Changing learning, changing lives

‘Changing learning, changing lives’ is the vision of Learning and Teaching Solutions (LTS) within The Open University.

➜ The Open University

The Open University (OU) pioneered supported open learning in the 1970s and continues to lead the way by recognising an increasing need for education to be accessible in new and creative ways. The OU understands the needs of students who either want or need to combine learning with other commitments, from paid employment to caring for dependents. At the OU we strongly believe that higher education should be available to all, not just to those who can attend traditional universities.

➜ LTS

LTS is a modern centre for the development, production and delivery of creative and cost-effective learning materials. We employ highly skilled teams who provide the expertise and experience to ensure that OU learning materials are delivered to the appropriate standards. They are supported by a management team that not only understands the needs of distance education, but has the creativity and strategic vision to ensure LTS is a leading player in its field.
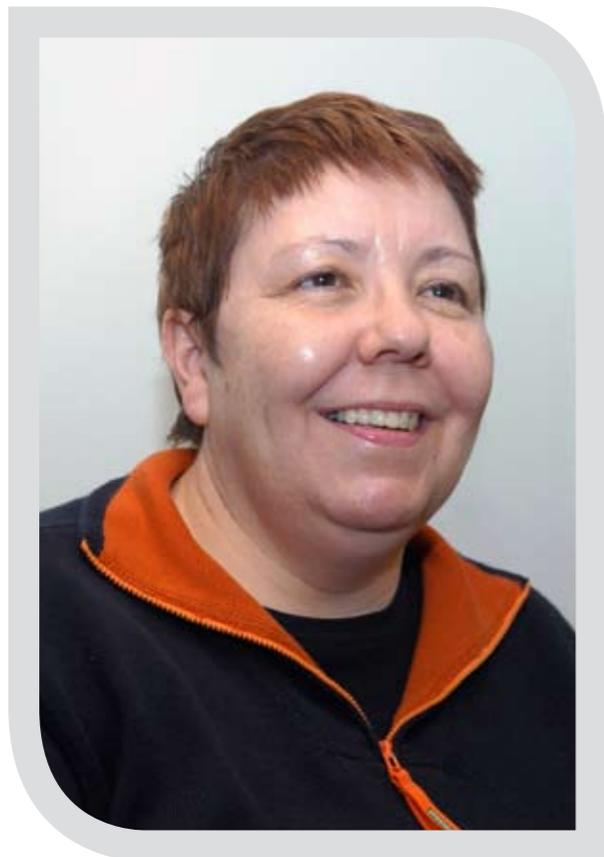
'It is a privilege to work with staff who demonstrate a commitment to the vision and mission of The Open University. Leading such an important department is challenging, stimulating and rewarding.'

Anne Howells, Director of LTS

Structure

LTS is divided into three sub-units: Business Planning, Strategic Development and Media. There is also a Director's Office that supports the work of the unit and oversees staffing, recruitment, communications, and learning and development.

➔ Director's Office

The Director's Office is responsible for ensuring that LTS is staffed with the right people who in turn are equipped with the right skills to keep us at the leading edge of educational media production. The office also looks after communications within the unit.

We are strongly committed to the development of all our staff. Each staff member has a personal development plan and is encouraged to seek out both formal and informal training and development to enhance their skills and abilities.

Director LTS

Director's Office

Business Planning

Strategic Development

Media
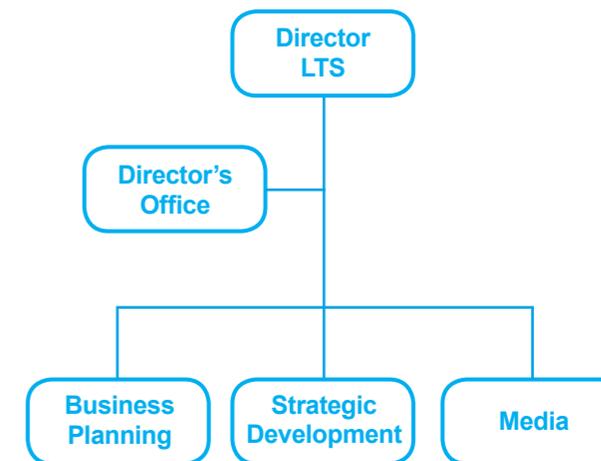
Business Planning

The Business Planning sub-unit is responsible for LTS's input to the university's annual planning and budgeting cycle. It also manages the procurement, storage and distribution of the OU's physical teaching materials, such as books, DVDs and CDs. The Project Support Office and the Intellectual Property team are also part of this sub-unit.

➔ Procurement, storage and distribution

The Materials Procurement team is responsible for securing the goods and services we require to run our business. We have a warehouse facility in Wellingborough which is the hub for the storage, assembly and distribution of our physical materials. In addition to printed materials, the centre also handles Home Experiment Kits and other bespoke materials and manages the residential schools service.

➔ Project support

The Project Support Office oversees the scheduling and monitoring of production and outsourcing across all areas of LTS. The office plays a key role in providing on-demand management information for LTS, academic units and the Vice-Chancellor's Executive.

➔ Intellectual property

Intellectual property laws protect the rights of individuals and organisations that create music, literary or other artistic works. The LTS Intellectual Property team is responsible for maintaining a coherent rights-management process for the university's acquisition, creation and use of copyright and related rights. These core responsibilities include:

▶ Licensing existing copyright materials for inclusion in courses.

▶ Contracting performers, presenters and production companies involved in the creation of audio-visual materials.

▶ Negotiating, drafting and management of co-production contracts.

▶ Managing the University's liabilities under legislation covering copyright, defamation and obscenity.

▶ Managing the University's trademarks.
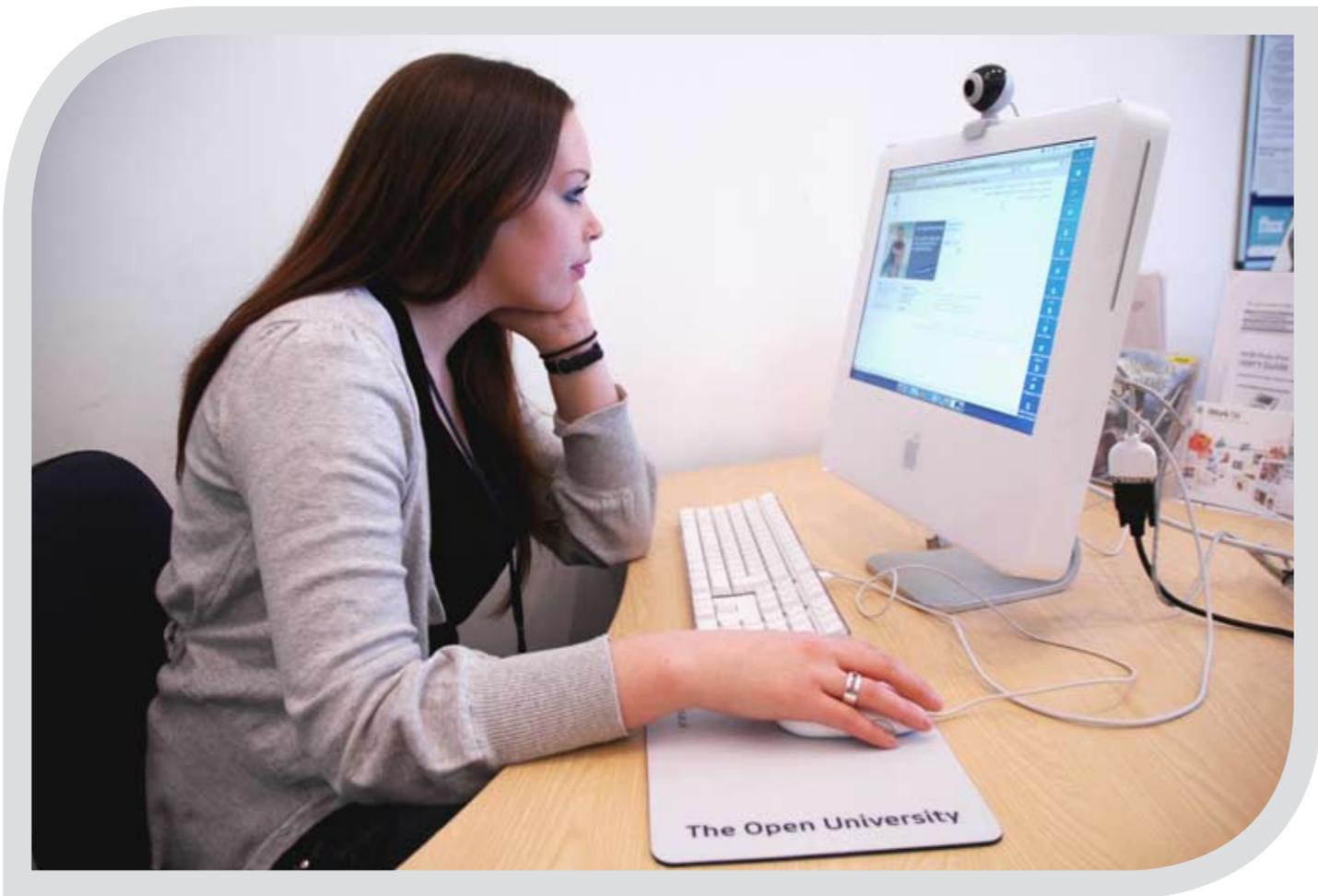
Strategic Development

The technical and service excellence in Strategic Development teams puts LTS at the forefront of creating and championing new ways of exploiting the digital revolution for learning and teaching.

The Strategic Development sub-unit provides leadership in innovation within LTS, and new mainstream and prototype systems and products are developed by this group. The sub-unit also plays an influential role in the wider University strategy, and helps to specify the needs for new systems and products.

→ Asset management

With so many different types of assets in use on a daily basis, it is important that they are processed and stored effectively for use and reuse in different contexts and through different channels. The Digital Asset Management (DAM) system is part of LTS's strategic eProduction

development. It is being designed to ensure that LTS has the best possible asset management capabilities, and will also form part of the university-wide Enterprise Content Management (ECM) project.

Technical implementation of the DAM system began in March 2007, and it is currently being trialled on a number of courses. As part of the eProduction system, DAM allows learning materials to be published directly to the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), OpenLearn and other formats such as PDF. Text for course materials is increasingly created in a tool that structures and tags content for publication through different channels.

→ The Virtual Learning Environment (VLE)

The OU's VLE is an online delivery system that provides students with round-the-clock access to learning materials and administrative information via the internet.

The VLE provides an excellent platform for:

► Delivering accessible interactive course materials with built-in online assessment

► Collaborative study

► Monitoring student activity and achievement

► Providing a high level of student support, including online tutor and peer group support

► Keeping course materials up-to-the-minute

► General communications, such as news updates.

LTS was actively involved in establishing the OU's VLE, which is based on the open source Moodle software. We have an ongoing role in the world's largest Moodle development team, which is developing and enhancing a wide range of student tools and services. Our developers are trained to understand and exploit this exciting tool. We also work closely with the Learning Innovations Office and academic units to identify requirements for new VLE features.

→ Service delivery

Our Service Delivery team supports the administration and maintenance of VLE websites and associated software tools.

→ Technical testing

A skilled Technical Testing team ensures that interactive media products and systems are rigorously examined prior to launch.

→ OU Computing Helpdesk

The OU Computing Helpdesk helps students and Associate Lecturers to gain the most from The Open University's computing resources. It is available seven days a week, from 9:00am to 11:30pm. A limited service is also offered on most bank holidays.

LTS staff operate the helpdesk, providing technical support for course-related software (more than 400 applications) and assistance with usernames and passwords for online services. They also provide support for the OU's online forum system and the electronic assessment handling system (eTMA).

→ Distribution Helpdesk

The Distribution Helpdesk assists students in tracking the delivery of physical course materials.
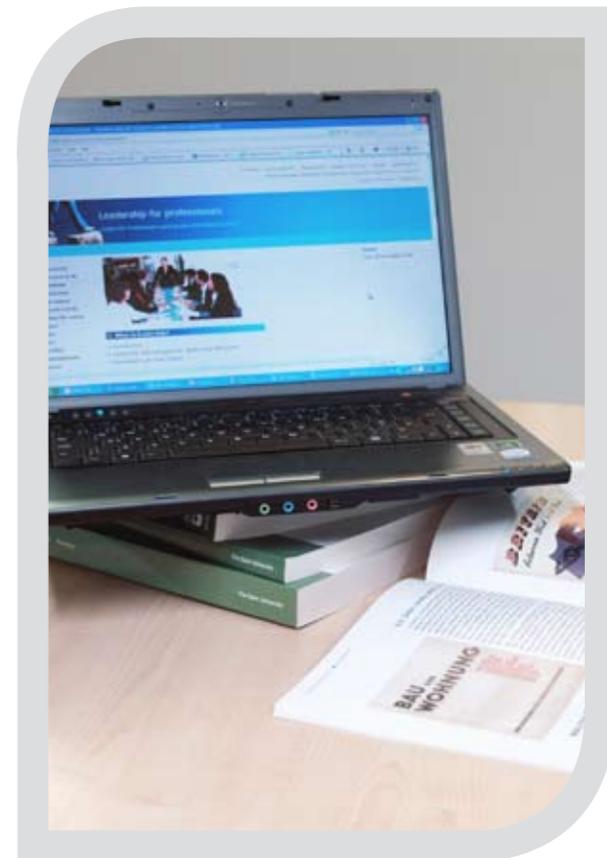
Media

LTS Media staff work creatively in collaboration with academic colleagues to develop world-class teaching and learning materials, adopting a mix of traditional and leading-edge elearning technologies.

→ Working in partnership

LTS works with academic colleagues to plan, design and produce quality learning products.

Framework agreements have been established to offer an efficient, cost-effective service to our academic partners. Well-documented production processes help to ensure efficiency and also help to embed best practice.

LTS also works in close partnership with the Library, the Knowledge Media Institute, the Institute of Educational Technology, Student Services, the Centre for Professional Learning and Development, and Marketing.

The course team for M889 Computer Forensics monitors the BBC and other news sites, and regularly posts links to news items while the course is running. This brings the course material to life, and adds value to the student experience.

The importance of learning media design

When designing learning media it is vital to understand both the key learning points (learning outcomes) and the intended audience. LTS is dedicated to designing and creating learning media that help students to learn effectively and to participate in an academically stimulating environment, even though they are learning from a distance.

Account management

LTS has media account managers to lead our partnership with academic units. A corporate media account manager supports non-academic units and external partners.

Project management

Each project has a media project manager (MPM) assigned to it. The MPM is responsible for ensuring that early planning work is comprehensive and that course teams have the best possible advice regarding the media elements of their teaching plans.

Media teams

Our media developers have a wealth of experience and training. This enables them to provide creative input to the design process, as well as helping course teams to identify the right media to use, for example interactive activities, quality graphics and clear, concise text written to the appropriate level. Courses can be delivered using print, the VLE and via DVD-ROM, or indeed a mixture of all three. We are also constantly looking at new and innovative ways to deliver course material.

External collaboration

In addition to in-house staff, LTS also works closely with specialist suppliers such as sound and vision production companies, co-publishing partners, print and disc suppliers, and a wide range of freelance media professionals, from illustrators to editors.

Processes, quality and accessibility

The LTS Best Practice Group defines and implements best practice in all aspects of LTS production. This includes processes that govern how:

- ▶ projects are managed
- ▶ quality is assured and enhanced
- ▶ access to learning materials is guaranteed for students with disabilities.
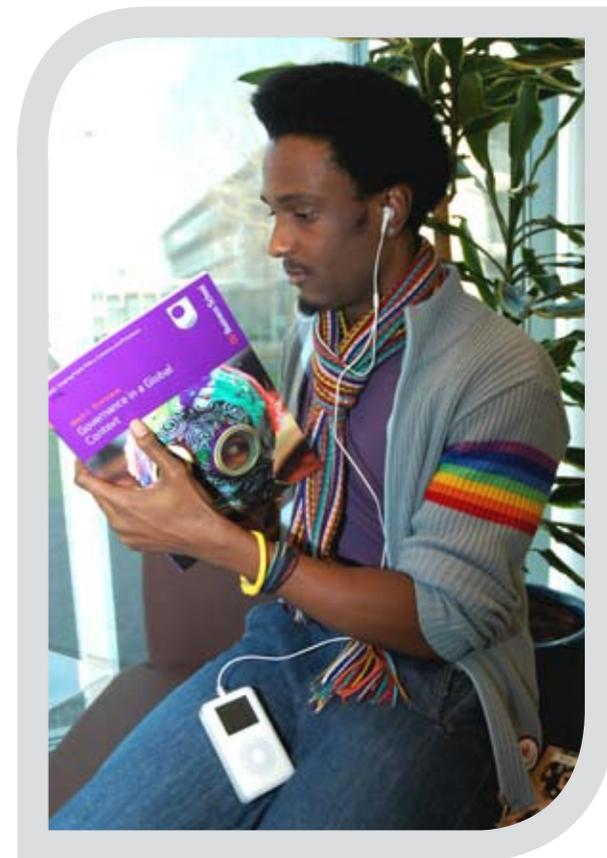
➔ Processes

Our strategy is to agree common project stages and terminology and a high-level production model. This enables LTS to deliver projects on time and on budget, and also provides a system for monitoring and adjusting performance. Quality is assured through regular reviews during production.

➔ Accessibility

LTS is strongly committed to ensuring that the university's course materials and computing services are as accessible as possible. This is part of our philosophy that education should be open to all, as well as being required by legislation.

Approximately 6% of our students have registered some form of disability so this is a key area in which we provide excellent student support. In particular we aim to provide:

▶ All written materials as PDFs with a high level of accessibility for screen readers

▶ Transcripts of all audio and video material

▶ Alternative text or figure descriptions for graphics

▶ Keyboard control of the VLE.

We are also working closely with the Digital Audio Project. Run by Disabled Student Services, this project is looking at using DAISY (Digital Accessible Information System) at the OU. In particular, Daisy digital talking books allow users to move efficiently and flexibly around text.
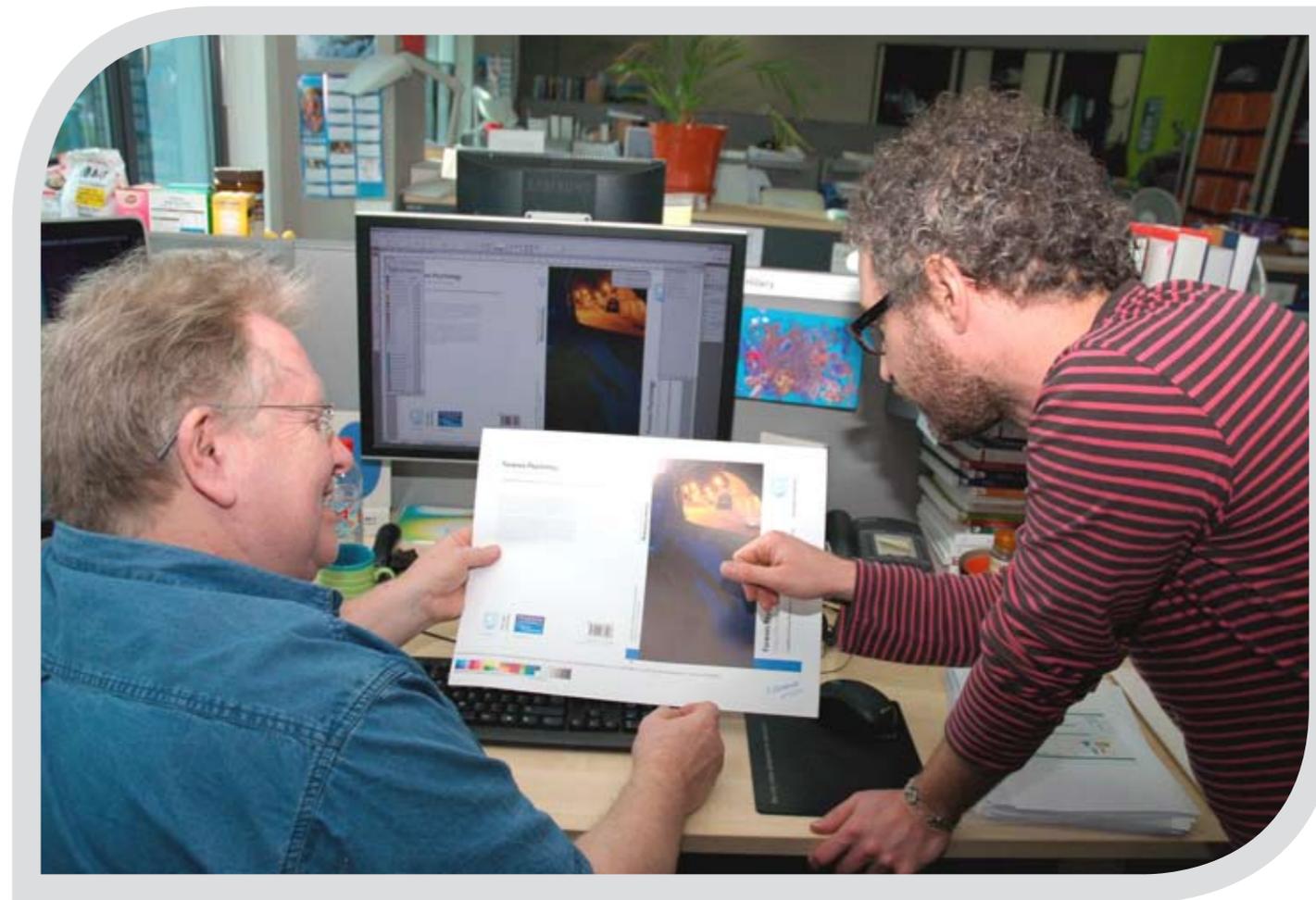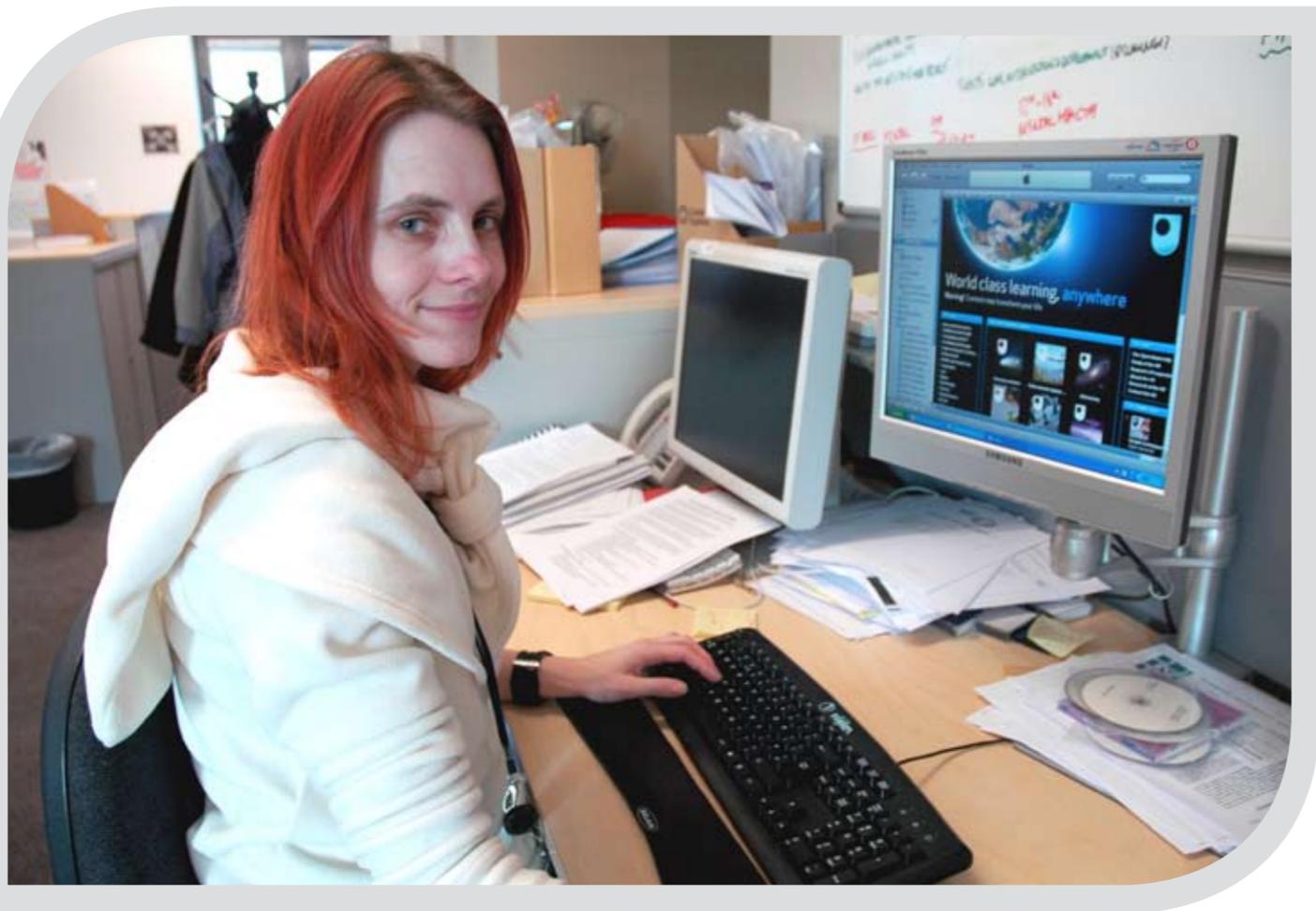
Open University strategic projects

LTS supports strategic projects that help deliver the Open University's commitment to education for all. Here are some current examples...

➜ OpenLearn

In October 2006, the OU became the first UK university to provide free access to course materials with the launch of OpenLearn. LTS has been closely involved in making educational resources available online through OpenLearn.

www.open.ac.uk/openlearn/

➜ ouView

LTS creates videos for the OU's own channels on YouTube, making use of one of the world's most popular social networking sites.

www.youtube.com/theopenuniversity

➜ iTunesU

The Open University on iTunesU opens a gateway to informal study by providing world-class learning, anywhere, via an exciting new learning space.

www.open.ac.uk/itunes/

➜ SocialLearn

SocialLearn draws on the resources of 'the social Web', combining VLE, social networking and ecommerce elements. It will allow students to profile both their formal and informal learning objectives and achievements within a social networking context.

Welcome

Learning and Teaching Solutions

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