ecosystem of a floodplain woodland and use adjoining habitats to create a living science laboratory for practical teaching and engaging learning. This dynamic, living laboratory will enable observation of processes, habitats and nature, providing better opportunities for nature-based solutions to issues such as climate change.

The OU is a hub for innovation in environmental and ecosystems education, and all data collected will support learning around ecosystem processes and activity.

 **Explore the OpenSTEM Labs**  
[www.bit.ly/openstemlabs](http://www.bit.ly/openstemlabs)

# Free learning for life, for everyone

OpenLearn is the home of free learning from the OU and breaks down barriers to education by providing free, accessible education. There are a wide range of subjects with around 1,000 courses to discover, some are based on Open University course materials and others are written specifically for OpenLearn.



## Further help for those supporting Ukrainians in the UK

In 2022, The Open University launched a new free online course for people housing, caring for, or working with Ukrainians in the UK. *Introduction to Ukrainian language and culture* has been developed to help UK residents hosting refugees, and service providers working with people who have arrived from Ukraine.

Hosted on OpenLearn, the course provides an insight into Ukrainian language, food, housing, and healthcare as well as other cultural elements. It also offers learners the chance to chat in specially designed forums, to find out more about how they can help during Ukraine's struggle and any other Ukraine-related topics.

Alongside the new course, which will be added to the Open Centre for Languages and Cultures, the OU's package of free online resources for Ukrainian refugees unveiled earlier this year has also been translated into Ukrainian. This includes courses from learning English language to articles on writing a CV.

Vice-Chancellor, Professor Tim Blackman, commented: "As the appalling situation in Ukraine and the plight of those whose lives have been upended due to the conflict sadly continues, the OU is further enhancing our package of support. Across The Open University, we will continue to seek ways to mobilise our efforts as a university to support people from Ukraine as they find refuge in our four nations."

Work to translate more of the resources into Ukrainian is planned, and OpenLearn is working with the OU's Development Office to seek further funding for the project.

 Access the resource hubs  
[www.openlearn.com/ukraine](http://www.openlearn.com/ukraine)

 The Open Futures Fund

## Over 500 futures now full of hope and opportunity

This year marks five years since we started to build our scholarships and support programmes and we could not be more proud of what has been achieved. The Open Futures Fund provides life-changing scholarships and bursaries with the central aim being to keep education open to all. A very special milestone has now been achieved with over 500 scholarships and bursaries awarded, and this is only possible thanks to the incredible kindness and generosity of the OU family of donors, supporters and ambassadors.

Over the last five years the Fund has continued to grow, offering more life-changing scholarships and bursaries to those facing some of the greatest barriers to education. In 2018 Disabled Veterans' Scholarships launched, providing 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.

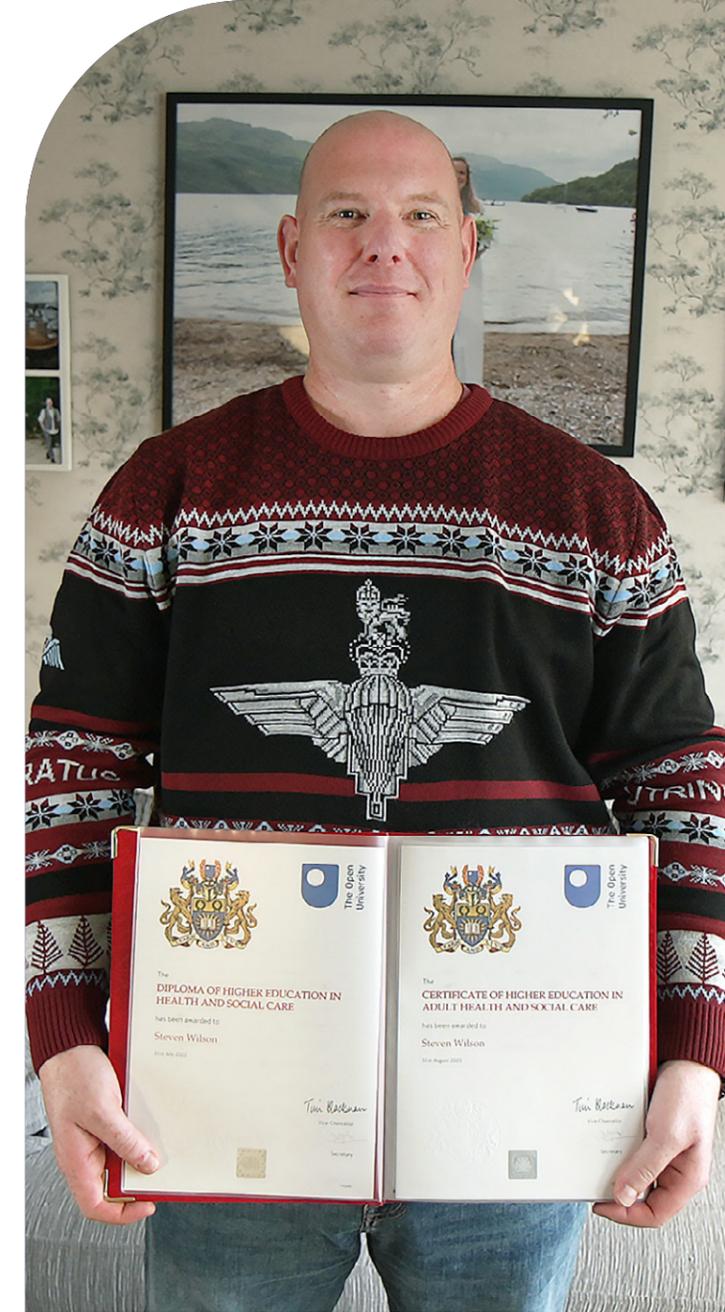
This was followed by the Carers Scholarships in 2019 as part of the University's 50th anniversary celebrations. This offers support for unpaid carers or those who have recently stopped being a carer, helping them develop a sense of identity outside of caring and retrain towards seeking employment.

The impact of these two scholarships programmes is being realised more than ever as we see our first students graduating and hearing so many incredible and inspiring stories on how an Open University education is helping to transform their lives and rewrite their futures, such as disabled veteran Steven Wilson.

Last October saw us welcome the first students onto the Sanctuary Scholarships and Black Students Support programmes. Sanctuary Scholarships gives students seeking refuge for themselves and their families the opportunity to build a new life and hopeful future through education by providing 12 scholarships each year for the next three years. The Black Students Support programme was created to provide scholarships and bursaries to Black students from disadvantaged backgrounds, supporting them to overcome barriers and inequalities in higher education.

So much has been achieved through the Open Futures Fund and all of this has only been made possible due to the collective power of philanthropy. Thanks to the compassion and thoughtfulness of each and every donor, over 500 students now have access to education and can dream of futures full of hope and opportunity. We can't wait to see what these inspiring students achieve through the power of education.

 Learn about the Open Futures Fund  
[www.bit.ly/openfuturesfund](http://www.bit.ly/openfuturesfund)



### Student Stories

## Steven Wilson

Steven Wilson served as a Private in the 1st Battalion Parachute Regiment and put his life on the line rescuing hostages in a top-secret mission.

It was during the mission that Steven was involved in an explosion and suffered multiple shrapnel wounds. The injuries were so severe that Steven had to endure open surgery in the field and was later discharged. This period of his life was extremely difficult, as he struggled to adapt to life outside of the military.

Over 20 years on, Steven now says his life has changed considerably. He was awarded a scholarship to study with the OU and has now achieved a Diploma in Adult Health and Social Care.

 Read Steven's Story  
[alumni.open.ac.uk/stories/steven](http://alumni.open.ac.uk/stories/steven)

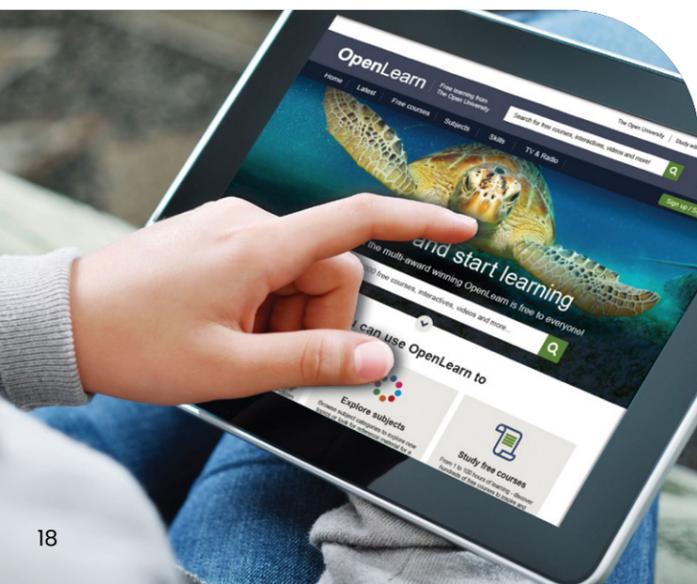
This year, we have added a plethora of new content and courses to OpenLearn. We are also delighted to report some of the very promising milestones achieved in our mission to inspire and inform as many learners as possible.

The *Supporting female performance in sport and fitness* badged course and accompanying animations proved very popular, as did the social media campaign to find the best female sporting performances of 2022, with the Lionesses, England's women's football team, unsurprisingly the most popular nomination!

*Good hair: perceptions of racism* a new immersive interactive film, is part of the ever-growing Race and Ethnicity Hub and has already been shortlisted for several awards and film festival screenings; the extremely popular *MoneySavingExpert's Academy of money* course passed 50,000 enrolments. OpenLearn saw 16 million visits to the site last year, awarding 44,000 digital badges and we expect to reach the landmark quarter of a million in the coming weeks.

Please visit OpenLearn to see what it can do for you.

 Explore OpenLearn today  
[www.openlearn.com](http://www.openlearn.com)





# Changing how we do research

## Open Societal Challenges

In 2021, we consulted widely with staff, students and alumni to determine the research themes which we should focus on going forward, the three core focus areas are:

### Living Well

This multidisciplinary research area applies expertise from health and life sciences to psychology, sociology and computer science to help people live well worldwide in whatever their circumstances. In a post-pandemic world, it has never been more evident that ensuring safety and security for the most vulnerable, building communities, tackling taboos and supporting emotional, mental and economic wellbeing are also essential to our physical health and society.

Our work addresses complex challenges from preventing and curing physical diseases such as prostate cancer and diabetes to empowering people to live well into later life, supporting emotional and mental wellbeing and suicide prevention.

### Tackling Inequalities

The OU understands tackling issues such as migrant inequalities require an intersectional approach because race and ethnicity are experienced through situated contexts including poverty, education, gender, and geopolitics.

Our academics seek to understand and tackle inequalities by working together to bring the best knowledge and expertise to bear on our world's existential challenges. Our passions drive our research, from tackling religious intolerance and online violence against women and girls to the inequalities LGBTQ+ people face, racial and ethnic educational disadvantages and unequal access and opportunities for disabled people.

### Sustainability

This means more than just reducing greenhouse gas emissions. OU researchers work here because they believe in our social mission and that combatting the climate crisis also means protecting people's rights and improving living conditions now and for future generations worldwide.

OU researchers aim to bring together experts from anthropologists to astrobiologists and political scientists to physicists to address diverse challenges, from engaging indigenous communities in environmental protection to building carbon-neutral cities. Our research supports a more sustainable planet by creating a shared understanding, identifying opportunities, and bringing people together.

## OU Research Plan 2022–2027

For more than 50 years, the OU has been conducting research, and playing a vital part in research projects which have had a significant impact on the world around us. The OU's research is strongly aligned with our mission to be open to people, places, methods and ideas and our REF 2021 (Research Excellence Framework) performance confirmed our strength and depth across all Faculties.

In September 2022, a new OU Research Plan was launched to align with the OU Live & Learn Strategy, running up to 2027.

The period from 2021–2022 was an important time for the University with our new Research Plan approved by Senate and its implementation in full swing. Engagement across the University and with external supporters to develop our Plan has been superb and creates a solid foundation for enhancing our research and its impact on society across the four nations of the UK and internationally.

The new Research Plan provides us with an opportunity to build on our strengths by:

- ▶ Drawing on our concentrated centres of excellence to support major research collaborations
- ▶ Building on our reputation for openness to become sector leaders in fostering an open research culture
- ▶ Creating a more diverse staff and research student population to bring a broad range of perspectives and experiences into our research culture and environment across our faculties and in each of the four Nations

 [Read more  
www.open.ac.uk/research](http://www.open.ac.uk/research)

# Showcasing The Open University's pioneering social impact research

In 2022, the University launched the **People's Choice Award**, putting four cutting-edge research projects to a public vote. The shortlisted projects were featured in docuseries led by British model and environmentalist Lily Cole.

The nominated projects were:

### ▶ How can we help sex-trafficking survivors rebuild their lives?

Dr Saraswati Dawadi is a Co-Investigator on a project led by Dr Margaret Ebubedike, conducting vital research into improving the lives of human trafficking survivors. This research is already empowering marginalised communities in Nepal and Nigeria and giving victims the support and skills to help themselves and others.

### ▶ How can we "age well", and what does that really mean?

Dr Jitka Vseteckova has helped more than 30,000 people to learn the theories and practices essential to living longer and healthier lives. She has shared her five pillars for good health and longevity; nutrition, hydration, physical activity, and cognitive and social stimulation through more than 80 public talks and free OpenLearn online learning resources.

### ▶ How can we improve the education system in India?

Dr Simon Cross, Professor Freda Wolfenden and Dr Lina Adinolfi are addressing a critical skills gap in India's teaching profession by empowering thousands of the country's teachers to earn digital badges for completing free online courses. They've also put the qualifications which demonstrate teachers' interest in a subject and evidence of their commitment to professional development on the policy agenda across the country.

### ▶ How does researching water on the Moon improve sustainability of resources and health on Earth?

Professor Mahesh Anand, Dr Simeon Barber, and Dr Simon Sheridan's pioneering work to extract water and its component hydrogen and oxygen molecules from lunar rock paves the way for humans living on the Moon. One day, it could also see our closest satellite become a base for future space exploration. Back on Earth, the technology could provide clean drinking water in drought areas and even extract water and rare metals, such as lithium, from mine waste.



The work I do is so close to my heart and my heritage. Having led rural development projects in the Lake Chad country region, I've experienced first-hand how critical empowering girls and young women is in these kinds of communities.

The human trafficking project is fostering creative spaces for the girls to express themselves, to articulate their daily challenges and concerns about their future aspirations, and to reconstruct their identity in ways which empower them to reintegrate and make meaningful contributions to their communities.

We hope to not only help these young girls and women in the short term, but to create long lasting, sustainable change.

**Dr Margaret Ebubedike**  
People's Choice Award winner



After devoting five years of my working life to how we can help trafficking survivors rebuild their lives, it's an honour to have the importance of these types of projects recognised by the UK public.

The research we are doing is opening our eyes to the needs of girls in marginalised communities. It's about empowering victims of sex trafficking by giving them the support and skills to help themselves and others.

**Dr Saraswati Dawadi**  
People's Choice Award winner



These projects caught the attention of the media, raising awareness of what we do to audiences around the world. On her involvement in the project, Lily Cole commented:

"I was fascinated to learn about the research underway at The Open University. I knew of the OU as a place for online learning but hadn't realised how much else it has going on in terms of really exciting academic research.

"The researchers' passion for their respective areas really shone through when I spoke to them. Given the different social and environmental crises we collectively face, academic institutions and universities like the OU are in a powerful position to help us find and develop innovative solutions."



The public vote chose 'How can we help sex-trafficking survivors rebuild their lives?' as the winning project

[Read more  
www.bit.ly/peopleschoicevote](http://www.bit.ly/peopleschoicevote)



# Help to navigate your future

After working hard for your qualification, we aim to help it work hard for you, with support from the OU's Careers and Employability Services to achieve your life goals.

Each year, more alumni are turning to the OU's Careers and Employability Services, and we are ready and waiting to help. In fact, we were delighted to support 62% more alumni in the academic year 2021/22 than in the previous year.

Perhaps you'd like to discover where your OU qualification could take you or want to explore different pathways with a specific career in mind. Maybe you just need to make sure your applications, CV and interview technique tell employers what they want to hear. Everyone is different, everyone is valued, so we'll help you succeed, whatever your career needs, your background and whoever you are. Just bring yourself.

Our professional and experienced careers team can help you navigate your future for up to three years after you qualify. Follow the link below to find out how. If you qualified more than three years ago, you can still access a wealth of careers information and advice in the 'Careers' section of the Help Centre.

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

## GCAS scholarships in Scotland

Graduate Career Advantage Scotland (GCAS) offers careers support and flexible, paid internships for those who finished their Dip HE, first or postgraduate degree or PhD in 2022 or early 2023. If you're aged 29 or under and meet one or more of the scheme's criteria, search for the GCAS Talent Pool on OpportunityHub to find out more.

 **Log in to the OpportunityHub**  
[www.bit.ly/loginopportunityhub](http://www.bit.ly/loginopportunityhub)

## OU in Wales GROW programme

GROW – Graduate Opportunities Work Experience – offers support to OU in Wales graduates who have graduated since 2019 and are unemployed or underemployed. GROW helps graduates prepare for their next steps, manage any individual challenges they face and explore their ambitions. The programme also arranges paid work experience placements. If you'd like to find out more about the support on offer from GROW and the work experience placements available, get in touch by email.

 **Email to find out more**  
[graduates-wales@open.ac.uk](mailto:graduates-wales@open.ac.uk)

# OU students becoming the future of business

The Open University was founded on principles of openness and its distance learning model has provided hundreds of thousands of students the opportunity to study whilst working, balancing family life and, in some cases, setting up their own businesses.

Many OU students have turned their hobbies and passions into successful businesses with the support of the University. You can be inspired by just some of the OU student entrepreneurs who are juggling start-ups with their studies.

 **Could you be an entrepreneur in 2023?**  
[www.bit.ly/2023entrepreneur](http://www.bit.ly/2023entrepreneur)



### Karen Oliver

Karen turned her health blog into a coaching business to support those struggling with eating disorders. She's now studying Psychology with the OU to expand her business into a private practice.

She said: "The support, resources, and advice I've received from The Open University as a student entrepreneur has been a game-changer for my business."

"The OU is set up and designed for distance learning, so I knew I would be well supported. I can fit my studies around all my other commitments as a single parent and business owner."



### Allana Francis-Ashmeil

Known as 'Coach Ace' to her students, Allana launched her children's coaching business during her OU Sport and Fitness degree. After struggling with dyslexia at school, she says the OU gave her the support and confidence to succeed. And she's now eager to inspire sports stars of the future.

She said: "I always wanted to set up a business in sport to 'give back'. OU study made me feel I had the capability to do more."



### Nick Bassan

Business Studies graduate Nick launched a smart-tech clothing brand while completing his degree. After two attempts at university, Nick says the OU gave him the freedom and flexibility he needed to succeed.

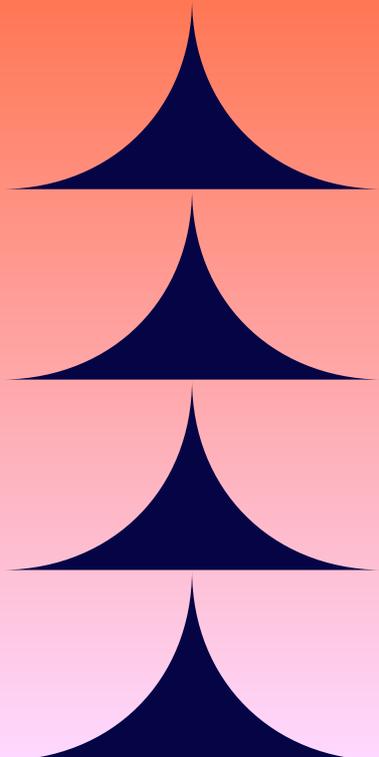
"I was able to apply learnings from my course to both the job I work at and the business I'm developing. It was a match made in heaven," he said. "I love the freedom that the OU gave me. The OU is so well built for the digital age and perfectly suited to me as an entrepreneur."



### Carly McCluskey

Carly from Glasgow launched a plant-based business during the pandemic with the aim of making breakfast more environmentally friendly. She says studying Business Management with the OU is giving her all the skills and practical knowledge she needs to make her 'vegan egg' business a success.

She said: "My degree has helped me in so many ways, from learning the basics of accounting, so I can do the books for our business, to learning the basics of marketing to help promote it and create social media campaigns."



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# Together, let's take pride in keeping education open to all

Now, more than ever, our OU family must stand together to help **keep education open** to those who might otherwise miss out.

This is our **shared ambition**. It's what binds us together as an alumni family and makes the OU so special for us all; it's at the very heart of our social justice mission; and it's never been more needed. **Please will you join with us by giving others the same life-changing chance of an education today?**

These are **challenging times**. Increasing numbers of people are finding that rising costs, the squeeze on incomes and concerns for the future are making life harder than ever for them and their families. In these incredibly difficult times, giving the gift of education is vital and urgent. Education has the power to not only provide knowledge, but to offer hope, opportunity, and a light at the end of the tunnel.

This is particularly affecting many potential higher education students who are already **struggling to cope** and face more barriers to education than ever before. These include disabled veterans, carers, Black students from disadvantaged backgrounds, and those seeking refuge in the UK from threats to their lives. Keeping education open to all has never been so urgent!

For these people especially, higher education can be the **key to transforming their lives and rewriting their futures**. That's why it's so crucial that education must be kept open to them. Your kindness and compassion can help make this happen. **Will you please help** by supporting more life-changing scholarships through our Open Futures Fund?

**Please make your gift today to help keep education open to more people desperately hoping for a fresh chance in life.**

[Donate Now](#)

# In these challenging times, please be the hope so many desperately need

As a member of our amazing OU alumni family, I hope you share the pride we can all feel in how the OU continues to be a beacon of openness and inclusion in our society. This has only been made possible through the kindness and generosity of wonderful alumni like you, for which everyone is hugely grateful.

Today, the need to keep education open to all is more vital than ever. I know that these are difficult times for so many, but this is even more so for those already facing considerable challenges and adversity in their lives. More and more people are desperately hoping to access higher education to give themselves and their families a better chance in life. But too many of them simply can't afford it, or may face other barriers such as disabilities, caring responsibilities and more. Plus, the increasing numbers of applications we're receiving for scholarships far exceeds our available funds.

By making your donation today you can help provide an Open Futures Fund scholarship for more people like Rebekah (see below). You'll be giving them the chance to transform their lives and rewrite their futures through the power of education, in the same way as I hope it has done for you too. You'll also be making a lasting difference to their families and our society as a whole.

So, please show you stand beside those like Rebekah at this time and help keep education open to all. You can make a life-changing difference to someone by sending your donation today. Thank you so much!

*Mark Parsons*

**Mark Parsons**  
Head of Alumni Fundraising

*P.S. With a gift today  
you can transform  
lives by helping  
more people like  
Rebekah access an  
OU education*



## The Open Futures Fund

Your support today for our Open Futures Fund can help keep education open to all by providing a range of scholarships, bursaries and financial support for students, including:

- **Disabled Veterans' Scholarships**  
ensure veterans injured during or due to service are empowered to rewrite their own futures. Through the programme, these brave servicemen and women receive the opportunity to study with the OU for free, with specialist disability and career support, so they can reskill for the civilian jobs market and rebuild their lives.
- **Carers Scholarships**  
offer carers the opportunity to study with the OU for free, so they can develop their sense of identity outside of caring and retrain towards seeking employment.
- **Black Students' Support**  
provides assistance for Black students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Inequalities still exist across higher education and unless action is taken now, the Degree Award Gap will continue to put Black students at a stark disadvantage.
- **Sanctuary Scholarships**  
for people arriving into the UK seeking refuge from threats to their lives, providing them with the opportunity to build a new life for themselves and their families.

**The Open University:  
Keeping education  
open to all**

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# How keeping education open to Rebekah is transforming her life and rewriting her future

Rebekah is a carer for her son Jack, who devastatingly suffered a stroke whilst being born. Jack also has cerebral palsy, experiencing daily seizures and suffers from other complex needs requiring a high level of care. Jack, now 13, needs help with personal care, eating and dressing, and must attend many regular hospital appointments, with Rebekah prioritising his and her other two children's needs alongside the demands of a busy family life.

For many like Rebekah it can be incredibly challenging to balance caring responsibilities alongside work commitments, and in Rebekah's case, she felt pressure to leave a previous job having needed time off to support Jack after major surgery. As a result, Rebekah has only been able to work for brief periods in low paid work and gave up her place at a traditional brick University as Jack's care needs were too high to make studying on campus possible. She was devastated that she could not take up her place to study for a degree but caring for her poorly son was far more important.

Rebekah knows and gladly accepts that as Jack's mum she will be his carer for life.

"It's really tough, but I know I still have something to offer, and I desperately wanted to study for a Law degree. I was browsing the OU site and found Carers' Scholarships – part of the Open Futures Fund. I was totally overwhelmed and thrilled when I heard I had been successful."

Rebekah is incredibly passionate about carers' rights and believes that the systems around families should support and encourage carers to pursue their own interests and career outside of their caring role.

As is the case for many carer families, the loss of an income from paid work can have devastating financial consequences, especially in light of the current cost of living crisis. Rebekah's own family manage on a tight budget, and if it had not been for the scholarship, she wouldn't have been able to fulfil her dream to study law and rewrite her future.



As a carer I have often felt invisible, unvalued, and lonely. My study has given me a new purpose and is a huge affirmation that people like me are worth investing in. I would love to do something positive with my Law degree and ultimately even become a barrister and help promote carers' rights. With the OU's amazing help, I have already found some opportunities to begin this quest.

To anyone considering supporting the OU's Open Futures Fund, I would say that this is a fund that truly can transform lives. A scholarship can be the change that alters a carer and their family's outcome, and without it, I would never have been able to study like this. To me, this is exactly the heart of the OU's mission, to keep education open to all. Thank you so much!

**Rebekah**  
Carers Scholarship recipient



Donate Now

Please make your donation by giving online at [alumni.open.ac.uk/donate](https://alumni.open.ac.uk/donate) or calling 01908 655 044. Thank you – your support is hugely appreciated by us all!



What the scholarship offers, is a truly life-changing and truly invaluable opportunity. It reflects the values, kindness and difference, that a combination of The Open University and scholarship donors can bring together, to help others like me. Thank you so much.

Hollie  
**Carers Scholarship recipient**



This is an amazing opportunity, it gives others a light at the end of the tunnel, the chance to retrain for a job that would bring meaning and brings a sense of purpose back to their lives.

Steven  
**Disabled Veterans' Scholarship recipient**



The scholarship provides me with an opportunity to finish my studies which were interrupted by the war. Completing a degree will open many job opportunities for me, and simply guarantee a more stable future of living in the UK... Lots of plans and dreams are wrecked but people are not upset, many receive help, and everyone is grateful for that.

**Sanctuary Scholarship recipient**



Words cannot begin to explain the extent of the significance that providing this scholarship opportunity means to me, including the positive impact it will have on my future. Having personal experiences of trauma and setbacks in life, this truly provides me with a chance to take back my educational power! While looking into courses, I came across this amazing opportunity, and it was all the encouragement I needed to proceed. I personally want to thank all that have worked hard to put this scholarship in place. I will be sure to make you proud!

**Black Students' Support recipient**



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We always love to hear from you, so please get in touch if you have any questions or comments.