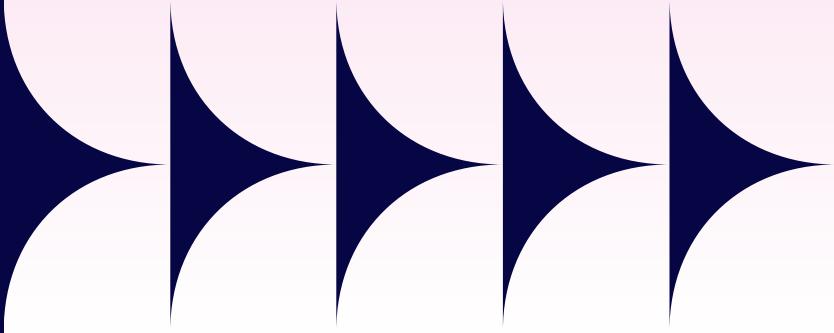


OpenDoor



Breaking down barriers

From academia to animal welfare:
the incredible reach of donor support



A heartfelt thank you

Welcome to OpenDoor, the magazine created exclusively for you, the OU's incredible supporters and donors, as a thank you for your continued kindness and compassion. Your generosity never ceases to inspire us, so please see this issue of OpenDoor as just a small token of our gratitude. Thank you.

In this edition, we're thrilled to be able to bring you some exciting and exclusive first-look content, including interviews with esteemed academics from across the OU, as well as selected highlights of the amazing (and often surprising!) research that goes on at your University. You'll read about anarchic graffiti in ancient Pompeii, the perils of confirmation bias, and some long-awaited improvements in the fascinating field of zoo animal welfare.

You'll also hear from some of our inspirational scholarship recipients, who – thanks to your support – have been able to access the education they so deserve. We'll celebrate Giving Day 2024, revealing the breathtaking grand total of the OU family's fundraising efforts across our annual 36-hour appeal. And we'll update you on the beautiful Legacy Garden Celebration Event at our Milton Keynes campus, a living testament to those who've graciously supported the University with a gift in their Will.

Our dedicated alumni and supporters are amongst the very best advocates of The Open University, so please do keep spreading the word about the transformational power of an OU education. We truly couldn't do any of this without you.

With best wishes and grateful thanks,



Karen Hart
Deputy Director
of Development



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Celebrating Giving Day '24



Mark Parsons
Head of Alumni Fundraising

Earlier this year, a challenge was set for the OU family: to raise as much money as possible in 36 hours, to fund essential scholarships that change lives through learning.

It's safe to say they rose to that challenge.

On 4–5 July 2024, 1,506 generous donors came together to donate a truly jaw-dropping £170,760 across the Open Futures Fund, breaking down barriers and creating educational opportunities for people who would otherwise have missed out on the futures they deserve.

The continual support, generosity and kindness of the OU family should hardly be a surprise any more, but it never ceases to amaze. As the donations came in, we were blown away by how emphatically our alumni and donors managed to raise the bar once again.

The Giving Day provided lots of exciting ways for supporters to get involved, be that donating, helping to unlock our fun donor challenges, spreading the word to family, friends and colleagues, or getting involved on social media. We are especially grateful to the donors who pledged match-funding opportunities and challenges of their own, allowing people to double their donations or unlock additional funding pots.

Together, you proved yet again the unshakeable power of community.

Having already awarded 569 life-altering scholarships since it launched in 2018, we're delighted to report that the Open Futures Fund will offer at least 88 fully funded degree places for the next academic year, 2024/2025.

The Open Futures Fund truly couldn't exist without generous supporters like you. Thank you so much for all you do. To end on a quick note to self: never underestimate the OU family.

The Open Futures Fund enables and supports five incredible scholarship opportunities:

- Disabled Veterans' Scholarship Fund
- Carers' Scholarships
- Black Students' Support Fund
- Sanctuary Scholarships
- Care Experienced Scholarships



Read more
www.bit.ly/openfuturesfund



You are supporting more people like me to transform their lives and rewrite their futures. Thank you so much.

Hollie Wilkinson
Carers' Scholarship recipient



It gave me so much pleasure to follow this year's Giving Day. Your kindness and compassion touch the lives of our students, ensuring they can build better futures for themselves, their families and their communities. I am incredibly proud to be Vice-Chancellor of this very special University. We remain today as much a movement for social change as we were when we first opened our doors in 1969, and that's all because of you.

Professor Tim Blackman
Vice-Chancellor



The OU Big Quiz 2024

This year, for the first time, we celebrated the Giving Day by introducing the brand new OU Big Quiz, which gave donors the opportunity to test their knowledge with questions set by academics across the University. Thank you to everyone who took part.

The Big Quiz will return in July 2025; is it too early to start revising?

Bridging the gap



We know that offering everyone the same support, regardless of their identity, background or challenges they face, doesn't always result in equitable outcomes. That's why offering targeted interventions — such as financial support for particular groups of students through the Open Futures Fund — plays a fundamental role in promoting equity within access to OU study.

A key pillar of the Open Futures Fund is the Black Students' Support Fund, which provides an opportunity for lower-income UK residents who identify as Black to study at the OU for free. With recent government research showing that more than half of Black children in the UK are living in poverty, it's vital that we do all we can to close this unjustifiable gap and build better futures for all. Unless action is taken now, the degree

awarding gap, which puts Black students at a stark disadvantage in their prospects of graduating from higher education, will only widen.

For over 50 years, the OU's open access policy has helped break down the barriers preventing so many students from realising their potential, and we're fiercely proud to continue that tradition. We're delighted to report that the Black Students' Support Fund has awarded 97 scholarships since its introduction in 2022, with a further 10 recipients starting study this Autumn.

Princess, a recent recipient of a Black Students' Support Fund scholarship, shared her personal journey of realising the power of OU study:

Student stories

Name:
Princess

Occupation: Freelance
artist and OU student

Degree: Design and
Innovation, BA/BSc (Hons)

 The best thing about the OU, for me, is the flexibility. I can fit study around my work and the kids, getting ahead when I can so that I have some leeway if something unexpected crops up.

I'm constantly able to put skills I've developed through my course into my creative practice. Learning key terms and theories has helped me delve deeper into my art, thinking about what I want to express and how I portray that. Education has really broadened my mind and had an impact on how I communicate with others. I'm so glad I signed up.

The scholarship has made a massive difference, as it means I can breathe. I don't have to worry about the financial side. But because I'm getting a scholarship, I also know I need to try, and need to work harder to keep that scholarship.

And if I ever need any extra motivation, I picture myself in the gown, crossing the stage at my graduation ceremony. I tell myself that if I want that moment, I need to work for it.

I believe it's really important to bridge the education gap and show People of Colour that there are career aspects to education. Going to school is important. Education expands your knowledge, your vocabulary and your confidence, and helps Black people feel like they're not in a cycle of poverty.

This scholarship is a great opportunity, and it's really important to keep doing it. Thank you so much to the donors that make it possible. I've told all of my friends about it, so there will probably be lots more applications!

With thanks

We're excited and grateful to announce that The Cyril Taylor Charitable Foundation will continue supporting the Black Students' Support Fund for a second successive year. Their generous grant will support an additional four disadvantaged Black students through their studies, starting in autumn 2024, bringing the total number of students supported by the Cyril Taylor Foundation to seven. Their generosity will help bridge financial gaps, break down barriers, and create pathways for success.



I'm proud that we are supporting this life-changing fund. It's an honour to contribute to the transformative effect that learning can have.

William Gertz
Trustee of The Cyril Taylor Foundation

Care Experienced Scholarship

We're hugely grateful to John Lewis Partnership (JLP) for their continued support of the Care Experienced Scholarship, a vital strand of the Open Futures Fund. This year, JLP provided a life-changing five scholarships for new students who have experienced living in care.

Furthermore, the scholarship fund received substantial donor support, which far exceeded expectations, allowing an additional three scholarship students to experience the monumental power of higher education.



This programme counters inequality, as well as harnessing the exceptional talent and ability of the care experienced community. JLP is committed to supporting this community to ensure they not only feel seen and heard, but empowered to reach their fullest potential.

Sharon White

Chairman, John Lewis Partnership



Now welcoming its second cohort, we look forward to watching the Care Experienced Scholarship programme grow, thanks to the generosity of JLP and the OU family, and the engagement and enthusiasm of the recipients themselves.



It's changed the trajectory of my life, allowing for greater success on my course and eliminating the stress of student debt. I am forever grateful for this scholarship and, in turn, anyone who contributed to bringing it to fruition.

Althea

Care Experienced Scholarship recipient



The need

People who have experienced time in care before the age of 18 are statistically more likely to become homeless than enrol in higher education.

However, 71% of care leavers who graduate from university are in employment, further study or a combination of both after 18 months.

Together, we can change lives and support young people who have been in care to achieve their dreams and potential.



Learn more about the Care Experienced Scholarship
www.bit.ly/careexp

Wales REACH goes even further

The Open University has secured major National Lottery funding to deliver its groundbreaking heritage project, Wales REACH (Residents Engaging in Arts, Culture and Heritage), in partnership with Amgueddfa Cymru, a family of seven museums located throughout Wales.

The National Lottery Heritage Fund has awarded a generous grant to the project, which is co-led by the OU in Wales and the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, to deliver Wales REACH in five communities, where people can use creative arts to explore and curate perspectives on each local area and its unique blend of cultural heritage.

In Butetown (Cardiff), Sandfields (Port Talbot), Dyffryn Nantlle (Gwynedd), St Davids and the surrounding areas (Pembrokeshire), and across Rhondda Cynon Taff and the Vale of Glamorgan, residents from a wide range of backgrounds, experiences, disadvantages and needs will benefit from this community co-designed project. It proudly celebrates a modern understanding of 'Welshness', in all its pluralist, diverse glory.

Our thanks to The National Lottery Heritage Fund for supporting the University and our project partners who make Wales REACH a reality. Diolch yn fawr!



Thanks to National Lottery players, we are working with more people than ever before, using art and creativity to identify and preserve the stories, histories and heritage that matter to them.

Dr Richard Marsden
Wales REACH academic lead



Rethinking captivity



Professor Clara Mancini

Regular readers of OpenDoor may recall the Animal-Computer Interaction (ACI) Lab's compelling work in the field of canine cancer detection, which our alumni and donors proudly supported back in 2015.

This year, we caught up with Professor Clara Mancini of the ACI Lab for an update on the latest extraordinary research taking place in the laboratory.

A big responsibility

When you sit down with Professor Clara Mancini, the first thing you notice is her passion. Esteemed researcher and founding head of the OU's ACI Lab in The Faculty of Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths, she is above all an advocate of animal welfare and ethics.

Clara's research takes place at what she calls "the intersection between animals and technology", and she begins by telling us how she feels a "responsibility to ensure that technological developments are having a positive impact on animals."

A big responsibility to take on, but Clara's work more than proves this commitment. Examples of her innovative research include co-designing (with Dr Luisa Ruge) dog-friendly wireless switches for assistance dogs, which are known as Dogosophy Buttons and are now produced by Ravencourt Ltd. She is collaborating with Jennifer Cunha of Parrot Kindergarten, USA, to optimise the design of interactive speech-boards, allowing parrots to demonstrate communicative abilities more complex than previously thought. And she's lectured far and wide on the importance of considering an animal's own perspective, experience and wellbeing when developing farm management technology.

But when we meet Clara, there's one particular topic she's keen to talk about: rescue tigers.

It's safe to say that no two days at the OU are the same.

Bio-detection dogs: an update

The ACI Lab's collaboration with Medical Detection Dogs continues to save lives, and thanks to the generosity of the OU family and donors, research is going from strength to strength.

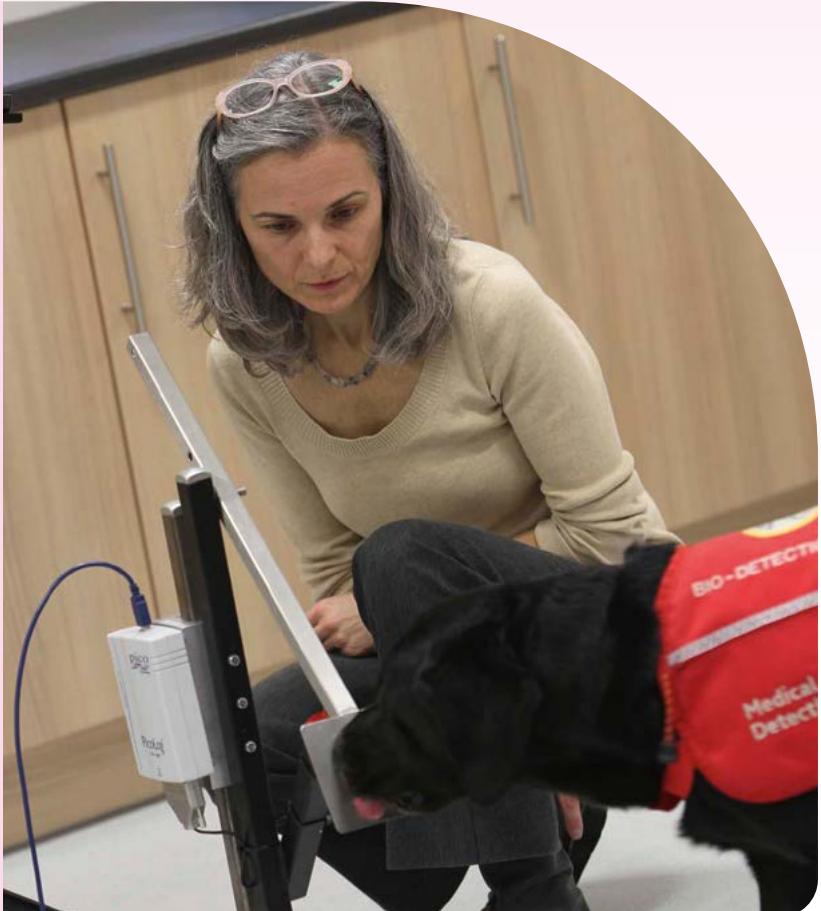
Aided by the ACI, bio-detection dogs – exceptional animals who, for example, can identify prostate cancer in humans with a staggering 90% reliability – are now able to communicate with medical practitioners like never before. Recent developments in the research include the use of new machine learning software and the development of customised interactivity tools to help the dogs detect and communicate the presence of disease more clearly and efficiently than ever.

It is OU donors who make research projects like these a reality. Thank you.



Read more

www.bit.ly/biodetectiondogs



"We're currently working with animal rescue charity FOUR PAWS and an organisation called Care for the Rare," Clara tells us, her trademark passion shining through, "who specialise in the ethical design of habitats in zoos and wildlife parks. In captivity, you'll see large carnivores pacing around, but it's meaningless movement. In the wild, tigers roam for miles and miles, forage, seek mates, and patrol their territory, all the while engaging their cognitive abilities by interpreting the land. But in captivity, they don't have those opportunities."

"The idea of this project was to design technology that can go some way to replicating a tiger's experience in her natural habitat. We've developed an interactive maze, consisting of three concentric rings and an elevated central island. The rings are connected by multiple gates, which will open and close to reconfigure the space and provide multiple routes to and from each location, according to where the tigers choose to go."

"As they roam, olfactory, acoustic and visual signals associated with different locations will guide them around the perimeters and through the gates. Sensors around the perimeter will identify the tigers' position and trajectory, and dynamically adapt gate configurations and signals accordingly. The aim is to enable meaningful movement."

We ask Clara how this works in practice, and again her enthusiasm is palpable.

"The lights, speakers and scent-boxes, as well as the sensors and automatic gates controlling the pathways inside the maze, will be installed in TIERART Wild Animal Sanctuary near Frankfurt in October; working out the logic of it all has been very challenging, but very interesting."

Driven by her love of animals and a lifelong drive to see all creatures great and small treated with respect, compassion and dignity, Clara places animal welfare and ethics at the heart of everything she does. The ACI Lab is the kind of groundbreaking research facility on which the OU prides itself, and our conversation with Professor Mancini leaves us feeling optimistic for the fate of animal life across the world. If you ask us, animals are in good hands.

We end by asking for a one-word answer to a devilish question: "If you could work with one animal you've never worked with before, what would it be?"

Her response? "Crows."

Yep, as we said: no two days are the same.

Recognition

Professor Clara Mancini would like to extend special thanks to OU colleagues Tiff Leek, Mikki Thomas, Alexandru Iordan and Shane Payak for their invaluable engineering expertise during the habitat development process, as well as Dr Jake Veasey, CEO of Care for the Rare, and Florian Eiserlo, manager of Four Paws' sanctuary, TIERART.



Join us for OpenDoor Live

You can hear more about the ACI Lab at OpenDoor Live, an exclusive virtual event celebrating the sensational power of philanthropy. On Wednesday 16 October 2024, you are cordially invited to join us online from 12.00-13.15.

You will not only hear from Professor Mancini herself, but also from Dan Richards, an OU student and inspiring recipient of the Disabled Veterans' Scholarship Fund, about the transformative effect education has had on his life.



Reserve your tickets now
www.bit.ly/opendoorlive2024



Exploring confirmation bias

A new series of short films co-produced with *Morning Live*

To thank you for your continual compassion and support, we wanted to give readers of OpenDoor a bespoke glimpse behind the scenes of the renowned partnership between the OU and the BBC.

This summer, staff from the School of Psychology & Counselling collaborated with BBC One magazine show *Morning Live* to create six fascinating pieces on a wide range of themes, showcasing the broad range of groundbreaking work taking place at the University.

These engaging short films (available to watch via OU Connect) include the dangers of taking phone calls while driving, 'brain health hacks' to improve mood and productivity, everyday extremism, and courtroom bias around regional accents.

Overleaf, we caught up with Dr Jim Turner, a Senior Lecturer in Forensic Psychology at the OU, and the academic behind one of the films in the series, titled 'Confirmation Bias'.



Eco Wins

with Dr Trudi Macagnino, Staff Tutor in Psychology & Counselling

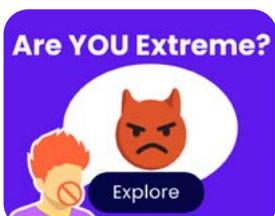


Courtroom Accents

with Prof. Lara Frumkin, Head of Discipline and Professor of Psychology

This seven-minute film discusses how we can all take small, manageable actions to help the environment, limiting the damage caused by our own lifestyles, while allowing us to shed 'eco anxiety' around the climate crisis.

In a bespoke experiment conducted at the University of Bradford's student courtroom, local volunteers are tasked with judging multiple legal testimonies, to see what effect a defendant's regional accent may have on jurors' cognitive bias.



Everyday Extremism

with Prof. Kesi Mahendran, Professor of Social & Political Psychology

With first-hand testimonies from reality star and presenter Zara McDermott, and international rugby referee Wayne Barnes, this film explores the blurred line between acceptable social media discourse and abuse.



Brain Health Hacks

with Dr Sinead Eccles, Staff Tutor, School of Psychology and Counselling

Learn about the four chemicals we need to keep us happy and motivated: dopamine, oxytocin, endorphins and serotonin. Radio One's Katie Thistleton takes part in an experiment showing the instant benefits of looking after your brain.



Distracted Driving

with Prof. Gemma Briggs, Head of Discipline and Professor of Applied Cognitive Psychology

This fascinating piece delves into recent research suggesting that, despite it not being prohibited by law, conducting a hands-free phone call while driving is just as dangerous as physically using a mobile phone handset.



In conversation with
Dr Jim Turner

How did your *Morning Live* piece come about?

Our whole department received a call-out for pitches, literally one or two sentences, for ideas that might make interesting *Morning Live* features.

I suggested a piece on confirmation bias, which ended up being one of the six pitches selected. The general election was fast approaching, so we focused on people's bias towards (and away from) certain political parties.

In a nutshell, what is confirmation bias?

Confirmation bias is a type of 'cognitive bias', meaning a tendency to think in a particular way. Specifically, it occurs when you have a strong belief in something; your brain will find facts to support that belief, and filter out facts that contradict it. Confirmation bias applies to all sorts of things, like healthcare, religion, or judgements you make about people, but we honed in on politics.

As an example, research from the US suggests that if you ask voters about a Republican policy or a scandal involving a Republican politician, then Democrat voters will say, "Oh, I believe that scandal", or "I think that's a bad policy". Whereas Republicans will say the exact opposite. But if you switch the party to whom you're attributing it, they'll switch their opinions.

Is confirmation bias something that's particularly relevant now?

Well, it's always been relevant, and as far as we know it affects everyone.

Where it's most obviously relevant now is through algorithmic curation. In other words, on many online platforms, what you consume dictates what you're recommended. This can lead to 'echo chambers', where you're deliberately only being fed one side of the story.

Think about going to the newsagents. You pick up your chosen newspaper, but it's on a rack with all the other papers, so you at least see the headlines of the others. Whereas in online news spaces, or curated social media feeds, you don't ever see the covers of those other papers — metaphorically speaking.

You described working with *Morning Live* as 'reassuring'; can you expand on that?

I must admit I'm not a morning person, so didn't really know anything about *Morning Live*...

But working with them, I was reassured by the fact it didn't feel like the BBC had a story to tell; they were willing to let the science speak for itself. It felt like the programme-makers wanted to find out the truth, rather than cherry-picking the findings to suit an agenda.

What did you do to explore participants' bias?

We showed people a range of real policies from several UK political parties, and for each we asked them if they agreed with it and which party they thought it belonged to.

Our volunteers tended to think that the policies they agreed with were from the party they supported, and those they disagreed with were from other parties. It wasn't clear-cut — nothing in psychology is! — but there was a pattern that indicated confirmation bias.

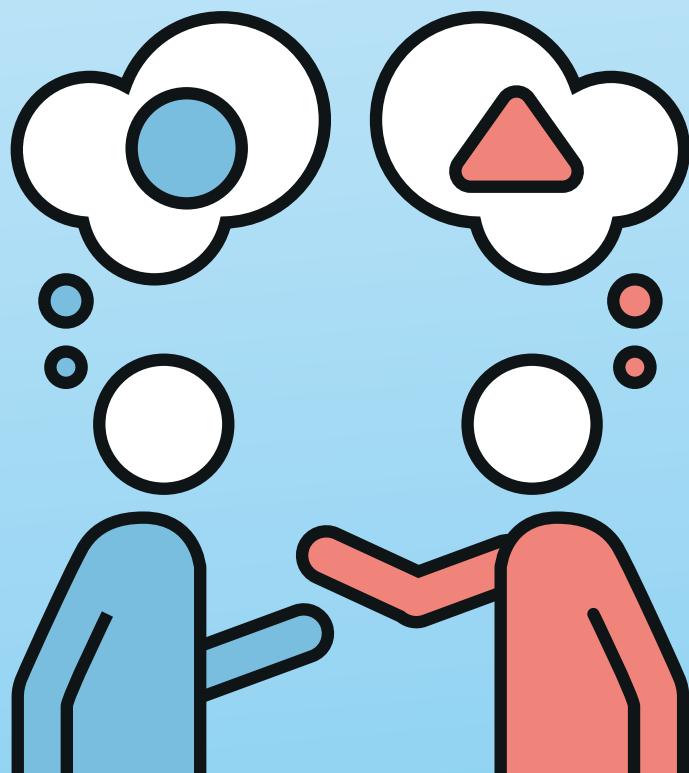
What can people do to counter the effects of confirmation bias?

The best way to tackle any kind of cognitive bias is to question yourself. Ask difficult questions like "Why might I be wrong?", or even trickier, "Why might they be right?".

With politics specifically, it can also help to read multiple news sources, even those you disagree with.

But the main tool to avoid confirmation bias is simply being aware of its existence. If you acknowledge that your brain's carrying out these processes, it will be easier to confront them.

The problem is that being wrong about something feels the same as being right about it, so you need to fact-check yourself!



OU Connect

Head to OU Connect now to watch all six films, explore the digital resources that accompany each one, and hear about other OU/BBC collaborations and co-productions.



Find out more
www.bit.ly/bbcmorninglive



Uncovering Pompeii: your opportunity to explore the city

Ancient Pompeii, the great Italian city preserved under the volcanic ash of Mount Vesuvius' eruption in 79CE, has captured imaginations for centuries.

However, despite the site receiving more than 3 million visitors per year, for many, visiting Pompeii is sadly either impractical or unfeasible.

But if you can't explore Pompeii in person, why not explore it online, through a fascinating new interactive resource available at OU Connect?

Created as part of the sensational BBC/OU co-production *Pompeii: The New Dig* (2024), this virtual map of Pompeii allows you to walk in the shoes of Flavia, a fictional young resident of the city, just before her beloved hometown fell victim to a devastating natural disaster.

A guided tour

Easy to navigate and deeply evocative, the interactive resource allows users to take a multimedia stroll through the ancient streets of Pompeii, and experience the sights and sounds of an ancient city coming to life.

With Flavia as your guide, you can discover the thrill of making an offering to the gods at the Temple of Apollo, the joys of indulging in retail therapy in the bustling 'Abundance Street' shops, the refreshing taste of a glass of Falernian wine at the House of the Bear tavern, and even the relaxing calm of soaking in the public baths. And all from the far more affordable comfort of your own home.

Designer Steff Easom worked closely with OU academics Phil Perkins, Professor of Archaeology, and Dr Emma-Jayne Graham, Head of Classical Studies, who were tasked with casting a careful eye over the historical details, not all of which are quite what you might expect.

"We wanted to show the real Pompeii. It's an ordinary working town, and we were keen to make sure the grubbiness was shown alongside the glamour," revealed Dr Graham.

This is certainly the case when it comes to the surprising revelation of graffiti scrawled everywhere across the walls of Pompeii. As the interactive tour explains, often the words were just names, like 'Scamander', 'Successus' or 'Saturnus', but a longer, lewder message includes a suggestion of who to ask for at the brothel, and how much to pay!

This Pompeian sense of humour is far from the only surprise Flavia unveils, with a whole host of unexpected twists and turns along the way. This guided tour is certainly one not to miss.



Visiting Pompeii isn't possible for everyone, so it is really fantastic to know we've been able to bring the ancient ruins into the homes of so many people through this interactive tour.

Dr Emma-Jayne Graham



Interested in studying?

This interactive tool was supported by the OU's Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, with particular relevance to its BA and MA degrees in Classical Studies. If you've always wanted to study this enthralling field, it's never too late to start; contact the OU to discover more.



OU Connect
www.bit.ly/ouclassical



To me, archaeology is a bit like building, only backwards. You get to build a narrative to explain how these amazing artefacts happened to end up where you found them, how they got preserved, and how they got there in the first place.

Professor Phil Perkins



Watch now

Pompeii: The New Dig is available to watch now on BBC iPlayer. Visit OU Connect to explore the episodes, see bonus content from OU experts and take the guided tour under Flavia's expert local guidance.



OU Connect
www.bit.ly/connectpompeii



A beautiful legacy

The Legacy Garden, set in the picturesque grounds of our stunning Milton Keynes campus, is a visual testament of gratitude to those who have generously supported the OU with a gift in their Will. On Tuesday 16 July, staff, alumni, family and friends gathered there to remember and honour those whose legacy gifts were received in 2023, through the unveiling of their very own memorial plaques.

It was a touching, poignant day, and we'd like to offer our warmest appreciation to all who attended. Mingling among the guests, you could feel the buzz of conversation, as the Legacy Garden sparked memories and unspooled a plethora of stories from, and about, our wonderful alumni.

Or, as one guest amusingly shared, "I always say: my husband did the degree and I put up with it."

Attendees were treated to a number of entertaining, informative talks throughout the day, on a wide range of topics, including:

David Gowing, Professor of Botany, captivating the room with his talk on the importance of Floodplain Meadows to the UK ecosystem.

Daniel McCarthy, Senior Gardener on the OU campus, giving a colourful insight into the flora and fauna of the Legacy Garden itself.

Ruth Cammies, OU Archivist, delivering a fascinating talk about the University archives, including the special collections of pioneering MPs Baroness Jennie Lee and Baroness Betty Boothroyd.

Dr Kadmiel Maseyk, Senior Lecturer in Environment Studies, leading a tour of the decadal research project the Weston Open Living Lab, which aims to establish and monitor a riparian woodland.

Then, following a moving eulogy to our legacy supporters, the event moved to the Legacy Garden for the plaques to be unveiled, where we were customarily welcomed by a traditional British rain shower. Thankfully, the damp weather failed to dampen our spirits.

Overall, the event was an uplifting, positive tribute to our generous legacy donors, and we look forward to welcoming our guests at next year's unveiling.



It was lovely to be at Walton Hall Campus and visit the Legacy Garden again. It is a very magical place. The Open University remains very special to me. It has opened so many doors.

Sue Burkett

OU alumna



The Legacy Garden is a truly inspirational creation – it looked glorious and I am content to know that my plaque will be placed there one day, though I hope not for some time!

Marion Sherwood

OU alumna



It was such a happy, informative event. It was very emotional, of course, but John would have been so proud of all your scholarships.

Charlotte Hearn

Guest



Find out more

If you are considering supporting The Open University with a gift in your Will, or would like to discover the positive impact legacies make to our work, please contact the Legacy Team in the OU Development Office.

You can call the team on +44 (0) 1908 659 141 or email giving@open.ac.uk