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 topped 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 I have been fortunate to meet graduates and hear their inspiring stories of commitment, perseverance, dedication and ambition. The OU truly transforms lives, and it delivers to the UK the highly skilled work-force this country needs, without taking them away from their work. It supports developing countries too, in delivering the education and skills they need to meet their challenges.

CROSSHEAD
We have cemented our position as a leading research institution, with 72% of the OU research submission was assessed as world-leading or internationally excellent (4* or 3*) in the 2014 Research Excellence Framework 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 satellite landing on comet 67-P. We hope this will inspire thousands more students to engage with science – one of the UK’s key skills shortages.

I really believe in what the OU stands for and I am proud to have been passed the baton by Martin Bean. He 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 – over 200,000 less benefit from the transformation that HE can provide.

Continued austerity will mean that OU will need to engage government even more effectively to retain funding for widening participation and to remember that those already in the workforce should have access to higher education to develop the skills industry demands.

Believing in a great institution doesn’t mean you are a member of a preservation society. I take inspiration from the daring and innovativeness of the OU’s founders, now almost fifty years ago. We will need to ask tough questions to get to the right answers and we will need to be brave in choosing the path that truly delivers our mission. We must focus even more closely on student needs and deliver a sustainable model to meet the needs of our students and society long into the future.

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 rely on you for your continued 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 multinational organisations, businesses looking to develop their staff have found the OU’s bespoke professional training highly beneficial. More than 1,300 organisations, including IBM, the Ministry of Defence and BT, regularly invest in our courses.

One such beneficiary is Babcock, the UK’s leading engineering support services organisation, with a 26,000 strong workforce, involved in sectors such as defence, energy, telecommunications, and transport. To meet the demands of expansion, the company had to find a quick solution to the chronic shortage of engineering skills at the Higher Education (HE) level in the UK.

TICKING ALL THE BOXES
“We needed to start looking at growing our own talent and developing individuals that we had”, says Carol Anne Knight, Human Resources Director at Babcock.

The OU offered a cost-effective and high quality training environment in the form of its Bachelor of Engineering degree with a customised pathway, tailored to the needs of individual employees, and based on their previous education and their role in the business. See video: Link to be added here

One of the most attractive features of OU study is flexibility, which keeps time away from the work-place to a minimum, and has enabled Babcock’s engineers not only to work while studying, but to put their acquired skills to practice and contribute to the business immediately. The fact that study isn’t tied to a particular location has also been a key benefit for Babcock, since the company has staff spread throughout the UK. Ginny Stead, Capability and Development Manager at Babcock, says: “OU study minimises time away from the workplace, which of course matters to a business, as time away is a loss of potential income”.

The OU responds to demand from a wide range of sectors. For example it is already the UK’s largest provider for nurses and paramedics, thanks 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. According to the hospital’s own estimates, about one in four of the patients on their wards suffers from dementia.

MAKING IMPACT ON THE WARDS
With patient numbers expected to increase over the coming years, the hospital decided it wanted to rapidly train 50 healthcare assistants to be subject experts on the wards, while minimising the impact on the rota. The solution was a version of the OU course ‘Improving Dementia Care’, which combined tutor support with the MK Hospital’s in-house training resources, to create a programme that encourages staff to reflect on their learning and to consider how they would immediately apply their newly gained knowledge in their roles.

A major objective of the programme was for the healthcare assistants to share their knowledge with others and to achieve real impacts on the wards and with their teams. Jon White, Senior Nurse in Practice Development, said, “What we did here in Milton Keynes was to give that experience to 50 individuals so that when they came into clinical practice, their voice was much, much louder. What we also found was that their ability to influence and make changes and improvements was considerably enhanced.”

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
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 so doing, 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 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
OpenSTEM see: bit.ly/1Hmd0DI

SOCIAL LEARNING IN ACTION
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: https://youtu.be/uMJos3V1hek

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 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/1I2y5OS

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.
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 return the programmes have delivered rich audiovisual materials for 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 BBC3. 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 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.

BECAUSE I can – these are the words of Lisa Rowlands, winner of 2015 NIACE Cymru older learner award winner, Lisa has since signed up for an OU open degree. See: 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/1klMLI3

Across all four UK nations, the OU has a long tradition of working with trade 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

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.

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
### 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. Below 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 the #OUthanks and see: [bit.ly/1P5umN5](bit.ly/1P5umN5) for more shared experiences.

**Dawn Faizey Webster** was affected by the 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](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](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](bit.ly/1NLSYav)

### Generously supporting education

The Open University was founded with the vision of providing a quality higher education to everyone with the determination to succeed. In the last year, thousands of OU alumni, supporters, trusts, foundations and organisations have shown their shared commitment to this mission, generously donating or bequesting over £3.3million to the University. Their generous gifts are helping take learning further than ever, making free education resources for teachers in sub-Saharan Africa, and funding research that will, for instance, 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, those charities need individuals with leadership skills and knowledge to navigate the complexities of the voluntary sector. This centre will **WHAT WILL THIS DO?**

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

INSPRING THE NEXT GENERATION OF LEARNERS

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, “The award gives me inspiration that I could make an active contribution (to astronomy) of my own. 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.”

If you would like to offer life-changing learning to hard-working students, please visit [www.open.ac.uk/giving](www.open.ac.uk/giving)
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 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, or HEAT, delivering resources for 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, or how changing the habits of Western consumers can reduce poverty amongst workers in the clothes industry see: 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 e.g. producing medicines locally in Tanzania means that they are more likely to reach remote villages. We believe that by researching and promoting grass root 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.

Training new water experts

THE OpenWASH project aims to help save lives in Ethiopia by supporting existing and sustainable water sanitation and hygiene (WASH) initiatives through training their staff. 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

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 www.open.ac.uk/wales
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 and successful 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. Video on Rosetta: 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.

CITIZENSHIP and Governance is an innovative research collaboration at the OU addressing some of the key issues in society in Britain, 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 Britain, 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. Video: xxxxxxxxxxxxx

For example, Dr Umut 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 that migrant mothers play a key part in motivating integration of their whole families. Video: 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.

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/1l290ng

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 (Video: bit.ly/1NvbELn) and collaborating with commercial enterprises to improve cancer screening and measuring air quality in submarines (Video: bit.ly/1N1UW7T).

Researching today’s Britain
The largest academic institution in the UK with 173,886 students

86% of the FTSE100 have sponsored staff on OU courses

90% of students satisfied with the quality of their course (NSS data)

Financial highlights 2014/15 can be found at (link)

Equality and Diversity

FIND out more about the OU’s equality scheme and objectives: http://www.open.ac.uk/equality-diversity/

Link to video with Jiten Patel ???????????

Council membership August 2014 – July 2015 can be found at bit.ly/1MetezP

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Produced by The Open University with contributions from Luboxon Communications www.luboxon.co.uk and Kelly Cooper www.kellycooperphotography.com SUP047591