

# Annual Report 2014/15



The Open  
University



## Vice-Chancellor's Introduction

The Open University has always put students first and in 2014-15 we have stayed true to our mission. Tens of thousands of OU students completed their higher education journeys, helped on their way by the advice, inspiration and guidance of our Associate Lecturers and Student Support staff. In 2015, the OU was top-rated in the National Student Satisfaction rankings in Scotland, Northern Ireland, and Wales once

again, while remaining in the leading pack in England.

In my new role as Vice-Chancellor I have been incredibly proud to meet graduates and hear their inspiring stories of commitment, perseverance and ambition. It's clear that the OU truly transforms lives, and delivers to the UK the highly skilled work-force this country needs, without taking students away from the workplace. It supports developing countries too, in delivering the necessary education and skills to meet their challenges.

We have cemented our position as a leading research institution, with 72% of the OU research submission assessed as world-leading or internationally excellent (4\* or 3\*) in the 2014 Research Excellence Framework (REF) review of UK Universities. Over the last year we have determined our 2020 research strategy and celebrated our involvement in pushing the boundaries of our understanding of the origins of life in the Solar System through our involvement in the Rosetta project, which successfully put a landing craft on a comet last year. We hope this will inspire thousands more students to engage with science – one of the UK's key skills shortages.

I truly believe in what the OU stands for and I am proud to have been passed the baton by my predecessor, Martin Bean, who led the OU as it responded effectively to the new funding regime in England. The implications of those changes continue to have consequences for the UK part-time sector, which has seen a 37% decline since 2009/10 – that's 200,000 potential students who won't benefit from the transformation that HE can provide. We continue to lobby government and policy makers hard to address this in an environment of continued austerity, with a particular focus

on retaining critical funding for widening participation

Believing in a great institution doesn't mean you are a member of a preservation society. I take inspiration from the daring and innovative thinking of the OU's founders, now almost fifty years ago. We will need to ask tough questions – of ourselves and others - to get to the right answers and we will need to be bold enough to choose the path that truly delivers our mission. We must focus even more closely on student needs and deliver a sustainable model to meet them, not just for the sake of our students but for the benefit of wider society long into the future.

As our annual financial statements make clear, the continuing impact of reduced student numbers along with the likely further withdrawal of direct government funding will create further pressure on university budgets. But I am confident that there are huge opportunities for growth if we can align our university to the needs of learners in the UK and the world.

The OU has so many of the assets needed: brilliant students, talented staff, influential supporters and a spirit of innovation. Thank you for your dedication, interest and involvement so far. I hope we can continue to rely on your support, enthusiasm, guidance and ambassadorship over this next crucial year.



Peter Horrocks

# Businesses turn to the OU to upskill staff

Whether it's a company with 10 employees, or large multinationals, organisations looking to develop their staff have found the OU highly beneficial. More than 1300 employers, from small companies or local authorities, to government departments and sector giants, including IBM, BT and the NHS, regularly invest in our courses.

The OU offers flexible learning solutions at scale, responding directly to business needs. In particular the OU has a growing reputation for tackling the talent shortages in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) – addressing a skills gap that the UK Commission for Employment and Skills

(UKCES) finds 'alarming', given that STEM skills are crucial to business innovation and growth. Read the report: [bit.ly/218koyp](http://bit.ly/218koyp)

The OU's ability to tackle significant skills shortages by upskilling existing workforces explains why the OU's presence and sponsorship at the annual Confederation of British Industry (CBI) conference since 2013 has become a welcome feature. Indeed, David Cameron praised 'the great work' of the OU in supporting the UK economy.

"It is a win-win situation, which businesses really like", says Mike Dutton, OU's Director, Strategic Planning and Resources. "One of the most attractive features of OU study", he adds, "is flexibility, which keeps time away from the workplace to a minimum, and enables staff not only to work while studying, but to put their acquired skills to practice and contribute to the business immediately."

The Nuclear Skills Academy, which has over 100 employer members, approached the OU to develop the Certificate of Nuclear Professionalism to address the shortage of 'work-ready' graduates with the skills they needed, specifically around communication, project management, team leadership, commercial awareness and some technical nuclear skills.

The Certificate is delivered across the country via a number of flexible blended learning options to suit employers' needs:

## OU in Northern Ireland

We hosted a meeting of the NI Assembly's Committee for Employment and Learning. The Members learned about our students' experiences and sampled interactive learning materials, better preparing them for shaping part-time higher education policy in Northern Ireland.

[www.open.ac.uk/northern-ireland](http://www.open.ac.uk/northern-ireland)



Learning at work Image: Thinkstock

distance learning; in-company accredited course; or classroom-based provision. This successful programme received an award from the influential Nuclear Engineering International magazine in its first year. Award judge Ulrik von Estorff described it as "a very innovative and professional course with a high involvement of the nuclear industry in its design".

The OU responds to demand from a wide range of sectors. It is already the UK's largest provider for nurses and paramedics due to its long-standing collaboration with the NHS.

A recent project, developed for and with Milton Keynes Hospital, addresses the urgent need for better care for patients with dementia – a disease suffered by one in four

**"Had the OU not existed, it would have to be invented for UK businesses"**

of the hospital's patients. The solution was an OU course, combined with tutor support and the hospital's own in-house training resources. Jon White, Senior Nurse in Practice Development said, "What we did was give that experience to 50 individuals so that when they came into clinical practice their voice was much, much louder. Their ability to influence and make changes and improvements was considerably enhanced."



*A student engaging in an online tutorial*

# Improving student experience

Students are at the centre of the University and its success is shaped by their experiences. The OU's vision is to provide every student with an outstanding study experience that maximises their attainment, whilst upholding high academic standards.

The OU has pioneered the use of technology, initially focusing on breaking down the barriers of distance and scale. In

doing so, it has become a world-leader in pedagogy. Our students are able to study in digestible, dynamic, bite-size chunks, testing their understanding and ability as they progress, at regular intervals and informally. They can study whenever and wherever they wish, on any digital platform, through our award-winning OU Anywhere provision.

However, it is the combination of effective use of technology and human intervention

that makes OU teaching effective. Part-time is often considered a solitary pursuit by those who have not experienced it. Our Associate Lecturers and subject-based Student Support Teams provide frequent and timely interventions. They are also at the end of a phone call or an email when students need them.

We continue to innovate, not least with our virtual science and soon-to-be engineering OpenSTEM Laboratory. Thanks to a £2.7m grant from the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), students worldwide will be able to participate in an enhanced suite of remote-controlled experiments using the most innovative remote access facilities and industry-standard tools. This will build on the successes of the Wolfson OpenScience Lab, which won the 2014 Times Higher Education Award for 'Outstanding ICT achievement of the year'. @OpenScienceLab see: [bit.ly/1dzj6XX](https://bit.ly/1dzj6XX) OpenSTEM see: [bit.ly/1Hmd0DI](https://bit.ly/1Hmd0DI)

## TIMELY INTERVENTION

We are now using learning analytics to predict which students are in need of additional support and when, resulting in proactive contact from an Associate Lecturer or the Student Support Team dependent on whose intervention is best suited to the challenge. No traditional university is able to do this. Prof. Belinda Tynan explains:

[bit.ly/1Pogo8V](https://bit.ly/1Pogo8V)

Student support and development in a University environment cannot be entirely delivered by the University's teachers. It is also delivered by the student community. The value of subject-based discussion, explanation, exploration and mutual support is significant. This networking, knowledge

sharing and mutual support are valued by employers as key employability skills.

Our students are encouraged through our tutorials, student forums, social media, closed and open groups, to join a vibrant and supportive learning community. That encouragement starts as soon as a student commence, through our online induction programmes, and via the OU Student Association's (OUSA) Student Hub Live and online Fresher's week – initiatives developed in collaboration with OUSA over the last two years. These include live-streamed talks, interactive demonstrations, Q&A sessions and quizzes, supported by lively discussion in social media.

We have also invested heavily to make the enquirer's decision-making process easier. Indeed, we won the Times Higher Education Award for Outstanding ICT Initiative of the Year 2014 for the new OU 'MBA Explorer' iPad App, which provides a one-stop information centre about the OU MBA. The app includes advice on how to plan studies to ensure the MBA fits around a busy schedule.

See: [bit.ly/1l2y5OS](https://bit.ly/1l2y5OS)

## High student satisfaction

The OU was the top-rated university in the 2015 National Student Survey (NSS), in student satisfaction in Northern Ireland and Scotland, and tied for first place in Wales, with student satisfaction ratings remaining over 90% across the UK in general.



Life Story Image: BBC/Sophie Lanfear

## Inspiring learning through BBC collaborations

From the outset our BBC partnership has inspired members of the public into higher education through its free educational offering.

Indeed the partnership with the BBC continues to flourish. This year an even wider range of inspirational programmes were produced that engaged UK and international audiences. Our OU academic consultants have informed, challenged and engaged the production teams and in return the programmes have delivered rich audiovisual materials to aid our teaching and learning.

Our programming covered big landmarks, from *Life Story*, *The Met*, and *Richard Hammond's Wildest Weather* on BBC 1 to powerful series examining disability and

educational exclusion on BBC 3. On BBC 2, the hidden world of Parliament was explored in *Inside the Commons*, and healthcare provision for children was examined by the third series of *Great Ormond Street Hospital*. On BBC 4 we delved into the *History of Forensics* and explored three giants of ancient philosophy: Buddha, Socrates and Confucius, in *Genius of the Ancient World*. The dark side of the internet was examined by MCT's series *Cybercrimes* for BBC News and, internationally, on BBC World News.

### FROM INSPIRATION TO ACTION

Over 600,000 people were inspired by our programmes and visited OpenLearn to explore subjects in greater depth. In 2014/15 we

launched the first Badged Open Courses (BOCs), free learning materials open to all and leading to a digital badge, developed in response to feedback from informal learners who are seeking to have their online learning recognised.

Our flagship project, FutureLearn has continued to flourish, passing the two million learners mark and significantly increasing the list of academic and specialist partner institutions,

as well as delivering a range of new Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), including some hugely popular ones developed at the OU.

Just like our partnership with the BBC, the rich learner experiences developed for our free and social platforms are brought back home to contribute to and inform our new module development. We have kick-started a virtuous learning circle.

## Changing perceptions

'BECAUSE I can' – these are the words of Lisa Rowlands, winner of the 2015 NIACE Cymru older learner award winner, Lisa has since signed up for an OU open degree. See: [bit.ly/1WcD00b](http://bit.ly/1WcD00b)

Every year, the University supports thousands of people to realise that it is never too late to learn and study for a qualification. In 2014-15, over 2,500 students took advantage of the offer of a free Access module as a first step into OU study.

For many, studying part-time is the only viable option, as shown by a recent piece of OU research investigating the experience of Part-Time learners and highlighting some of the barriers they encounter, including the idea that HE study might not be for them.

See: [bit.ly/1WCaZiU](http://bit.ly/1WCaZiU)

Across all four UK nations, the OU has a long tradition of working with trades unions, educational providers and other agencies to raise awareness of our HE offer.

Initiated by the OU in Wales and with similar models being developed in Scotland and Ireland, Pathways to Success (PTS)

uses the OU's Open Educational Resources effectively in widening access activities.

See: [bit.ly/1HmZorA](http://bit.ly/1HmZorA)

In England, using HEFCE funding awarded as part of the National Networks for Collaborative Outreach (NNCO) scheme, work has begun to develop free online resources aimed primarily at those looking for part-time, flexible study options, in particular unemployed adults or those in low paid, unqualified jobs. See: [bit.ly/1PeWOfg](http://bit.ly/1PeWOfg)

## OU in Scotland

A partnership with Asda helped retail staff across Scotland learn to recognise and assist customers showing signs of dementia, improving their day-to-day experiences. This work received the 'Outstanding Contribution to the Local Community' award at the Herald HE Awards. [www.open.ac.uk/scotland](http://www.open.ac.uk/scotland)

# Class of 2014/15 – truly life changing learning

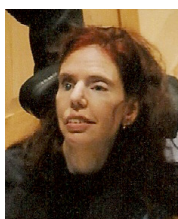
The OU student cohort is unique – we take students with no or little prior educational achievement (39% or more of our students enter with two A levels or less). 75% are in work when they study with us. Also 75% of our students tell us that as a result of their course they have improved their career prospects and 88% say that the skills and knowledge they develop through OU study benefits their current areas of work.

It is also the case that the OU accommodates a large number of students whose circumstances make employment very challenging (learners in prison or leaving prison; students with disabilities or significant caring responsibilities) and for whom learning gain has a more profound impact and broader, societal and community benefits beyond employment.

## THEIR STORIES, OUR STORY

The people who tell the impact story best are our students. Here are just three stories from the class of 2014/15. Our recent life-changing learning promotion caught the interest of our students and alumni in social media. Do take a look at #OUthanks and see: [bit.ly/1P5umN5](http://bit.ly/1P5umN5) for more shared experiences.

**Dawn Faizey Webster** was affected by locked-in syndrome after a stroke, leaving her with complete paralysis except for her left eye. Her only way of communicating is by blinking, yet despite this incredibly difficult circumstance she obtained an OU degree. She is now working on her Masters. See: [on.fb.me/1NLSvFc](https://on.fb.me/1NLSvFc)



**Amy Woolfson** is an OU Law School graduate and has been offered a place at Harvard University to study for a Master's degree in Law. She is the first OU graduate to be awarded a Kennedy Scholarship in the USA. See: [bit.ly/1NLTiG5](http://bit.ly/1NLTiG5)

**Ian Cox** studied graphic design and worked as an animator in TV and movies, before realising he wanted to change his career. He later gained a degree in Psychology and now has an MA in Counselling and Psychology. When fully accredited, he intends to go into private practice. See: [bit.ly/1NLSYav](http://bit.ly/1NLSYav)

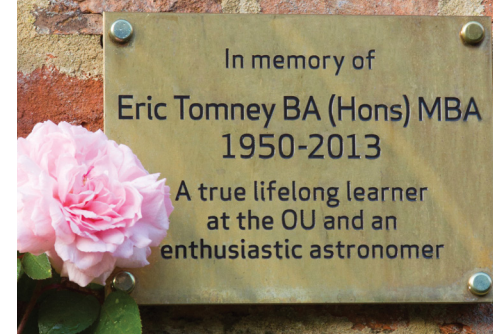


# Generously supporting education

In the last year, nearly 10,000 OU alumni, supporters, trusts, foundations and organisations have supported the University's vision of a quality higher education, open to everyone with the determination to succeed. Donations totalling £3.4 million are helping take learning further than ever, creating free education resources for teachers in sub-Saharan Africa, and funding research that will enable dogs to sniff out the early warning signs of cancer.

## OU ALUMNUS SUPPORTS EXCELLENCE IN VOLUNTARY SECTOR LEADERSHIP

A gift of £600,000 from Anthony Nutt is helping create a pioneering Centre of Excellence for Voluntary Sector Leadership (CVSL). As society



increasingly relies on voluntary organisations to support people in need across the country, the CVSL will help charities acquire the leadership skills and knowledge to navigate the complexities of the voluntary sector.

## INSPIRING THE NEXT GENERATION

Eric Tomney, OU alumnus, left a gift in his Will to encourage students who share his love of astronomy. The first student to benefit is Jim Stanton, who is using the award to buy a telescope. Jim says, "I hope that Mr Tomney's friends and executors will consider this a fitting tribute to his commitment to the OU, life long learning and to astronomy."

To offer life-changing learning to more students, visit [www.open.ac.uk/giving](http://www.open.ac.uk/giving)

## Thank You

THE Open University would like to offer heartfelt thanks to everyone who made a gift to the University this year. The following donors have made exceptionally generous gifts in the past year:

Aldgate & Allhallows Foundation • Banco Santander • Mr Howard Brown and Mrs Elizabeth Brown • Mr Richard Delbridge • Esmee Fairbairn Foundation • The Exilarch's Foundation • GMC Trust • Lord and Lady Haskins • Inmarsat plc • John Ellerman Foundation • Dr Ivo Kovachev • Mrs Charlotte Leahy • Mr Anthony Nutt • OPITO International • PF Charitable Trust • Share Radio Ltd • Baron Thyssen • True Potential LLP • University Book Search • Mrs Rachael Webb • Dr Charlotte Wood • Mr Stephen Wyatt • Yorkshire Adult School Union

# Leaders in technology enhanced learning

This year marks half a century since Harold Wilson spoke of the ‘white heat of technological revolution’, a world with no place for ‘restrictive practices or outdated methods’. The Open University has pioneered the use of technology in pedagogy and its leadership in this area was recognised in 2013, when Her Majesty created the first Regius Professorship at the OU in Open Education, held by Prof. Eileen Scanlon.

## RESEARCH HELPING STUDENTS

The OU’s position as a European leader for massive innovations in learning technologies was confirmed by its outstanding result in REF 2014. OU research in Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) will continue to be prioritised

in the coming years, as it has direct influence on our student experience as well as provides solutions to global educational challenges.

Through TEL networks and the production of the eagerly awaited annual *Innovating Pedagogy Report*, the OU champions the adoption of technology into teaching and examines many applications of learning technologies, in particular the role of social networks of learners in education. Researchers from both our Knowledge Media Institute and Institute of Educational Technology observe and create new best practice to inspire education and professional training sectors, by linking their involvement at the OU and FutureLearn, with the collaboration with corporate partners.

# Tackling inequalities globally

SELECTED as one of the University’s priority research areas our international development research has long been renowned for its impact. Projects such as English In Action, improving English language skills of 25 million people in Bangladesh, and TESS-India, delivering

resources for hundreds of thousands of teachers in India, have won recognition and acclaim.

In addition to addressing skills gaps in the Global South, OU research in international development tackles other pressing issues, such as how to encourage

green development in Africa, how to produce affordable medical devices in India see: [bit.ly/1MdMeyy](http://bit.ly/1MdMeyy), or how changing the habits of Western consumers can reduce poverty amongst workers in the clothes industry see: [bit.ly/1k3Bwny](http://bit.ly/1k3Bwny)

The OU is pioneering an

approach called “inclusive innovation”, involving poor and marginalised people in developing their own solutions. Our researchers have found evidence that producing medicines locally in Tanzania means that they are more likely to reach remote villages. We believe that by researching and promoting grass roots innovation, the OU helps to reduce wealth inequality and social exclusion.

The OU’s research and practice in this area enables the development of a rich curriculum base which tackles global development issues and is attractive to sector practitioners.



Clean water will keep him in school

# Training new water experts

THE OpenWASH project aims to help save lives in Ethiopia by supporting sustainable water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) initiatives. It’s a critical issue, with implications far beyond getting enough to drink.

Pam Furniss, OpenWASH Academic Director, says, “Increasing access to safe water and sanitation underpins improvements in health, reductions in school drop-out rates and greater productivity.”

By equipping the people working on WASH projects with the complex skills they need, they are more likely to deliver long-term improvements for communities especially in rapidly growing urban areas.

Written by expert Ethiopian authors, supported by OU academic teaching specialists, the flexible resources delivered by the project can be used for independent study on site or as the basis for classroom teaching.

Funded by aid from the UK Government,

OpenWASH feeds directly into work by World Vision and UNICEF to support the Ethiopian Government’s goals to provide safe drinking water to nearly 30 million more people, plus over 30,000 schools and health facilities, many of which also need improved sanitation. To find out more, visit [www.open.ac.uk/ido](http://www.open.ac.uk/ido)

## OU in Wales

We continued our highly successful ‘In Conversation with...’ series, hosting Lord Neil Kinnock, Lord Dafydd Wigley, and former Australian Prime Minister, Julia Gillard. These events are open to the public and many are available to view on YouTube. See: [bit.ly/1PPkOoy](http://bit.ly/1PPkOoy) [www.open.ac.uk/wales](http://www.open.ac.uk/wales)



*Welcome to a comet  
ESA/Rosetta/Philae/CIVA*

## Making dreams come true

On 12 November 2014, as part of the Rosetta mission, a tiny craft called Philae, equipped with instruments co-developed at our University, such as Ptolemy, made an eventful landing on the comet 67P, creating a milestone in the history of space exploration. It was a personal triumph for OU space scientists, some of whom had waited for this moment for 20 years, since the beginning of the project.

And it was worth waiting for – the Ptolemy team, led by Professor Ian Wright, have published the findings, based on the data sent by Philae, which pushed the boundaries of human understanding of the origins of life in the Solar System. Prof. Wright said that the compounds detected by their instrument “would have gone into the mix that led to the formation of the life on Earth”, and although

did not contain life themselves, they were necessary in the formation of water and simple sugars.

The success of the Rosetta mission has strengthened the OU’s reputation as one of three major space science centres in the UK and as the go-to hub of space expertise for global media, often demonstrated by TV satellite trucks parked outside the Robert Hooke building. See video on Rosetta: [bit.ly/1EAsp2R](http://bit.ly/1EAsp2R)

Whether explaining new images of Ceres or Pluto, or the significance of the finding of Beagle2 landing site on Mars, recent interviews and articles by OU space academics have reached unprecedented audiences. We hope they will inspire future Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) students to come forward, meeting the UK’s insatiable desire for skilled graduates.

## Looking up and down

It should hardly come as a surprise that space science has been selected as one of the priority research areas at the OU. In the coming years our space scientists will undertake new projects, looking both up into space and down on Earth.

The OU will lead Europlanet 2020, a ground-breaking €9.9 million project, by sharing its own state-of-the-art facilities with researchers from all over Europe. As our space scientists specialise in designing, building and managing instruments, such as advanced sensors, the OU is an attractive partner to other academic institutions and commercial partners alike.

We will continue to be involved in the most exciting missions of our times, such as GAIA, measuring the positions of over a billion stars in our Galaxy and beyond; EUCLID, aimed at mapping the geometry of the dark Universe; and BepiColombo, a mission to explore Mercury, to be launched in 2017.

See: [bit.ly/1I290ng](http://bit.ly/1I290ng)

Space research also helps us tackle challenges on our own planet: we are helping to set up a 24/7 satellite system of monitoring volcanoes (See video: [bit.ly/1NvbELn](http://bit.ly/1NvbELn)) and collaborating with commercial enterprises to improve cancer screening and measuring air quality in submarines (See video: [bit.ly/1N1UW7T](http://bit.ly/1N1UW7T)).

## Researching today’s UK

CITIZENSHIP and Governance is an innovative research collaboration at the OU addressing some of the key issues in society in the UK, and beyond. Brought together at a time of unprecedented mass migration into Europe, continuing upheavals in the markets, as well as changes affecting the institutions regarded as the bedrock of life in the UK, such as the NHS and the BBC, the research is well placed to analyse the

processes we are witnessing and to provide answers about the significant challenges we face. See video: [bit.ly/1M5O4EB](http://bit.ly/1M5O4EB)

For example, Dr Umot Erel examines migrant mothers, who are often seen as contributing to societal pressures – a drain on resources, but who are in fact best placed to bring communities together. Dr Erel’s research establishes a key part in motivating

integration of their whole families. See video: [bit.ly/1MerDtZ](http://bit.ly/1MerDtZ)

Prof. Jean Hartley’s new National Centre for Policing Research and Professional Development will support evidence-based policing practice improvement, working collaboratively with the force to test, disprove or recommend innovative approaches and techniques and build them into their professional development portfolio.





The largest academic institution in the UK with 173,889 students



**86** of the FTSE100 have sponsored staff on OU courses



**90%**  of students satisfied with the quality of their course  
\* National Students Survey

Financial highlights 2014/15 can be found at [bit.ly/1OBGvt5](http://bit.ly/1OBGvt5)



## Equality and Diversity

FIND out more about the OU's equality scheme and objectives: <http://www.open.ac.uk/equality-diversity/> and watch the video with Jiten Patel, Acting Head of Equality and Diversity: [bit.ly/1PzZJhh](http://bit.ly/1PzZJhh)

Council membership August 2014 – July 2015 can be found at [bit.ly/1MetezP](http://bit.ly/1MetezP)

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For further information please contact:

Lucian J Hudson  
Director of Communications  
The Open University  
Walton Hall  
Milton Keynes  
MK76AA  
Tel: +44 (0)1908 274066

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

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