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Issue 225  
Spring 2005

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# KEEP IT COMING

**C**HANGING a tried and trusted format is always a bit of a gamble and we must admit to a few nerves as we waited for your reaction to the first new-look **sesame**. In fact the response has been overwhelmingly positive.

Top of the list of your comments was that the new format is more durable and easier to handle; particularly handy for one correspondent who likes to read it in the bath. You found the new design attractive and felt that the layout makes it easier to find your way around.

But nothing's perfect. We've already addressed some of your comments in this issue by moving the Letters page up nearer the front and making sure we include some science questions in the crossword, which we're making a regular feature. And for those readers who were unhappy about the 'political' content in the Interview, we should say that **sesame** will remain a platform for the views of all Open University students; but as a publication we are politically neutral, except where we see politics has a direct bearing on the welfare of students, as in the issue of student funding (see News page 5).

Please keep your comments coming. Let us know what you think about what we print, and let us know if there's something you'd like to see included which isn't.

In the next, Summer, issue we'll be carrying out a survey of your views on **sesame** magazine and the website. Oh no, not *another* questionnaire, we hear you cry, but we hope as many readers as possible will take the time to respond because this is the most representative way for us to canvass your opinions.

Finally: in the Summer **sesame** we are looking to feature a Debate on summer schools – what use are they, and is the move away from compulsory summer schools a loss or gain? So if you have strong views on the subject, and think you might like to expand on them in print, please get in touch.

*Yvonne Cook, Editor*



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# Titanic success for OU

**O**PEN University space scientists celebrated their greatest ever success by landing a probe on Saturn's largest moon, Titan.

Huygens' successful completion of its seven-year, two billion-mile journey ended in January with it landing further away from Earth than any previous probe or craft in the history of space exploration – and the fact we can see and hear information from Titan is down to equipment designed by scientists from The Open University.

The OU's Planetary and Space Sciences Research Institute (PSSRI)

played a vital role in the building of the Huygen's Surface Science Package, which records properties of the landing site and the atmosphere. The PSSRI team has also contributed to a Cosmic Dust Analyser and the probe's "accelerometry subsystem", which determined the density of the moon's upper atmosphere.

"I feel like an explorer discovering a new world – in fact I think I can claim to be one!" said OU professor John Zarnecki, who is the lead scientist gathering surface data. Photographs taken during Huygens' descent show valleys and possible seas or lakes, and other data suggests the temperature on Titan is about -180°C.

The probe landed among grapefruit-sized rocks that are probably frozen balls of ice. "The rocks are resting on beds that have the consistency of wet clay or sand, or crème brûlée," added Professor Zarnecki.

"This suggests the soil might consist of crushed water ice

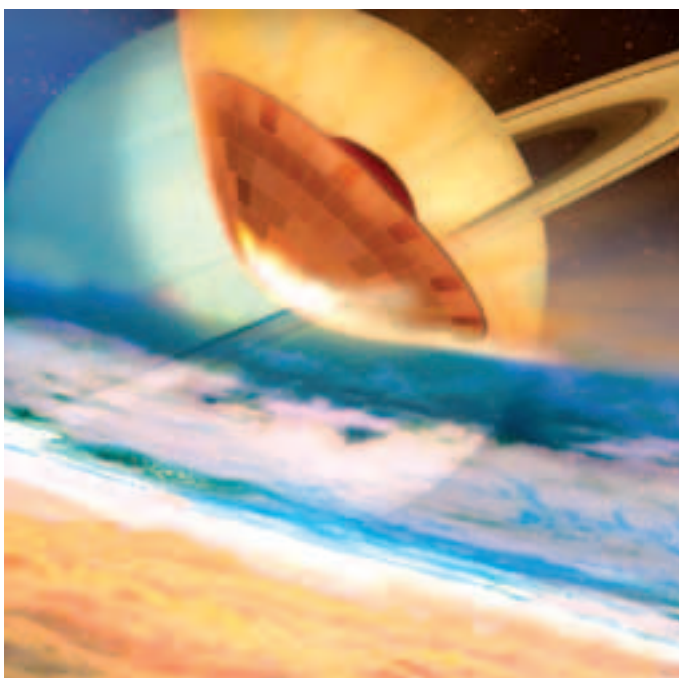
mixed with liquid methane and an oily, tarry substance made of more complex hydrocarbon molecules. I am desperate to get back to the science data which I hope will reveal more of what the enigmatic Titan consists of."

**"I feel like an explorer  
discovering a new world"**

Huygens was carried to Titan by European Space Agency ESA/NASA craft Cassini, which was launched from Cape Canaveral in 1997, and had investigated Venus and Jupiter before unloading its probe at the edge of Saturn's orbit.

Professor Zarnecki said: "It is a tremendous privilege to be part of an international team which has sent a spacecraft to another body in the solar system and for our instrument, designed and built in the UK, to be the first point of contact with Titan's surface."

The success is a huge boost for the OU's space scientists a year after Professor Colin Pillinger's Beagle 2 craft failed to make contact from Mars. To find out the latest from the Huygens project visit <http://cepsar.open.ac.uk> To hear sounds and see images from Titan go to <http://saturn.esa.int>



Artist's impression of the Huygens probe's descent

Picture: ESA-D. DUCROS

## OU is top of the (teaching) class

THE quality of Open University teaching received a glowing endorsement when the OU topped the table of universities which will host the government's new excellence in teaching centres.

The OU is one of only two universities in England (the other is Plymouth) to be awarded funding to establish four Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETLs).

The two main aims of CETLs are to 'reward excellent teaching practice', and to further invest in that practice to benefit students, teachers and institutions, according to the funding body, the Higher Education Funding Council for England. Those to be established at the OU are in:

- Work-based Learning for Professional Development, which will look at professional learning and student employability, building on the work that has been going on in the university's health, education and business programmes.

- Open Learning of Mathematics, Science, Computing and Technology, which will develop improved student support methods for the 90,000-plus OU students who are currently studying maths, science or technology courses.

- Personalised, Integrated Learning Support which will build on the university's expertise in supporting a diverse student population.

- Innovative Physics Teaching, which is a collaboration with the Universities of Leicester and Reading, and will devise new ideas for the teaching of physics and astronomy.

The OU is also a partner in a fifth CETL, led by Newcastle University, focusing on Inclusion in Contemporary Music Culture.

"This success is a reflection of the high regard in which the quality of The Open University's teaching is held both nationally and internationally," said the OU's Vice-Chancellor Brenda Gourley.

The OU CETLs are expected to start work this spring.

# Part-timers' cash boost

PEOPLE who study part-time are to get more government help to pay their fees.

The Department for Education and Skills has pledged to raise the maximum amount students can claim in financial assistance from £575 to £885 per year, along with an annual course grant of £250.

It's welcome news for OU students as their university still waits to hear how government and the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) will respond to its case for additional support when top-up fees are introduced across the sector.

The financial assistance initiative, announced recently by Higher Education Minister Dr Kim Howells, will for the first time link the amount of cash given to the "intensity" of study – meaning that, for

example, those who study 75 per cent of the time can claim more money than those studying 50 per cent.

The increase comes in from September, with single students qualifying for full support if they earn less than £14,970 a year. Students with partners can earn up to £16,970 and still claim, and the threshold is higher still for those with dependent children. Those who earn more than these sums may still qualify for partial support.

## Commitment?

Dr Howells announced the changes by saying: "This government was the first to provide financial support for part-time students and we are honouring our commitment to do even more to support them. The needs of part-time students are very different from their full-time

counterparts and... our policy of having separate arrangements for part-time students is the right one."

But the OU is still waiting to hear just how much of a "commitment" the government will show part-time students over the thorny issue of top-up fees. HEFCE was due to announce towards the end of February – after **sesame** went to press – whether it would compensate the OU for the substantial financial disadvantage it will face when the fees are introduced at conventional universities.

The OU argues that allowing other universities to charge top-up fees for the full-time courses – to be introduced in 2006 – will give those institutions significantly better resources to invest in teaching and learning.

*turn to page 6*

## Open Day is 18 June

OU Open Day is at the Walton Hall campus, Milton Keynes on Saturday 18 June this year. From 11am to 5pm academic units will be hosting displays and activities to showcase their teaching and research. There will be food on sale, activities to interest all ages and a chance to unwind with entertainment on campus from 8pm to midnight. Visitors can camp on campus from Friday 17 June from 6pm until 12 noon on Sunday 19 June, for a one-off charge of £5 per tent or caravan. For further details see [www.open.ac.uk/](http://www.open.ac.uk/) and updates will also be available on the **sesame** website [www.open.ac.uk/sesame](http://www.open.ac.uk/sesame)

## Anyone for golf?

STUDENTS and alumni are invited to join staff for a day of golf in the fifth Annual Open University Staff and Student Golf Challenge. It takes place at the OU's home course, The Millbrook, Bedfordshire, on Thursday 19 May. A fun nine-hole scramble will be followed by the main event – individual, full handicap Stableford over 18 holes. The day's golf plus lunch costs only £20. Students and alumni with current handicaps can enter by contacting Andy Harding, Faculty of Technology, OU, Walton Hall MK7 6AA, email [a.v.harding@open.ac.uk](mailto:a.v.harding@open.ac.uk) or phone +44 (0)1908 653328. Places will be allocated strictly on a first come, first served basis.

## New government systems course

A NEW OU course is helping to shape policies in Whitehall. T188 *Making policies work: systems thinking in government and management* is a result of OU systems expert Professor Jake Chapman's work reviewing government working methods. The 10-point course, which starts in May and again in October offers a brief tour of the OU's whole systems curriculum.

## TV lecture on Hitler

HOW did Adolf Hitler rise to power? This is one of the questions explored in the Open University Annual Lecture, to be broadcast on BBC4 in April 30. Professor Sir Ian Kershaw, one of the world's leading authorities on the life of the Nazi leader, will give the 60-minute address.

# PM gets science lesson

TONY Blair dubbed the OU's space science programme "fantastic" on a recent visit to the university's Walton Hall campus in Milton Keynes in February.

He told Professor John Zarnecki of the OU's Planetary and Space Sciences Research Institute (PSSRI) that the university's involvement in the successful Cassini-Huygens mission to Saturn's moon Titan was "a great piece of work".

Mr Blair said he was fascinated to learn that Titan could teach scientists about the formation of the Earth. "I've learned so much here today," he said. "I missed out on science at school."

The Prime Minister's visit, during which he met the OU's Vice-Chancellor Brenda Gourley, was part of a countrywide tour in the run-up to a general election. He took part in a live television discussion on campus for Five News.



The PM learns about science from Professor Zarnecki (right)

## IN BRIEF

### Library even more open

THE Open University Library and Learning Resources Centre at Milton Keynes has extended its opening hours. Access to the Library's extensive reference and lending collections and study facilities is available until 9pm on Tuesdays and Thursdays and all day on Saturdays. More details and access to online resources is available 24 hours a day at [www.open.ac.uk/library](http://www.open.ac.uk/library) (click on 'Walton Hall' for full details of extended opening).

### Sponsor a robot

OU tutor Nicky Hughes is inspiring a generation of girls to turn to technology. The East of England region tutor coaches teams to take part in international robotics competitions as part of her job as an ICT teacher at Amberfield School near Ipswich. Her two RoboDance teams made it to the UK Finals of the RoboCupJunior in 2004; the girls are hoping to repeat their success by qualifying to represent the UK at RoboCup 2005 to be held in Osaka, Japan in July. If you can offer help or advice on sponsorship, please contact Nicky at [nah42@tutor.open.ac.uk](mailto:nah42@tutor.open.ac.uk)

### Fiona's cycling for Mencap

SHEFFIELD Psychology student Fiona Mitchell is training to take part in a 250-mile cycle ride through China to raise money for the charity Mencap. Fiona, who is studying with the OU to enable a career change from engineer to educational psychologist, has been a volunteer worker for Mencap since she was a teenager. For more about her ride, or to sponsor her, visit [www.smurftastic.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk](http://www.smurftastic.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk)

### Open Eye in *The Independent*

THE OU Alumni office extends a warm welcome to all new students and best wishes for your studies. Passing your course will mean you are eligible to become a member of the OU Alumni Association, a community of more than two million former students of the OU. The Alumni Association bulletin *Open Eye* is printed in *The Independent* newspaper on the first Tuesday of every month, with stories and news about the OU of interest to alumni and students. Why not get yourself a copy? Next issue on the newsstands 5 April.

## NEWS

More news online at  
[www.open.ac.uk/sesame](http://www.open.ac.uk/sesame)

# Culture club

THE Open University will be supporting a number of cultural leaders this year to bring thought-provoking events to a wider audience.

**Brighton Festival** 7 - 29 May brings the best in world dance, theatre, classical and contemporary music as well as books and debates and street arts. On Saturday 14 May, The Open University will be supporting one of the highlights of the Festival, a screening of the powerful film *Battleship Potemkin* at The British Engineerium, Hove. The film will be accompanied by a world premiere performance of a newly commissioned score composed by Ed Hughes and performed by the New Music Players. For further information call the Box Office on +44 (0)1273 709709 or visit [www.brighton-festival.org.uk](http://www.brighton-festival.org.uk)

**Hay Festival** 27 May - 5 June attracts 85,000 people from all over the world to join a carnival celebration of ideas and stories. This year's programme of more than 300 hundred events features Buzz Aldrin, Jung Chang, Goldie Hawn, Spike Lee, Monty Roberts, Joseph Rotblat, Simon Singh, Alexander McCall Smith and Jon Snow. The OU will be

supporting a number of Festival events including a series of Breakfast Talks. For further details please call the box office on 0870 990 1299 or visit [www.hayfestival.com](http://www.hayfestival.com)

**Cheltenham Science Festival** 8 - 12 June is on the theme of Other Worlds, and high profile names attending including guest director David Puttnam, best-selling author Philip Pullman, journalist John Humphrys and cosmologist Lisa Randall. The Open University is working in partnership to present two thought-provoking events:

*Climate Change*, on Thursday 9 June, will be one of the key events of the Festival and will feature the Chief Scientific Advisor to the Government, Sir David King. *The Science Curriculum*, on Saturday 11 June, presented in association with The Institute of Ideas, will debate the focus of the new science curriculum.

OU students can benefit from priority booking and discounts on a selection of Cheltenham Science Festival events. For further information please contact the Box Office on +44 (0)1242 227979 or visit [www.cheltenhamfestivals.co.uk](http://www.cheltenhamfestivals.co.uk)

## Part-timers' cash boost

from page 5

But institutions such as the OU that teach only part-time students will not have access to this money. The Government has suggested the university should bridge the gap by raising its fees, but the OU claims that if fees were to rise to keep pace with the full-time sector, it would lose a great number of students - many of whom are from the very group that the Government most wants to encourage into education.

Government has asked the Funding Council to review how teaching and learning is funded across the sector as a whole, but as this does not solve the immediate problem for the university, the OU has asked the Council for a 'first

aid' solution to meet the shortfall, to give it the same financial stability as traditional universities until the outcome of the review of funding is in place.

The request amounts to some £48million over the first two years when the new top-up fees regime is introduced, and the OU's Vice-Chancellor Brenda Gourley and her team presented the case to a special subgroup of the Funding Council at the end of January.

Meanwhile the university has gained the support of many Members of Parliament and Members of the House of Lords, who are lobbying Ministers on the university's

behalf. The Vice-Chancellor has also asked for a meeting with Education Secretary Ruth Kelly.

"If no further funding is made available to the university, we shall certainly be asking students to raise the matter with their MPs as we approach the election," said Joan Jones, President of the Open University Students Association.

The decision of the HEFCE board will be posted on the **sesame** website as soon as it is available. Visit [www.open.ac.uk/sesame](http://www.open.ac.uk/sesame)  
The Open University's Financial Assistance Advice Line number is +44 (0)1908 653411.

# Wanted: stagestruck students

A NEW partnership between The Open University and the internationally renowned theatre company dreamthinkspeak is offering OU students the opportunity to be part of three exciting theatre projects in Brighton, Edinburgh and London this year.

Volunteers are wanted for all levels of the productions, from performance to technical theatre design and filming. All that is required is an interest in live theatre and willingness to attend a small number of rehearsals and live performances.

"Enthusiasm is more important than experience with these projects," said the OU's Jakki Hall. "dreamthinkspeak are skilled at working with volunteers and tailor the level of involvement to the individual.

"This is a great opportunity for OU students to work closely with a professional theatre company."

dreamthinkspeak's 2005 UK tour will include *Underground*, based on Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment* at the Theatre Royal as part of the Brighton Festival from 24 - 28 May, (for tickets call +44 (0)1273 709 709); and at Clerkenwell Vaults London, 10 - 29 October (for tickets call 0845 120 7511); and *Don't Look Back* (based on the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice) at Register House as part of the Edinburgh Festival from 22 - 27 August (for tickets call +44 (0)131 226 0000).



Eurydice slips into the underworld in *Don't Look Back*

To find out more about volunteering contact Ros Hall on +44 (0)1273 680 159 or email [ros@dreamthinkspeak.com](mailto:ros@dreamthinkspeak.com) For more information on the company visit [www.dreamthinkspeak.com](http://www.dreamthinkspeak.com)

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To get your ISIC simply visit any STA Travel branch, call 0870 160 6070 or visit [www.statravel.co.uk](http://www.statravel.co.uk).

You will need to provide a passport sized photograph and official proof of full time student status.

Terms and Conditions apply.



### STA TRAVEL

## PVC'S VIEW

Worldwide  
community of  
OU students

DO you know about the hidden, but growing community of OU students? While you are probably aware that students in Western Europe take OU courses you may not know that there are students studying OU materials in Russia, Singapore, South Africa and Greece – to name but a few.

The recently established Arab Open University (AOU), aims to reach out to all Arab states and extend opportunities for higher education to thousands of people – both men and women. The OU played a key role in helping to set it up, and in adapting OU courses. Through our Open University Validation Services we guided it towards becoming an “accredited institution”.

**Two-way learning**

In mid-January I led a delegation of senior OU staff to the first OU-Arab partnership conference in Kuwait. We discussed quality assurance, assessment, infrastructure and systems support, curriculum innovation and how students were responding to this new way of studying. It was a chance for us to learn from their experience. It was also an exciting encounter with Arab academics driven by a desire to create a high quality distance learning institution.

All this reinforces the point that studying the OU way can help to widen opportunities for people all over the world. It reminds us that learning from our partners can enrich OU study for all students. In the UK we are also reaching out to diverse cultural and social groups.

It highlights how the “extended family” of the OU continues to grow – and not only through distance learning. In addition to institutions like AOU which use OU courses there are thousands of students taking OU validated courses through face-to-face-teaching in OU-accredited institutions.

So as you travel in the UK or abroad you are even more likely to bump into a fellow enthusiast for the OU!

**Linda Jones, Pro-Vice-Chancellor  
(Curriculum and Awards)**

## RESEARCH

Ghosts in the  
machine

*Beneath the modern, workaday façade presented by our cities, lurks something very strange. OU urban and cultural geographer Dr Steve Pile has been investigating urban ghosts. By Yvonne Cook*

**P**EOPLE in cities are meant to be objective, rational, above superstition. Modernity was meant to have eliminated things like belief in ghosts. But it simply isn't so,” Steve Pile asserts.

His research in three cities – London, Singapore and New Orleans – has shown they are simply teeming with haunted sites. A catalogue of spooky experiences is recorded in his new book, *Real Cities*, which has raised eyebrows among some colleagues who doubt that the supernatural can be the subject of serious academic research.

Dr Pile disagrees. “Geographers for some time have been interested in how people respond to places. I am particularly interested in the role of fantasy and imagination in the production of places.”

Ghosts are almost always associated with a particular place – and with some kind of traumatic past event. “In Singapore, quite a lot are associated with the Japanese occupation of 1942 - 1945,” Dr Pile said.

“In the Raffles Hotel, where some of the rooms were used by the Japanese security police, people hear screams. There are regular sightings of ghosts at Alexandra Hospital, where the Japanese killed doctors, nurses and patients.”

Ghosts don't just haunt places which are old or spooky, he said. “There are a lot of apparitions in Singapore reported in new tower blocks. It usually turns out that the block was built on the site of an old cemetery.”

In London, ghosts often inhabit buildings built on the site of ‘plague pits’, where the bodies of victims of the dreadful seventeenth-century epidemic were buried en masse. “People have seen ghost rats, and ghost flies emerging from the ground and swarming round,” said Dr Pile. Titled ghosts are quite common ‘aristocrats who have jumped off tall buildings or died in various

other horrible ways’, and ghosts connected with the wartime Blitz.

In New Orleans, on the other hand, hauntings tend reflect the influence of the city's French past and its association with slavery. “Julie, a ghost who was the slave-mistress of a French-Creole gentleman appears on the top floor balcony of 732 Royal Street,” said Dr Pile.

“One day the gentleman's family called unexpectedly and he asked Julie to go out onto the balcony and wait while he told his family about their love. She was almost naked – in some stories completely naked – and it was a winter's night. She waited and waited but he never came, and eventually she died of cold.”

Ghosts are associated with the feeling that ‘something bad has not gone away’, Dr Pile suggests. “On the one hand ghosts are quite reassuring, because they suggest there is an afterlife. On the other hand they are recalling something about the past which is still troubling.” In the case of Julie ‘the traumas associated with slavery are being replayed’. And while the great fires that swept New Orleans and gave rise to many ghost stories are history, New Orleans residents still live with the knowledge that their city is very vulnerable to fire.

“I cannot prove it, but I would guess every city in the world has ghost stories,” Dr Pile said. And not just ghosts – New Orleans and London are both riddled with vampires. Budapest, on the other hand, is packed with angels. But do sophisticated city-dwellers really believe the stories they tell?

In one well-known experiment conducted by psychologist Professor Richard Wiseman, a group of students were taken down to the Edinburgh catacombs and dotted about in different locations. About one-third reported feeling some kind of unusual sensation; and, spookily, they were most likely to be in the

**“New Orleans and London  
are both riddled with vampires.  
Budapest on the other hand  
is packed with angels”**



locations where ghostly happenings had been reported in the past.

"Even where people don't want to believe it, some part of them cannot dismiss the possibility," Dr Pile said. "This may be because we do not really know the truth – to prove that ghosts do not exist is very difficult."

### Deal with the past

He believes those involved in shaping our cities should take people's leanings towards the supernatural on board.

"Firstly, we do not pay enough attention to the irrational. There may be lots of ways in which we can create slightly magical places.

"Secondly, very often ghosts are associated with the sense that something bad happened in the past which we have not dealt with. Maybe we need to think about memorialising events, or apologising.

"In New Orleans there is this huge legacy of slavery which is not really talked about. Maybe they need to deal with it in a better way. Otherwise the ghosts will just keep coming back."

Dr Steve Pile is on the course team for DD205 *Living in a globalised world*, which launches in 2006.

*Real Cities: Modernity, Space and Phantasmagorias of City Life* is published by Sage Publications. £21.99.



The spread of modernity has not dented belief in ghosts and spirits

Picture: Yvonne Cook

Can ghosts be the subject of serious academic study?  
Write or email your views to sesame.

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## LETTERS

## Never too old

IN October 2000 a small insignificant advertisement came through my letter box. Four years later I have a BA degree from The Open University. I will continue taking the OU courses as long as I am able to; I love every bit of them.

**Electra Gray (aged 83)**  
Bedfordshire

students using their initiative, but your profile of Ron Larter (*sesame* 224, p.15) goes well beyond the acceptable boundaries of media hype. Ron has not "astonished the science world", to do that he would have had to publish a scientific paper, which would need to contain reasoned argument based on established scientific facts, it would also need to have been peer-reviewed by fellow scientists.

Ron Larter has merely posted some rather unconventional ideas onto a website, and the

fact that this has attracted the attention of a few like-minded people hardly places him on a par with Stephen Hawking.

If we are to publicly challenge the status quo it must be from the standpoint of a thorough knowledge of our chosen field. Happily the OU can give us a start in the process of acquiring that knowledge, and Ron has now embarked on that path. I wish him every success.

**Jim Grozier**  
Secretary, Fusion (The Open University Physics Society)

## Family friendly OU

I AM writing euphorically after completion of my AA309 exam. I took the exam in my own lounge at home with my own personal invigilator, having just fed my eight-week-old baby. I want to encourage other working mums. It is possible to do a degree. The OU's attitude was very helpful and sensitive.

**Esther Edain**  
Sheffield

## Hype not Hawking

IT is always good to see OU

## How to become a freelance writer

by NICK DAWS

Freelance writing can be creative, fulfilling and a lot of fun, with excellent money to be made as well. What's more, anyone can become a writer. No special qualifications or experience are required.

The market for writers is huge. In Britain alone there are around 1,000 daily, Sunday and weekly papers, and more than 8,000 magazines. Many of the stories and articles that they publish are supplied by freelancers. Then there are books, theatre, films, TV, radio...

With such demand, there's always room for new writers. But, as Mr. E. H. Metcalfe, principal of Britain's leading writing school The Writers Bureau, explains, 'If you want to enjoy the rewards of seeing your work in print, one thing you must have is proper training.'

The Writers Bureau runs a comprehensive correspon-

dence course covering every aspect of fiction and non-fiction writing. The 140,000 word course is written by professional writers and has been acclaimed by experts.

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### English PGCE wanted

I AM an OU student aiming at a BA (Hons) in English Literature and Language. My aim is to become a secondary teacher of English. Despite English being identified by the Government as a shortage subject the OU does not offer an English PGCE. If I continue to follow the OU route, I will not receive my final degree result until December 2006, and will then face nine months wait to study PGCE at a 'traditional' university – needing the result before I can start the course. I now face the prospect of having to give up on OU study and follow the 'traditional' university route.

Can anyone tell me whether the English PGCE will be offered in order that I (and I'm sure other students) can make an informed choice as to future study plans?

**Jackie Vallerius**  
Northampton

### Too much art

I ENJOYED doing the crossword in the new-look *sesame*. But as a recent science graduate from our OU, I thought it pretty poor that every single clue involved an arts reference and not a science one. It's this sad assumption of arts people (which I once shared) that they can get away with scientific illiteracy.

**Phillip Clark**  
Builth Wells

### Feeling lost

I HAVE been an OU student since 1999. So far I finished six courses for the PGDip CCI and last October handed in my MSc thesis. For every course I received not only a letter from the chair of the course but also a page with the names and photos of the people at the office, stating their responsibilities, email and telephone number. When there was a problem I knew exactly whom and how to contact.

I continued with DD121 which is a starter course. Here things are totally different. The only way to get problems addressed, where a tutor cannot help, is via the "contact us" website. At the beginning of the course a major issue arose and the only way to get attention was by "mail-bombing" somebody at the completely wrong end.

There is a lot of debate about reasons for attrition on courses. Impersonal appearance of the OU and feeling lost is definitely one of them. One simple page is all it needs to make the difference. If DD121 had been my first course with the OU, it would have probably been my last as well.

**Olaf Lipinski**  
Germany

### Support essential

I SUFFER with panic attacks and depression so exam time was hell for me. Student Support put me in touch with the most amazing lady by the name of

## STAR LETTER

## High street? No

IN the last **sesame** the OU's Head of Marketing and Sales says that the OU 'must continue to deliver the standards (students) have come to expect on the high street and through the internet'.

It is my experience of the high street that often we are being pressured to buy shoddy and usually unnecessary goods.

As for the internet, this is surely a triumph of information over knowledge.

As both a student of the OU and a lecturer in another fairly prestigious university, I find it sad that what is, by any measure, one of the best universities in the UK thinks that the standards of the high street and the internet are worth aspiring to.

**Peter Dewar**  
Bromley

Tracey Edwards who deals with exam stress management. Tracey gave me some amazing tips on revision and keeping calm and focused.

Due to cuts, wonderful people like Tracey may no longer be available to students who need this invaluable help.

If other students have received this type of support can they please let the OU know.

**Deborah Bierton**  
Luton

## Weekday no good

I HAVE read quite a lot recently about changing the academic year to encompass autumn starts to courses and also a greater emphasis on weekday tutorials and more work to be internet-based.

I live in York (and work in Manchester) and last year my tutorials were held on Saturday mornings in Leeds. If the tutorials were to be moved to a weekday evening then I could not attend as I do not drive. I have a slight disability and I would not want to cross Leeds to either the station or the bus interchange, by myself at 10 in the evening.

I do not have access to broadband internet at home so accessing online tutorials would be a nightmare. Similarly I do not welcome the idea of submission of course work over the internet. I work with computers and I wanted my OU studies to be a distraction from them.

Besides, my face-to-face tutorials were a great source of support and fun throughout the course. I think that the OU should try to remember the aims that it was created to address – education for life for adult learners. Please don't let the OU become 'just another university'.

**Dr Richard Greaves**  
York

## Euro barrier

I STRONGLY disagree with the content of the 'Hot Seat' in **sesame** issue 224, especially with such optimistic views as 'OU students are double Europeans' or 'the reform embodies an ambition to promote mobility across Europe'.

My personal experience, as an Italian national and OU graduate, is rather different.

I got my BA(Hons) in Humanities in 1998 and I am still struggling to have my degree recognised by the Italian Ministry of Education. Local universities do not even grant me any exemption from their syllabus, taking very little notice of the Bologna declaration.

**Marco Lorenzelli**  
Italy

## Archaeology please

A COUPLE of months ago a new OUSA conference sprang up on FirstClass – OUSA Archaeology. One big gripe is the lack of Open University courses in this area.

It has been suggested that the lack of access to practical archaeology would prevent the OU running courses yet both Exeter and Leicester University offer distance study that does not require you to get your hands dirty. Anyone out there who has a common interest in archaeology join us on FirstClass and pester the OU about the lack of courses in this area.

**Katherine Bell**  
Yorkshire

## Thai'd up by ICT

RE your centrefold (issue 224) "Your university online".

Everyone's going crazy about how brilliant and exciting this new ICT is. But here in rural Thailand, downloading a page on the web can take half an hour depending on the weather and time of day. Give me face-to-face human contact anytime.

**Mike Ridler**  
Klaeng Rayong, Thailand

## Deadline shock

I RECEIVED a letter in 2003 informing me that the requirement for an ordinary degree would be changed at the end of 2004. Thinking that I had one more year to get my degree before the rule change, I applied for my final level 2 course, which I have since passed.

I became concerned towards the end of November that I had heard nothing from the OU, so I called the awards line and was told that I had not achieved the required points for a BSc due to the fact that I had no level 3 points. I was not very impressed by this news and was advised to write in and appeal.

Surely there must be more than just myself who have been tripped up by this change?

**David Game**  
Leicestershire

## TMAs on flexi-time?

I'M a full-time worker and find it really hard to put in enough study hours in a week to meet the OU's schedule of TMAs. Consequently for my A103 Foundation year I gave up socialising altogether, and studied all through the weekends between February and October. Could the OU give consideration to offering flexible schedules, so that students could take as much time as they needed to complete a TMA? Other centres of learning offer correspondence courses to suit students' timetables.

**Deborah Moore**  
Cornwall

WILL SWANN, DIRECTOR,  
STUDENTS, REPLIES

**RESEARCH has shown that if the University is too flexible about the dates for submission of TMAs, fewer students get to the end of the course. Regular and planned points for submission of TMAs help keep students on track. We want students to complete the course, not just for their personal satisfaction, but also because the OU does not receive any Government funding for those who do not finish.**

**The other alternative is that the whole course is extended in a flexible way. This would increase our costs considerably, and complicate matters for the tutors if they did not know when to expect TMAs. However, we have not ruled out all options for increased flexibility, and pilot schemes will be tested over the coming months.**

Please send your letters to: Letters to the Editor, *sesame*, The Open University, Milton Keynes, MK7 6AA.  
Fax: +44 (0) 1908 652247 Email: M.D.France@open.ac.uk

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## FIFTH COLUMN

## Why change exam venues?



EXAM venues – why do they change every year? Is this just true for language exams, or is it a general policy?

I have just taken my Level 2 French in Nottingham, having taken German exams there in the previous two years. Each time, the venue has been different. First time was average, the time after was good (so why change it?) and last year was absolutely awful. There was no parking, which meant using a multi-storey car park costing £10, and worse, there were no catering facilities, not even a coffee machine. In addition, the building was small and totally inadequate for separate groups performing both written and oral exams – the noise from waiting candidates could be heard in the exam rooms.

Personally, I feel that exams are fraught enough without the added problems caused by poor venues. As I live 70 miles away from my allocated centre, I chose to stay in Nottingham the night before the exam, rather than run the risk of being delayed in the morning rush-hour traffic. Therefore I couldn't prepare sandwiches or even a much-needed flask of coffee to sustain me during what is usually a very long day. I accept that I could go to an alternative centre, but my nearest would still be 50 miles away, and I would be deprived of the support provided by familiar faces from my own tutor group.

It must be possible to find one good venue and stick with it. Language exams last all day, so adequate facilities really are a priority.

**Jan Sutton is a languages student who lives in Northampton.**

Do you have a gripe or would like to share an interesting fact with other OU students? If so send us an article of no more than 300 words to The Editor, sesame, The Open University, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes, MK7 6AA or email your contribution to [sesame@open.ac.uk](mailto:sesame@open.ac.uk) Please include contact details and a daytime telephone number. We pay £50 for each contribution used.

## PEOPLE

## Traveller comes home

South East region staff tutor **Anne Roberts** tells **sesame** about one of her most remarkable students, nominated for an award for learning

**M**Y life has been transformed since I started the course. During the last 30 years I have been like a fish struggling downstream in a trickle of water, and at last I have reached the sea."

These are the words of Sharon Dee, a woman on a mission to reclaim the right to an education denied her as a child.

Sharon, 44, is from a travelling family. Her grandparents' home was a stopping-off point for what Sharon describes as "a motley collection of visitors" which included "people from [caravan] sites and from the circus and fair families". She was schooled in the oral traditions and customs of her Romany culture. Her grandmother also taught her to read, write and count.

At primary school, she found herself well ahead of her peers.

"I stayed near or at the top of the class throughout my time there, in spite of much time off for fruit- and vegetable-picking and other tribal activities with the family. When I was 11 I went to grammar school.

"From my first day in grammar school, they tried to get rid of me." Her work was of a very

high standard, especially in the sciences. However, her shabby uniform led her to be singled out. Although popular with pupils, she experienced constant humiliation and prejudice from school staff. At 14, Sharon and school parted company. The travelling lifestyle took over her life completely, and family commitments of her own soon

followed.

What motivated her to continue with her education? "Anger", she said, "that I was robbed of my life chances: robbed by the school, by my travelling background and by the system. I was denied the chance of finding out what I am capable of."

And the future? Sharon is already partway through the Y153 Openings course, and will have embarked on MU120 *Open mathematics* by the time **sesame** goes to press. Then it's full steam ahead to a degree.

"There is no stopping me now," she says. "I mean to make the next 20 years really count."

As Sharon's tutor on the 20-week Openings course Y155 I have found her work remarkable. This is why I have nominated her for an Adult Learners' Week Award.

**"Sharon was schooled in the oral traditions and customs of her Romany culture"**

Sharon: 'There's no stopping me now'



# Carried away by study

**B**ARRY Harper was so enthused by studying biology and ecology with the OU, that he's planned a trek to the North Pole.

The 45-year-old police inspector completed his BSc Hons last October; his ambition is to become a biology teacher when he retires from Nottinghamshire police force in two years' time.

"I started my OU degree in 1997 because I was interested in biology but the more I learned, the more I wanted to learn," said Barry, a police dog-handler and horse-rider. "It whetted my appetite for travel and to see animals."

Barry and a friend, mountaineer and Polar explorer Mike Thornewill, are co-leaders of a team of six explorers on the expedition which begins in early April.

Walking from Russia's ice station Borneo the explorers will take about two

weeks to reach the Pole.

As a member of the Rotary Club, which celebrates its centenary this year, Barry is seeking sponsorship to raise money for the club's Africa Hope Rwanda Appeal.

"The pictures of our team will be sent to Rotary Clubs all over the world, so we're asking companies to give us sponsorship to wear their logos on our ski suits. I guarantee they'll get worldwide coverage. All Rotarians are being asked to give £1, which we hope will raise tens of thousands of pounds for the appeal, but of course we would welcome any donations from non-Rotary members."

To sponsor Barry or to find out more about his adventure email him at [barry.harper40@ntlworld.com](mailto:barry.harper40@ntlworld.com) To find out more about the Rotary Club's Africa Hope Rwanda Appeal, visit [www.rotary-ribi.org](http://www.rotary-ribi.org) and key "Rwanda" in the search engine.



Barry (foreground) pictured on a 2003 expedition to cross the frozen Great Slave Lake in Canada

## Another great benefit of your Open University membership

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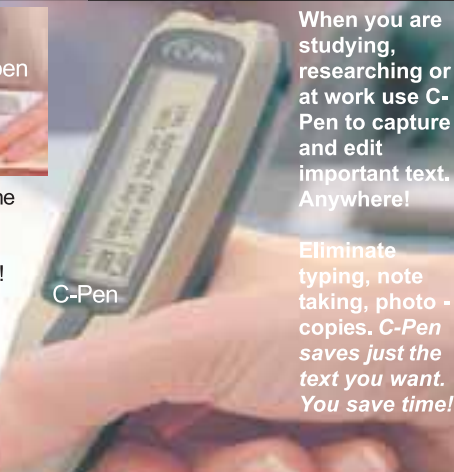
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# 'Positive is the only way to be'

*She was told she may only have weeks to live. But Samantha's studies helped her to get through*

"I WAS housebound, on oxygen and getting sicker and sicker while I waited for a lung transplant," said Samantha Sparke (pictured below). "It was really difficult – but it would have been even harder without my Open University work to distract me."

Perhaps it was being given just weeks to live that focused Sammi's mind. But it worked – for after having successfully undergone an operation to replace both her lungs, she's now just a year away from completing her OU humanities degree.

"The Open University helped me in lots of ways," said the 26-year-old, who has cystic fibrosis. "I started my degree in 1997 at Sheffield Hallam University but became ill during the second year so it became impossible for me to continue.

"The doctors told me I needed a double lung transplant and I would be stuck at home, with an oxygen cylinder, until they found a donor. I knew I would need something to pass the time, and so I signed up with the OU." Sammi was able to transfer all the credits from her year at Sheffield to her new course.

"The OU and my tutors were all great – they knew I couldn't come to them so I had a lot of telephone tutorials, which really helped me. And the OU way of learning is so flexible – I was able to study only when I felt well enough. And of course it proved a great distraction."

It needed to. The longer Sammi waited for a transplant, the more her condition deteriorated, until she was warned in 2002 she may have only weeks to live. But then, after a two-and-a-half year wait, doctors told her they'd found a donor. Sammi had the operation and is now making the most of her health by travelling the world – and

preparing for her final year's study, which she hopes will secure her a career in the media.

Her ordeal landed her an invitation to Downing Street. "Last summer was the 10th anniversary of the NHS Organ Donor Register, so Tony Blair held a reception to celebrate it. I was invited and had a chat with him. He spoke to everyone and was genuinely interested in everyone's stories."

Sammi, from St Neots, Cambridgeshire, continues to suffer setbacks – the drugs she had to take after her operation have at the time of writing resulted in kidney failure – but she is looking forward to the future.

**"Without the organ donor register, I wouldn't be here"**

"Positive is the only way to be," she said. "I'm looking forward to finishing my degree and then finding full-time work. I already work part-time for a media company, as a studio

hand and runner, and my degree will give me a real chance of building a career.

"I hope my story will inspire people to join the organ donor register," she added. "Lots of people carry cards but people must do more than that, because relatives have the power to stop transfers going ahead. If you want someone to live after your death, talk about it to your family so they know what your wishes are, and get your name on the register so there's no confusion. Without that register, I wouldn't be here."

For more information about organ donation and to put your name on the register, call 0845 60 60 400 or visit [www.uktransplant.org.uk](http://www.uktransplant.org.uk)



## PEOPLE



Melissa (left) with Marluce Monteiro, her host in Brazil

# Life on the streets

*A psychology student gained new insights into human behaviour – including her own – working with street children in Brazil*

“I wanted to learn about myself, learn what I was capable of,” says OU student Melissa England. She’s not talking about tackling coursework – but the challenge of teaching street children in one of the poorest areas of Brazil.

Mel, 20, recently spent three months volunteering at a community centre in Recife, in the northeast of the country – and was shocked by what she saw.

“Thirty-five per cent of children in that region don’t reach the age of 18, because of disease, abuse, violence, drugs and hired killers,” she said. “Fifteen per cent of children die before they’re five.”

Mel had already done youth work in some of the poorest areas of London, including Newham and Tower Hamlets, where she had encountered lots of “anti-social behaviour”, but said what she saw among the street children of Brazil (locally known as the *meninos da rua*) was on a completely different scale.

“The Brazilian kids are very affectionate and kiss and hug you, but even as they do so they are patting you down to see if you’ve got any money,” she said.

“About 300 children attended the centre I worked at, and not one of them had shoes.

Most had rotting teeth and the only reason they were there at all was because they were paid to be. Before they came there, most of them tried to make a living scouring rubbish dumps for things they could sell.”

**“The kids kiss and hug you, but even as they do they are patting you down to see if you’ve got any money”**

In a country with little structured help for abused, neglected or abandoned children, thousands end up on the streets and instances of crime, including rapes and muggings, are high.

“Statistics show that muggings in Brazil are almost always by children,” said Mel.

“Fights would break out among some of the children, as they do anywhere, but whereas in this country an adult would step in to break it up, on the streets of Brazil – and in this centre – nobody does.

“I had my hair pulled and I was slapped by a couple of the girls – that was something that didn’t happen in Tower Hamlets! There is no discipline or respect. When I put my arm up to stop myself getting slapped again, the girl attacking me looked absolutely shocked, as if I’d slapped her. They’re not used to someone questioning or challenging what they do.”

But Mel said she would have no hesitation in doing similar work again. “I was there because they teach the children English, but



there is no co-ordination between the centre and schools or employers so there's no future for the kids after they leave, except to go back to the rubbish dumps. Learning English might not have been as useful to them as, say, learning cookery.

### Back home

"But at least it gives them a childhood they would otherwise not have. And I did make a lot of friends among the children."

Now Mel's back home in Walthamstow, East London, to concentrate on the second year of work towards her psychology degree. "When I left school I went to Sussex University but I only lasted four months because I hated it," she said. "It was so impersonal and I felt like a number. Then someone suggested I try the OU. Like a lot of people I'd thought it was for mature students, but I'm enjoying every minute of it. It's so flexible and I feel really supported by my tutors and the university."

**Mel England spoke to Peter Taylor-Whiffen**



Frevo Dancers in the street market at Olinda, eastern Brazil



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# Doom watch

*Most people are taken by surprise when natural disasters strike. But students and researchers in Geosciences are working to prepare us better*

**T**HE Boxing Day earthquake and tsunami will go down in history as one of the greatest natural disasters, in terms of loss of human life, since records began. Yet many lives could have been saved if coastal communities had had just one hour's warning.

That's the view of OU volcanologist Professor Stephen Self, one of the authors of the University's *Geohazards* project course SXG390, which allows students to carry out their own research into natural disasters like earthquakes and tsunamis.

"The farthest inland the tsunami came was five or six kilometres. If you give people an hour or two's warning they can walk far enough inland, or go to a high point," said Professor Self, who supports the creation of a global warning system for all types of natural disaster.

The risk from natural forces is something most of us never give much thought to. But as a member of the OU's Volcano Dynamics Group and head of the international Volcano and Magmatic Studies Group, it's Professor Self's bread-and-butter. Volcanic eruptions can trigger tsunamis too.

We in Britain can't assume 'it could never happen here,' he says. Tectonic plates capable of giving rise to earthquakes meet beneath the Atlantic and around the Azores is a particularly vulnerable 'triple fault junction'. An

earthquake here could send waves speeding at 500 mph towards the coasts of Spain,

Portugal, France and Britain putting low-lying areas such as river mouths and the Dorset coast at risk.

OU Geosciences students benefit from the OU's flourishing Earth Sciences research department, which is 5-star rated and feeds into OU courses. SXG390 *Geohazards* is a 30-point project course which allows students to conduct an in-depth study of a natural hazard and how it could be mitigated. They can choose from earthquakes, landslides, meteorite impacts, volcanoes, tsunamis, floods and weather hazards, and can take the course as part of a Geosciences degree or as a freestanding one if they have an Earth Sciences background.

The research is 'literature-based', so students do not have to put their lives in jeopardy by scaling volcanoes or chasing tornados, although some bring in their own data from work or other experience. "It is a good learning exercise for the student in how to search for information and how to conceive of, carry out and write up a project," said Professor Self. *Geohazards* is the most popular of a suite of Science project courses, the others being SXN390 *Science in society*, SXM 390 *Frontiers in chemistry*, SXP390 *Radiation and matter* and SXN3900 *Science and society*.

Professor Stephen Self and fellow OU volcanologist Dr Hazel Rymer are also members of the Geological Society Working Group which has just produced a report on the hazards posed by volcanic super-eruptions. For details see [www.geolsoc.org.uk/template.cfm?name=Super1](http://www.geolsoc.org.uk/template.cfm?name=Super1)

**"Choose from earthquakes, landslides, meteorites, volcanoes, tsunami, floods and weather"**

# Learn how to learn

*The Good Study Guide* is one of the best sellers of its kind. Author Andy Northedge tells **sesame** why

**Y**OU'VE been poring over the course book for an hour and can't get beyond page two... you're staring at the essay title and you haven't a clue how to begin to write it... you're taking notes but agonising over what to put in and what to leave out... it's time to panic or despair. Or reach for *The Good Study Guide*.

You can deal with all these situations, says author Andy Northedge, and the *Guide* demonstrates how. Its great strength is a wealth of practical advice and exercises to help improve your performance whether you are reading, taking notes, writing essays or sitting exams. Which could explain why a book that was originally written just for OU social science students has become popular with students and tutors across the higher education scene.

What makes it so successful? Andy certainly has the ideal qualifications to write it – a highly successful OU tutor for 17 years, he was also a spectacularly unsuccessful student at a conventional university.

"I switched from maths to psychology with no idea what the demands of psychology were in terms of reading books, writing essays, managing time and so on," he told **sesame**.

After his first essay was returned with the comment 'Read more, if only novels, your style is atrocious' his confidence plummeted – and so did his essay output. "As I already read a lot of novels, I didn't know what to do. I resorted to avoidance – I didn't hand in any essays for three terms. I came to the conclusion I wasn't any good."

It was only when he finally plucked up courage to ask an A-student if he could read one of his essays that Andy realised what was expected of him – and that he could do it.

Essay writing, he says, is the biggest hurdle for most students, yet tackled properly it is their greatest learning tool. "When you're reading you're immersed in academic discourse and then you switch to a producing role, and that's when you really learn it, when it becomes part of your thought processes."

Another common stumbling block the *Study Guide* can help you get over is

'self-management' which is important to maintain your motivation. It involves prioritising life and study demands, establishing a routine but allowing space for the creative thinking essential to study.

### Enlarged edition

But how can students make time to read about 'study skills' when they're so busy studying? Don't sit down and read the book from cover to cover, says Andy, dip into it as you need to. Some of the advice, such as that on writing essays, will make more sense after you've tackled your first essay.

The new edition is substantially revised and enlarged. A major change is that computers and ICT have become central to study, and so there are new chapters devoted to making notes on computer, electronic filing, online research and so on. Examples which had been based on an

academic article written in the late 1980s have been brought up to date, with new student contributions and sample essays. But the fundamental principles, says Andy, have not changed.

One thing he can't be accused of is cashing in on the learning boom. "I haven't made a penny from sales of the book," says Andy, who occasionally amuses himself by trying to calculate how rich he might be if the profits on each of the 400,000 plus copies sold went to him instead of The Open University, which publishes it.

If there's one piece of study advice every student should take on board, it's this: read *The Good Study Guide*. Even if you think you can't spare the time. In fact, especially if you think you can't spare the time.

*The Good Study Guide* is available at all good bookshops. To see sample pages visit the *Good Study Guide* website [www.goodstudyguide.co.uk](http://www.goodstudyguide.co.uk)



## SUPPORT



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# A formula for success?

What makes the difference between a successful and an unsuccessful student? It's quite simple, says **Ormond Simpson**, read on...

I originally graduated as a theoretical physicist. It wasn't that I was particularly bright – it was just that after the third time I'd melted the Geiger counter and nearly electrocuted myself my supervisor decided it would be safer all round if I was trusted with nothing more dangerous than a pencil and a piece of paper (it's surprising how dangerous the pencil turned out to be but that's another story).

That experience left me with a taste for formulae and it was with some interest that I recently came across a formula for student success promulgated by Dr Alan Seidman, editor of the US *Journal of Student Retention*. I've adapted it freely (partly in the hope that the Simpson-Seidman equation will one day become as famous as Einstein's  $E = mc^2$ ) and here it is:

$$S = \text{Acc} + (\text{E} + \text{I} + \text{C})\text{CoT} + \text{ExS}$$

where S = Success, Acc = Accurate course choice, E = Early, I = Intensive, C = Continuous, CoT = Contact with your Tutor, and ExS = External Support.

Let me explain the terms:

- Acc = Accurate course choice. The best thing you can do to ensure success is to make sure you're on the right course for you in terms of level, length and content. Use the OU's resources to make sure of that – check the course description on [www3.open.ac.uk/courses/bin/p12.dll?A01](http://www3.open.ac.uk/courses/bin/p12.dll?A01); look at what previous students and tutors have said about it on the same site; ask your region for a Taster Pack if there is one, do the diagnostic quiz if there is one. Change to another course if the one you first thought of is unsuitable.

- (E + I + C)CoT = Early, Intensive and Continuous Contact with your Tutor. In theory your tutor should be contacting you regularly but in practice he or she may not want to bother you if everything's going well but has no way of telling when things aren't so good. So take the initiative and contact them. They'll be glad to hear from you and if there's something holding you up, no matter how seemingly trivial, they'll want to help.

- ExS = External support. When we researched student dropout recently we concluded that students whose studies survived the life events that happen to happen (birth, death and everything in between) were those who'd got good support networks. These could be from families and friends – see the OU's families and friends website [www.open.ac.uk/family/](http://www.open.ac.uk/family/) designed for them – or from other students – use FirstClass to find a conference for your course in the OUSA Study Rooms, use Peer Support in the same place or go to the Find a Friend site in the Info Centre to locate another student looking for a friend. Many students even find their employer a good source of support (we're working on a website for them).

So there you go – the Simpson-Seidman formula for success – look out Einstein!



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**Ormond Simpson is Senior Lecturer in Institutional Research in the OU's Institute of Educational Technology, and the author of Student Retention in Online Open and Distance Learning.**

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**or email: [new@lighterlife.com](mailto:new@lighterlife.com)**

**[www.lighterlife.com](http://www.lighterlife.com)**

lighterlife 

# competition

## sesame crossword competition

Win **£75** cash plus a copy of the **Chambers Dictionary**

**A**s the **sesame** Christmas crossword has proved so popular over the years we have now introduced a crossword in every issue, giving you all more chance of

being a winner.

Senders of the first three correct solutions drawn out of the hat on 3 May will receive a copy of the *Chambers Dictionary*. In addition, the first one

drawn will receive £75 cash courtesy of **sesame**. Winners will be notified by telephone or email.

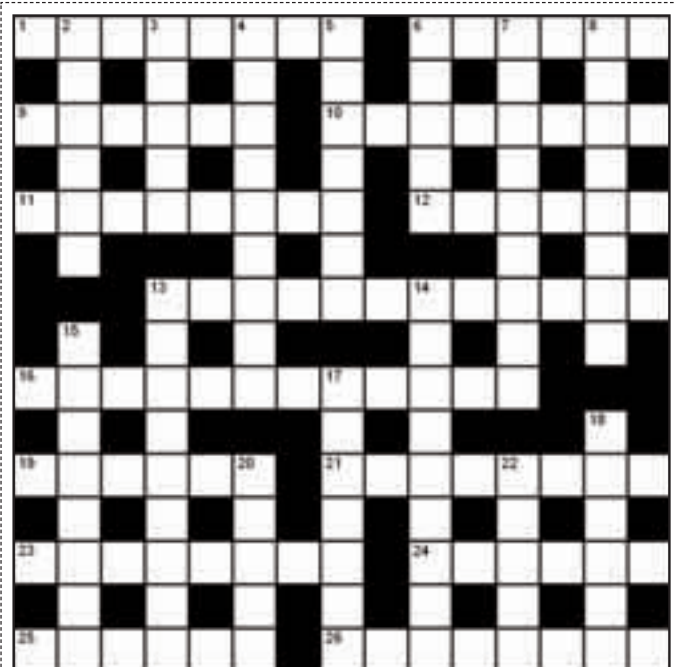
Details of *Chambers Dictionaries* can be found at [www.chambers.co.uk](http://www.chambers.co.uk)

### Clues - Across

- Genius taken for a mug in his native land? (8)
- Fall ill, catching a form of encephalopathy, and go down fast (6)
- Alcoholic drink provided in buffet? (6)
- A straight line, so I am kept in check (8)
- A warning about fuel coming from a wing, perhaps (8)
- It is a fallacy, showing hesitation in support of favourite (6)
- What resurrectionists do about Queen Consort's last poet? (6,6)
- Amount of energy extracted from buckwheat (8-4)
- Bone - it was left by St. Paul (6)
- One thus shot in the arm is equally tense (8)
- Drug reported in the land of luxury (8)
- Foot transport, that's me (6)
- Leaflets not applicable, probing origin of deal? (6)
- Out clumsily in Test - intensive coaching required (8)

### Clues - Down

- Eastern inn - millions are accommodated in it (6)
- Fish which gives you food poisoning? Not half! (5)
- Elation finding first bud in flower (9)
- Around around around a pound? Get knotted (7)
- Tiny creatures one found under a heap, possibly (5)
- US star mad about self-image probably went out with a bang (9)
- Dies of cold (3,5)
- Bird eggs amassed by one on board (5,4)
- He's probably not charged the earth for his endeavours (9)
- Pasta and port? One's consuming a large amount (8)
- 'He would not flatter Neptune for his \*\*\*\*\*' (Shakespeare - *Coriolanus*) (7)
- Brooch made of bone (6)
- What a carry on, say, when girl's around (5)
- Mollusc from the Channel Islands, alternatively French waters (5)



### SESAME CROSSWORD ENTRY FORM

Send your entry with the completed coupon to:  
Cullen Crosswords, 19 Cyncoed Place, Cardiff, CF23 6SG  
Closing date 3 May 2005. Only one entry per person.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
Postcode: \_\_\_\_\_ Tel Number: \_\_\_\_\_  
Email: \_\_\_\_\_

### Competition winners

The first correct entry out of the hat in **sesame's** Christmas quiz was from Brian Kane who lives in Canterbury. Brian won £100.

**Answers** (1) S180 *The Blue Planet*. (2) 25 years. (3) 15,000. (4) One mile. (5) Creative Robotics research network. (6) Will Swann. (7) Colorado. (8) They all have OU Honorary degrees. (9) Beethoven. (10) Barbara Fitzgerald.

Lucky winner of the Christmas crossword was Mrs

E. Allison, Northfield, Birmingham who won £150 plus a copy of the *Chambers Crossword Dictionary*. The four runners-up who also received a copy of the *Chambers Crossword Dictionary* were: Peter Horlock from Bristol; Mrs B Ward from Doncaster; Terry Cox from Cornwall; and J. Miller from Northumberland.

#### Answers - Across:

1. Ashmolean 6. Ichor 9. A Farewell to Arms

10. Hath 11. State 12. Swan 15. Verbena  
16. Cameron 17. Niagara 19. Colette 20. Oche  
21. Heine 22. Seth 26. Vaughan Williams  
27. Reeve 28. Steinbeck

#### Answers - Down:

1. Asaph 2. Heartbreak House 3. Obed 4. Electra  
5. Nilotic 6. Igor 7. Hereward the Wake  
8. Resonance 13. Behan 14. Emile 15. Vancouver  
18. Avernus 19. Candide 23. Hasek 24. Ghee,  
25. Elan

# WAVE OF SYMPATHY

With the spotlight on the world's poor after the tsunami disaster, **sesame** asks Open University academics how they would tackle global poverty – and how individuals can help

## GIVE DEVELOPING COUNTRIES MORE SAY

MOST developing countries have little control over their own policies. Major donors, like the World Bank are heavily involved in policy-making in developing countries. One way they do this is through Poverty Reduction Strategies; in practice, these policies tend to make developing country governments more accountable to the donors than to their own citizens. As a major contributor, Britain has a big say in how these donor organisations are run. Lobby your MP to make sure the government honours its aid obligations, but does so in a way that doesn't make developing countries less accountable to their citizens.

*Giles Mohan, lecturer in Development Policy and Practice*

## SUPPORT AN NGO

OF crucial importance are issues of trade, debt and aid. There is huge scope for change so that trade policy does not discriminate against poorer countries, the burden of debt does not strangle economic growth and aid is used not just to meet emergencies but for long-term development. It is vitally important that countries like the UK have strong, voluntary NGOs (Non-Governmental Organisations), such as Oxfam and Concern, able to work effectively with organisations in developing countries to campaign for change and implement aid and development policies.

*Chris Cornforth, head of the Public Interest and Non-Profit Management Research Unit in the OU Business School*

## TEACH PEOPLE TO CHALLENGE INEQUALITY

WE should demand that global commitments to achieving 'Education For All' are met. All necessary resources to ensure free, good quality schooling must be made available, including through debt relief. But learners need to be given the knowledge and confidence to challenge the ideas and practices that reinforce inequalities.

*Martha Caddell, lecturer in Development Policy and Practice*

## DON'T JUST SIT THERE, JOIN A PRESSURE GROUP

IF many concerned individuals get together, they are a formidable force. One example is the debt cancellation campaigners in Birmingham in 1997. More than 70,000 campaigners formed a human chain around the G7 meeting of world leaders, asking for debt cancellation for overburdened developing countries. World leaders took notice and debt cancellation has been taken seriously since this event. The key is taking action – apathy allows injustice to continue.

*Helen Yanacopulos, lecturer in Development Studies*

## GIVE THE POOR CASH

THE best way to end poverty is to give money to the poor. Studies show most poor people use their money wisely. Abolish the aid industry and just give everyone in Africa a simple cash payment, like child benefit in Britain. This was the basis of the successful social democratic transformation of Europe of the past 60 years. This would stimulate growth in Africa, but it would also benefit us, because Africa would import our goods.

*Joe Hanlon, research fellow in Development Policy and Practice*

## USE CONSUMER POWER

FAIRTRADE campaigners want us to buy goods for which producers receive a fair, sustainable livelihood. The impact of fairtrade is only a pinprick on the pattern of world trade. But organisations as diverse as Traidcraft, the Fairtrade Foundation, Oxfam, Christian Aid and the Co-Op are trying to exert influence over governments and corporations, and need to be able to show that they have broad-based popular support. Buying fair trade products is a way of being counted as part of this broader movement.

*Dr Clive Barnett, lecturer in Human Geography*

## TACKLE CLIMATE CHANGE

THE already precarious livelihoods of the South are likely to suffer increased water and food shortages, more disease, and loss of land, forests, wildlife and



More than 250,000 people died when the tsunami struck the coastline of ten countries in south east Asia and Africa on 26 December 2004

tourism, owing to climate change. We can help by conserving energy in our homes and offices, using renewable sources of energy, reducing our demand for car and air travel, and avoiding over-consumption.

*Robin Roy, Professor of Design and Environment*

## LINK THE WORLD IN CYBERSPACE

THE powerful images brought to the rest of the world by digital video cameras and cell phones created a new sense of connection. The same technologies allowed effective warning to reach some communities. Collective logging of events and monitoring of relief and recovery efforts continues. The new sense of connection allows the development of mutual support and understanding across the "digital divide." With only basic skills, on-line activism can be just a click away.

*Dr Steve Little, senior lecturer in Knowledge Management in the OU Business School*

## CHANGE THE USA

THE best thing to happen for the reduction of global poverty in the long-run (and it will take a long time to rid the world of poverty) would be for the US political system to change. Without curbing the overriding influence of the corporate world on US political life,

little will be achieved in my view.

*Grahame Thompson, Professor of Political Economy*

## FIND NEW WAYS TO WAYS TO TEACH

IN Sub-Saharan Africa 44 million children of primary school age have no chance of going to school. UNICEF estimates that nearly a million children a year lose their teacher through Aids. The Open University has been working in partnerships to develop innovative methods for training teachers. Its Digital Education Enhancement Project ([www.open.ac.uk/deep/](http://www.open.ac.uk/deep/)) is showing how new technologies can help teachers in Africa. The Teacher Education in Sub-Saharan Africa (TESSA) Programme is a major international collaboration to rapidly improve the working conditions of African primary teachers. If you could help in any way email: [r.e.moon@open.ac.uk](mailto:r.e.moon@open.ac.uk).

*Bob Moon, Professor in Education Teaching Studies*

## SHARE KNOWLEDGE

THE tsunami showed starkly how much knowledge there is in the world and how badly it is shared. Well-meaning support for poor countries is not much use if it is not shared with those countries. That is why a recent meeting of researchers focused on partnerships for science and technology in Africa. Not a very trendy

topic but one where our university (one of the world's largest universities) can join in. Join us in the OU's International Development Centre and let's see what we can do together with those wanting to think themselves out of crisis.

*Professor David Wield, co-ordinator, International Development Centre*

## SWITCH TO A GREEN ELECTRICITY SUPPLIER

THERE is no easier, single step you can take to reduce global environmental inequality. See <http://eeru.open.ac.uk/natta/scctshpwrad.html>

*Dr Stephen Peake, lecturer in Environment*

## FIND OUT MORE

IF you want to explore issues of international development more deeply, the OU offers a variety of courses. At undergraduate level you can choose from U213 *International development: challenges for a world in transition*, DD205 *Living in a globalised world*, or DU301 *A world of whose making?* The OU also has a well-established Masters-level programme in Development Management.





# Shedding light on plant pigments

**H**OW plants adapt to their environment is the focus of a brand new 15-point residential course available for the first time this summer.

SXR375 *Plants, pigments and light* introduces the study of plant pigments and the response of photosynthesis to environmental stress. In one of the laboratory investigations students extract, identify and characterise pigments from various plants and algae. In another, oxygen electrodes are used to investigate the effect of factors such as light stress on photosynthesis in micro-algae.

The biological sciences department is also planning another new 15-point course to start in 2006. Provisionally entitled *The molecular basis of disease*, it will use up-to-date molecular biology techniques to explore how variation or mutation at the gene level relates to protein function and can account for susceptibility to disease or infection.

Another new biological sciences residential course available this summer is SXR374 *Fat – the physiology of adipose tissue*, which investigates the physiology of an adaptive response to cold mediated by brown adipose tissue (BAT). This is a 15-point version of the previous course SXR370.

These courses, which build on skills taught in the first and second level residential school courses SXR103 *Practising science* and SXR270 *Investigative biology*, are worth 15 credit points – five more than previous such residential courses – because of the level of study and preparation students must undertake before attending

For more information visit [www.open.ac.uk/courses](http://www.open.ac.uk/courses) or email Christine Gardener, [c.gardener@open.ac.uk](mailto:c.gardener@open.ac.uk)

**“These courses are worth 15 credit points – five more than previous such residential courses”**

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[rcp6@tutor.open.ac.uk](mailto:rcp6@tutor.open.ac.uk)

**A**

**103**

# New care degree

STAFF in the health care profession can gain an invaluable qualification with the launch of the OU's latest foundation degree, in health and social care, in May.

The degree combines theory with work-placed practical experience to develop skills in the context of students' own jobs.

Employers will sponsor students to study the 240-point Foundation degree, which was developed with health union UNISON, University College Northampton and York St John College with advice from the Chartered Society of Physiotherapists. It fits into Government and NHS frameworks for staff development.

## Recognised qualification

Students are likely to be support workers or assistants to professionals such as physiotherapists, dieticians, speech therapists and so on, who are seeking a recognised qualification. After completing the level one courses K100 *Understanding health and social care*, and K114 *Introducing professional practice*, students will have a huge choice of second and third level courses covering such diverse health-related topics as children, mental health, death and dying and human biology. As the 240 points means the qualification does not have full degree status, students can study a further two 60-point courses to achieve a full BA or BSc.

Many will see the qualification as a logical progression from the OU's current Diploma in Social Welfare. The new qualification is the fourth Foundation degree offered by the OU since foundation degrees were launched in 2001 to link academic study with work-based learning.

OU Pro-Vice Chancellor (Curriculum and Awards) Linda Jones said: "How skills relate to jobs is very important for students and employers.

"It could be said that because so many of our students study and



The new foundation degree will suit NHS support workers

holding down jobs, the OU has been leading the way in this type of learning for a long time."

When the foundation degrees were launched in 2001, one in six students in the first intake were learning with the OU.

For more information about the new degree visit [www.open.ac.uk/shsw](http://www.open.ac.uk/shsw) and for details about foundation degrees in general, visit [www.foundationdegree.org.uk](http://www.foundationdegree.org.uk)

# Trading OU material is easier than ever

GOT some old course material you want to offload? Or are you looking to buy some OU set books? New technology has made it easier than ever to buy and sell, says **Sheila Forman**.

Students often ask **sesame** what is the quickest, most efficient way of buying and selling second-hand OU course material and set books. In the past the only way of doing this was through the pages of **sesame's** 'Small Ads' and although this is still possible, new technology has opened up new options.

If you want to buy and sell course material through **sesame**, you now need to contact our advertising agency McMillan-Scott. You will have to wait for the next issue carrying your advertisement to come out.

Another option is to use University Book Search. This company was set up by OU students to offer a quick and efficient service which helps other students buy or sell

their OU course material or set books. They say they have a register of hundreds of different courses for sale, including some discontinued course material. The website is clear and the instructions are very easy to follow. They also accept telephone and email enquiries.

On completion of her degree, Mandy Harrison from Hereford sold six years' worth of OU study material on an Ebay auction. Although her main aim was to find a good home for her beloved books, she was amazed how much interest was shown. "The last few hours of auction time saw the bidding prices increase considerably," said Mandy.

If you are just trying to dispose of your books you might want to take a look at the Bookaid International website. This site gives lots of options for certain types of books to be used by charitable organisations, one of which is helping victims of the recent tsunami

restock schools and colleges with suitable books. Please check out the website carefully first because they can only use books of a certain type.

If all else fails you could offer your books to your local charity shop, or as a last resort contact your local recycling centre.

So – if you are looking to buy or sell any OU course material, please don't call the **sesame** or the OUSA office. Try one of these instead:

● McMillan Scott, 10 Savoy Street, London, WC2E 7HR Tel: 020 7878 2317 fax: 020 7379 7155/7118 email: [John@mcmslondon.co.uk](mailto:John@mcmslondon.co.uk)

● University Booksearch: [www.universitybooksearch.co.uk](http://www.universitybooksearch.co.uk) Email: [jo@universitybooksearch.co.uk](mailto:jo@universitybooksearch.co.uk) Tel/fax: 01395 442174.

● Ebay: [www.ebay.co.uk](http://www.ebay.co.uk)

● Bookaid International: [www.bookaid.org](http://www.bookaid.org) Email: [info@bookaid.org](mailto:info@bookaid.org) tel: 0207 733 3577.

● Recycling: [www.wasteconnect.co.uk/](http://www.wasteconnect.co.uk/)

# Comic with a serious side

*Not many people know it, but comedian Lenny Henry has been an OU student since 2001. He also co-presented It's your Comic Relief, an OU/BBC1 programme broadcast in March*



Picture: Trevor Leighson

**You're currently studying English literature with The Open University? Why English literature? And why The Open University?**

All of the people I admire in showbiz are very, very smart. Quite a lot of them have been to university and benefited from it. Doing my BA is really helping me structure my thoughts. It's helped me to understand that good work is not an accident. You know the best writers like Flaubert and George Eliot and people like that took a long time to plan their work and The Open University has shown me that if you take the time to plan your work and structure it properly, you can do well. It's just helped me to organise my thoughts a bit better and I think the challenge of producing an essay every month or so is good, it keeps me on my toes. I like all the reading even the 19th century novels which sort of drove me mad in the beginning.

**Why do you think comedy is such a powerful fundraising tool?**

I think it's powerful because if I'm going to communicate with an audience they remember something I said with a bit of a twinkle in the eye better than boring old facts. There is a lot of really heartbreaking and moving documentary stuff on the [Comic Relief] night and if we can make people laugh in between it softens the blow and cushions the

effect of some of the harder stuff we show.

**This year is Red Nose Day's 10th anniversary, but there's still a lot of poverty out there. Do you think it has made a real difference?**

I think Comic Relief and Red Nose Day have made an immense difference. They've empowered the public, given them the ideas and tools to raise money off their own back without anybody telling them what to do. I think it's fantastic when I come to Africa and I see the grain banks, the new wells that have been built, the children being inoculated and terraced mountains that have been funded by Comic Relief. There are huge problems in Africa like HIV and Aids but a drip of water can erode a rock and I think that Comic Relief is becoming a very strong and mighty drip. We've got to keep going until the rock dissolves and it will dissolve but it's going to take a long time, so people have to stay committed. What's great about Comic Relief is that because it's fun I think people will stay committed.

**Work for Comic Relief has taken you to some pretty depressing places. How does seeing people coping with terrible poverty affect you personally?**

I've been in Addis Ababa this time round I went to a place called Debre Zeit where I watched this wonderful care worker called

Fanti visiting various people who were suffering from HIV. Even though these people were in immense pain, there was a lot of dignity involved. And what's wonderful is Comic Relief, by funding people like Fanti, are doing something to help.

**You've received numerous accolades during your career – the Golden Rose of Montreux, a British Comedy Awards Lifetime Achievement award, BBC British Personality of the Year, the Edric Connor Inspiration to Black People award are some of them – you're a husband and father and a mammoth fundraiser. Do you have any ambitions left for the future?**

I'd like to write something on my own that I could feel was a good piece of work, and the only way that I'm going to do that is if I have confidence and faith in my own ability. I've always worked with other writers. I've got some friends who are writers like Victoria Wood and Richard Curtis, who are pretty much the top of their game because they can work in a solitary way and produce immense pieces of work. There's nothing wrong with collaborating but I'd love to write something on my own and know it was good before I gave it to someone else to read. I think The Open University is helping me to judge my work in a way that writing something and giving it to someone to read for me simply doesn't.

# Try teaching

**W**OULD-BE teachers are trying out the profession thanks to a new OU initiative – and are already making a difference to the way children are taught.

Four OU students are combining their learning with working as teaching assistants to 11-18 year-olds at King's School in Peterborough, under the Student Associates Scheme which gives those interested in teaching a taste of the profession through a classroom placement.

Gemma Pitt, Jayne Turner, Niki Mailer and David Woodford are working in the school's science, geography and design and technology departments. And, says the deputy head Sue Hartropp, they are already making a difference to the way children are taught.

But although the quartet have only completed the first phase – a ten-day stint for which they each receive a £40-a-day bursary – they have all signed up for the 20-day second phase and, adds the deputy head, the scheme is clearly benefiting both students and the school itself. "The study element is making a difference to the students' subject knowledge and ways they approach pupils' needs here," she said. "We've been noticing the process changes in people's responses and the individual development that goes with it."

By the end of their placement, the four students will be able to plan, teach and evaluate a single lesson in their specialist subject area. The OU will be offering 600 such places by September in an initiative funded by the Teacher Training Agency, which aims to recruit teachers in subjects where they are most needed – science, geography, maths, design and technology, modern foreign languages and music.

Interested students must be studying at undergraduate or



Teaching placement attracts a £40-a-day bursary

postgraduate level now; be within travelling distance of a secondary school in England and not already have qualified teacher status (QTS) or be on a course leading to QTS. To find out more visit <http://sa-scheme.open.ac.uk>, call +44 (0)1908 858685 or email [FELS-student-associates-scheme@open.ac.uk](mailto:FELS-student-associates-scheme@open.ac.uk)



*Art history Study Tours*

**April – November 2005**

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**07 – 13 April 2005**

**Mantua and Ferrara**  
(AA305/General Interest)  
**13 – 17 April 2005**

**Sicily: Heritage, History & Art**  
(General Interest/A209)  
**05 – 11 May 2005**

**Religious Painting in Italy**  
1300 – 1500 (A424/354/General Interest)  
**11 – 17 May 2005**

**Renaissance Florence and Siena**  
(General Interest/A354/A424)  
**31 May – 06 June 2005**

**Rome and Ostia: the Romans**  
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The Open University

## Students: want £400 to try out a new career?

The Open University Student Associates Scheme allows students in higher education the opportunity to experience secondary school teaching in England, whilst getting paid for it.

### Are you:

- A full or part-time student in higher education?
- Interested in teaching maths, science, music, geography, modern foreign languages or design and technology in secondary schools?
- Not sure what to do with your degree when you graduate?

You could benefit from a 10 or 20 day work experience in a secondary school in England whilst getting £40 a day, tax-free.

**For more information and to download an application form go to our website at <http://sa-scheme.open.ac.uk> or call 01908 858685**

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**[www.openuniversity.co.uk/flexiblepgce](http://www.openuniversity.co.uk/flexiblepgce)**

# Social work degree opens the door to a varied career

*Some jobs are perennially popular with OU students. In the next few issues **sesame** will be focusing on those which generate most enquiries to the OU Careers Advisory Service. This issue: social work*

**T**HE social work profession in the UK is going through a period of change, which includes the introduction of a register of social workers and a new degree to replace the old Diploma in Social Work.

Work experience in roles supporting social workers is valuable for all applicants for social work training; in Ireland it is one of the entry criteria. Ways to gain experience include: working with asylum seekers; residential social work within care homes; making respite care arrangements for families; or working in disability learning teams.

Job titles will vary so it is important that you think about the role you are aiming for rather than simply a title. Use the vacancy pages of your local press or contact your local social services or social work department or health board.

## **Studying for a Social Work Qualification with the OU**

All the places on the OU social work qualification are for students

working in social care and supported by their employers. More than 300 students have now registered on the new OU Social Work degree in England and Wales. The degree is expected to be available in Scotland during 2006. The OU may offer it in Northern Ireland in the future. Students already studying for the discontinued Diploma in Social Work (DipSW) will be able to continue, and the DipSW will continue to be recognised as a valid qualification. Entry requirements and conditions for qualification differ between England, Wales, Ireland, and Scotland; contact your regional centre for details.

## **Broader Social Care Qualifications in the OU**

You may find other OU courses useful to increase your background knowledge on the social care sector: K100 *Understanding health and social care* or DD100 *An introduction to the social sciences: understanding social change*. K100 can also be used as evidence to

*Working with young people is among the new foundation degrees the OU is developing*



meet the requirement for GCSE English for acceptance on the OU Social work degree. If you are already working in the care sector, the OU is developing a range of 240-point Foundation Degrees in such areas as *Health and Social Care* (see Courses page 27), *Working with Young People* and *Early Years*. It may be possible at a later date to link these qualifications with professional training routes but seek advice on your circumstances.

Other degree options which may interest those working in or wanting to access the broader area of social care include: BA Childhood and Youth Studies, BA/BSc Health Studies or BA/BSc Health and Social Care. These may help develop relevant skills and background knowledge of the social care area but you may need further training.

### Areas Related to Social Work

Assistant social workers are not required to take statutory responsibility or study further than S/NVQ level 3. Roles are available working with all groups of people and across a variety of organisations. Other careers with close links to social work which require professional training up to and beyond degree level include: probation worker, youth worker, advice worker, mental health nurse, housing officer, psychologist, community worker, counsellor and occupational therapist.

### Useful Links

- Career Links is a scheme for OU students which matches you up with staff, associate lecturers or students working in the career you have an interest in. Go to [www.open.ac.uk/careers](http://www.open.ac.uk/careers)
- AGCAS Sector Briefing – Social Care [www.prospects.ac.uk/links/socialSB](http://www.prospects.ac.uk/links/socialSB)
- Social work careers information [www.socialworkcareers.co.uk](http://www.socialworkcareers.co.uk) (UK only)
- General Social Care Council [www.gsc.org.uk](http://www.gsc.org.uk) (covers England only)
- Scottish Social Services Council [www.sssc.uk.com](http://www.sssc.uk.com)
- Scottish Executive – Careers in Care [www.careinscotland.co.uk](http://www.careinscotland.co.uk)
- Care Council for Wales [www.ccwales.org.uk](http://www.ccwales.org.uk)
- Irish National Social Work Qualifications Board [www.nswqb.ie](http://www.nswqb.ie)
- Irish Association for Social Workers [www.iasw.eire.org](http://www.iasw.eire.org)
- Northern Ireland Social Care Council Information Service [www.niscc.info](http://www.niscc.info)
- British Association of Social Workers [www.basw.co.uk](http://www.basw.co.uk)
- Someone to watch over me: [www.open2.net/someonetowatch](http://www.open2.net/someonetowatch)
- Recognition Leaflet 1.3 Social Work [www3.open.ac.uk/courses/recognition/1\\_03.pdf](http://www3.open.ac.uk/courses/recognition/1_03.pdf) provides details of relevant OU courses
- National Graduate Development Programme [www.ngdp.co.uk/](http://www.ngdp.co.uk/) covers local government opportunities in the UK
- Database of volunteering opportunities [www.do-it.org](http://www.do-it.org)
- Public sector careers [www.getalife.org.uk](http://www.getalife.org.uk)

### Recruitment Fairs in 2005

- Compass Jobs Fairs are for people at all stages of their social care career. Their next event is in Leeds on 19 April. Call +44 (0)1892 785300 or go to [www.compassjobsfair.com](http://www.compassjobsfair.com)
- Forum 3 – Voluntary and charity opportunities – the UK's biggest recruitment and volunteering event for the non-profit sector is in London, 14 - 15 October.

In the next issue Careers looks at teaching.

## CASE STUDY

### John Pierre-Madigan, Probation Worker

#### Why did you choose probation work?

My background is from a family of six children from a council estate where I saw friends drift in and out of crime. I had a desire to help people see that there are choices in life. I was interested in probation work but having left school with four CSEs at 16, I never thought I could do it. It was only after taking a MENSA test that I realised if my IQ was anything to go by, I might have a chance.

#### What has been your career path before probation work?

After leaving school I went onto a Youth Training Scheme, followed by the Army. After this I moved from one job to another: labouring, warehouse work, factory work. While I was working, I studied for a Health and Social Care degree with the OU. At the same time I was a volunteer for the St John's Ambulance, the Probation Service and then a residential children's school. I was offered a full-time post in the residential care school and made my change in direction.

I applied to be a trainee Probation Officer, which requires you to study for a degree, work towards an NVQ and go on placement. One of the reasons the recruiters were interested in me was that I had studied with the OU while working.

#### Skills you use the most?

Time management especially the need to prioritise deadlines, read and digest information, then prepare succinct and precisely written reports for the courts. Being able to interact with people is vital as is concentrating on the salient issues. There is a lot of one-to-one work with offenders and this requires you to work through both your own and their emotional barriers.

#### Working environment?

Every day is different. Of a working week, about three days are spent in the office with the remainder split between prison and being in court.

#### Best parts and worst parts of the job?

*Best* – you get to work with a huge spectrum of people from the homeless to professionals who have made mistakes.

*Worst* – the job is generally very pressured and there are times when you have to engage with people such as sex offenders or rapists where it is difficult to isolate your professional behaviour from your emotions

#### Where do you see yourself going?

My role is currently that of Case Manager where I manage up to 35 offenders at one time. I liaise with the courts which is basically providing guidance on how best to sentence that particular individual. I also visit prisons where I am involved in the release process.

As a next step I would see myself as a Personal Development Adviser or Practice Manager, monitoring quality assurance within a team. In five to ten years time I would like to be a Senior Probation Officer in charge of 15 - 20 staff.

At the moment I'm studying the second year of my Masters in Social Policy and Criminology with the OU, which is certainly an academic challenge. I'm currently looking at what study to do next.

# CASE STUDY

## Mohammed Sayeed, Social Worker

### Why did you choose social work?

I had been in a variety of jobs including work in the family shop and in a sandwich bar when I decided to apply for the police force. I wasn't successful but I decided to do some voluntary work in a residential care home. The more I saw of the difficulties young people were in, the more I wanted to get involved in supporting them.

### What experience did you gain in order to get into social work and what has been your career path so far?

Having done some volunteering, I got a job as a Temporary Residential Child-Care Worker in a mainstream residential home and was made permanent shortly afterwards. Fourteen months later I became a Team Leader in a residential care home for children with disabilities, then moved to another children's home as an Assistant Manager. During this time I applied for the Diploma in Social Work (now a degree course). I was unsuccessful at the interview stage because I had a local understanding of social work and social care, but not enough of a national perspective. I then took an OU course D103 and succeeded in gaining a place on a part-time course for the Diploma.

After qualifying I spent time both as an Assistant and as an Acting Manager in a remand home for young people and during this time I achieved my Practice Teachers Award and D32-33 Assessors Award

which meant I was able to supervise those who were training for social care qualifications. After a stint as manager of a five bedroom residential unit, I was given the job of setting up another new home.

I decided for a variety of reasons, including the desire for a better work/family balance, to move back into field social work and now work for a Children's Health and Disability Team in Social Services. I am responsible for about 20 cases and deal with interviewing families, making assessments of their needs and liaising with other agencies and services to ensure that they are provided with the support that they qualify for.

### Skills you use the most?

Empathy, the ability to engage and communicate with people and to see past their disability or other circumstances, humility, advocacy, time-management, flexibility and efficient administrative skills.

### Working environment?

Within residential care homes you spend your time in and around the care home and are required to work any shifts including nights and weekends. By contrast life as a field social worker is spent visiting families in their homes, catching up with admin in the office and all within much more sociable hours which mean a better work/life balance.

### Best parts and worst parts of the job?

The best part is knowing that when you finish your working day you have made changes to make people's lives better. Having to constantly fight for resources is the worst part of the job.

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# Career Queries

OU careers advisor **Ellen Cocking** answers your questions

**I WANT to work with children but apart from teacher or children's nurse I'm not really sure what I could do. Am I too old?**

There is a wide range of careers that involve work with children. These include play worker, helping children to learn through play; art therapist, supporting children through illness or disabilities through the use of art; social worker specialising in children and families (see Case Study, page 32); outdoor pursuits instructor, taking groups on outward bound activities; counsellor, listening and talking to children and helping them to work through difficult times in their lives; and careers adviser. For more information see [www.prospects.ac.uk/links/occupations](http://www.prospects.ac.uk/links/occupations) or contact the Careers Advisory Service at your regional centre.

Maturity does count. If you can demonstrate what you have learned from life experiences this will go in your favour. You will need to research individual careers for specific restrictions. It will depend on you, the career, the training provider or the employer you apply to.

Think about whether you want to work in the same setting every day, can you travel, how much paperwork are you prepared to deal with, how much emotional stress are you prepared to bear? Also how much contact do you want with children? Jobs like teacher will require you to be in contact with children all day while others will involve less contact, although the time spent together may be more intense, as in counselling. The age group of the children is also a consideration.

You will need to be able to sell yourself to

an employer or a course tutor by providing evidence from your previous experiences.

The secret to securing the right job is to plan carefully. You might like to generate some career ideas for yourself using a tool called Prospects Planner. This is available on the national HE careers site called Graduate Prospects at [www.prospects.ac.uk/pplanner](http://www.prospects.ac.uk/pplanner)

And please contact the Careers Advisory Service at your Regional Centre who will be able to offer advice or make you an individual appointment with one of our careers advisers to talk through your situation.

**Ellen will be answering more careers questions in future issues of sesame. Please write or email your question to sesame, ref: Careers Q and A.**

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# Canker at the heart of an empire

*A period of British history we often prefer to forget is brought to life*

Nearly 19th century Britain, few families could match the success of the Beckfords. They turned the Jamaican sugar trade into the world's first truly global industry. So influential was the family that its head, Alderman, became Lord Mayor of London, persuaded Prime Minister William Pitt to be godfather to his son, and even had Mozart give the boy violin lessons.

But within two decades the family's empire came crashing down, due to the abolition of a practice upon which the entire Beckford fortune was built – slavery.

At the height of their power the Beckfords worked tens of thousands of slaves on their 22 enormous Jamaican sugar plantations. No matter that in 1807 Britain's MPs voted to end the trade that had existed for nearly 300 years, the Beckfords carried on exploiting the Caribbean locals for another quarter of a century until the slaves finally, and successfully, revolted.

The rise and fall of the Beckfords mirrors the journey of the British slave trade itself, and promises a fascinating story in the OU's latest television series. *The Slavery Business*, co-produced with the BBC, combines dramatic reconstruction and recollections of the slaves' and traders' descendants with readings from diaries and other documents written by the Beckfords as their business boomed and declined.

It will also revive some remarkable true stories that, perhaps owing to a 21st century reluctance to explore such a morally repugnant

history, are in danger of being forgotten. How the Royal Navy posted a third of its entire fleet off the west coast of Africa for 90 years – the longest campaign in its history – to end the transportation of slaves; how British abolitionists invented the world's first logo to boost their cause; and how Creole Samuel Sharpe, one of few slaves able to read, learned from newspapers left in Montego Bay by the sugar ships that the abolitionist movement was sweeping through Britain – a discovery that prompted the sugar slaves' revolt.

The series uses computer graphics to re-create a 19th-century sugar plantation and the grand houses in which lived and worked the Beckfords and the other leading British slave trading family, the Lascelles. It will include contemporary texts on the trade by Benjamin Disraeli and Lord Nelson, as well as William Beckford's own 1788 treatise which was about how slaves should be treated.

Most pertinently, viewers will hear the views of modern-day Beckfords, whose ancestors were slaves or traders, including renowned black British theologian Robert Beckford, white business lecturer David Beckford, and Tyson Beckford, the world's most successful black male model and latterly star of the US version of *I'm A Celebrity... Get Me Out Of Here*.

*The Slavery Business* is due to air on BBC2 from Tuesday, 5 April. Check listings for details.

For more information about OU/BBC TV programmes, including links to relevant OU courses, visit [www.open2.net](http://www.open2.net)

**“At the height of their power the Beckford family worked tens of thousands of slaves”**

*Master and slaves: the descendants of both have attained equal eminence in the 21st century*



# Childbirth in the 21st century

**G**IVING birth is the focus of a new BBC/OU series, *Midwives*, which follows the progress of mothers and their nurses in ten half-hour programmes shot in and around Derby City Hospital.

"It's a broad look at the different types of births women can have, and the roles of the midwives within that," said series producer Charlotte Reid.

"We chose Derby because it has a large department of 100 midwives in the hospital and a further 100 out in the community, and because it had one of the highest instances of home birth (about four per cent) in the country."

## Mother v. baby?

The series will, she added, make viewers appreciate the nurses who bring babies into the world. "They want to do right by the mums, but often have to make decisions that are in the baby's best interest but aren't what the mother wants. And we also see some of the frustrations of the job, such as when decisions are taken out of their hands by the doctors.

"We'll see mums who want a Caesarian section but the midwives want them to have a natural birth, or planned epidurals not being available because the anaesthetist has been called to theatre. But this programme isn't about NHS politics or funding or shortages, but about the actual job that our midwives do."

"We portray the reality of the work these people do," she added. "That means it's not always for the squeamish." The series is expected to run on BBC 3 in early May. Check listings for details.

The OU runs a series of health care courses, from the level one studies Y158 *Understanding health* and K100 *Understanding health and social care* right through to the third-level course for professionals, K350 *Assessing practice in nursing and midwifery*. For details visit [www.open.ac.uk/courses](http://www.open.ac.uk/courses)



The programme focuses, not on NHS politics, but on the reality of what midwives do

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