

OpenDoor

**Thank you for
changing even
more lives**



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With grateful thanks

Welcome to OpenDoor, the magazine created exclusively for you, the OU's incredible supporters and donors, as a thank you for your ongoing kindness and generosity.

I was lucky enough to spend a few hours in the company of some of our wonderful scholarship recipients recently, including Pete, whose story you can read about on page 6. I was touched by their stories of overcoming adversity, their gratitude to the OU family for giving them the gift of education, and their inspiring ambitions for the future.

Over the next few pages, you'll also discover OU academics whose vital research is underpinned by donor support, receive updates on some of the community-driven OU programmes tackling real world problems, and learn more about the latest in a long line of BBC/OU collaborations, the fascinating *Make It at Market*.

With best wishes and grateful thanks,

Karen Hart

Karen Hart
Interim Director of Development



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TESSA turns 20!

Celebrating two inspirational decades of the Teacher Education in sub-Saharan Africa programme

Regular readers of OpenDoor may recall the innovative, truly life-changing work of TESSA (Teacher Education in sub-Saharan Africa).

A pioneering programme providing free resources to support the millions of unqualified teachers working in sub-Saharan Africa, TESSA is underpinned by the extraordinary generosity of our amazing donor community.

Now, in 2025, we're delighted to announce that this incredible project is celebrating its 20th birthday!

Since its launch in 2005, TESSA's reach has been remarkable. To date, it's estimated to have supported over 2 million teachers and teacher educators, and continues to inspire, enrich and empower countless people worldwide.

Working with multiple influential partners, TESSA supports primary and secondary school teachers across sub-Saharan Africa, with the ambitious but vital goal of achieving quality education for all.

The programme's amazing success has even been replicated in successful sister programmes across Malawi, Sierra Leone, Zambia, and even as far afield as India. TESSA is integrated into locally-led teacher education programmes in ten countries across the world and supports an active network of over 40 ambassadors - teacher educators dedicated to helping teachers improve their classroom practice.

Other achievements in the past 20 years include major contributions to knowledge and understanding of how to improve classroom practice published in a range of prestigious journals and other publications. Similarly, many researchers and practitioners who started their careers with TESSA have gone on to become leading figures in education, having been inspired by the programme's groundbreaking approach and unshakeable ambition.

Everyone at the OU would love to thank the incredible donor community who have made this programme possible, and offer our huge congratulations to TESSA for 20 years of phenomenal commitment to improving education.

Without TESSA, millions of teachers would be underprepared for their roles and responsibilities in the classroom, and as such, many more children would not receive the education they so greatly deserve. Your generosity is their opportunity.



The TESSA team will be honouring these 20 remarkable years of changing the world with a number of local and international events throughout 2025, so please keep an eye out across the University's social media channels for further announcements!

Until then, please join us in wishing all at TESSA a very happy birthday.

TESSA timeline

✓ Phase 1: 2005–2010

TESSA resources written, translated and integrated into teacher education programmes in ten countries and four languages.

✓ Phase 2: 2010–2015

Handbooks, toolkits, resources to support secondary science and teaching packs extended throughout the programme's target regions.

✓ Phase 3: 2015–2015

Ongoing research into delivery conducted; free online courses produced; global reach increased; ambassadors recruited; small grant programme developed to support local initiatives.



Learn more about the TESSA programme
www.bit.ly/csgdtessa



Learn about the impact TESSA is having
www.bit.ly/tessaimpact



Access and download TESSA's free resources (available in four languages and multiple country specific Versions)
www.bit.ly/tessaresources

Age is nothing but a number!

How Take Five to Age Well is changing the way we think about growing older

Dr Jitka Vseteckova, the OU academic behind the revolutionary Take Five to Age Well, designed the programme with one very clear goal in mind:



We want to build a healthy population for a happier society.



You can't say fairer than that.

Dr Vseteckova firmly believes that Take Five to Age Well is ready to play a huge part in helping people live longer, healthier lives. All it takes, she tells us, is a series of small, achievable steps.

Akin to the tried and tested Dry January and Stoptober models, Take Five to Age Well is a nationwide programme asking people to sign up online to a choice of commitments across five key areas: Eat, drink, move, think, connect & engage.

Robustly scientific, yet with the wellbeing of its users at its heart, the programme puts the public on a vital mission: to get healthier and happier, one step at a time.

With users supported throughout, the Take Five to Age Well team (in partnership with Age UK, Age Cymru, Age Scotland and Age Northern Ireland and many other organisations across the UK), we are proudly challenging participants to adopt tiny changes to their lifestyles which will have a monumental impact on their lives.

"As our Ambassador Professor Rose Anne Kenny outlines in her book *Age Proof**, research has found that 70–80% of one's ageing rate, up until age 80, is largely determined by non-genetic environmental factors" says Dr Vseteckova, "And many of these factors are within our control. We can make the necessary changes ourselves: the earlier the better and never too late."

Take Five to Age Well, which launches its 2025 programme on 1 May, is fun, free, expert-led, and encourages people all around the UK who are concerned about ageing to challenge their assumptions. By taking the Take Five to Age Well pledge, you can give yourself the best chance of living longer, more enjoyable lives.

Top take-home tips

In advance of the launch, here are just some examples of the kinds of small routine changes that could be included in your bespoke health programme:

1. Spend five minutes **doing something creative**. Draw a picture, play an instrument, do an origami online tutorial, anything goes! Just five minutes' daily creativity can transform your mental wellbeing.
2. **Learn something new.** It's never too late to keep your brain active by exploring a new educational avenue. Dive into OpenLearn for a huge range of courses; there really is something for everyone.
3. Offer to **walk someone's dog**. Spending time with animals is calming, while walking in nature is good for both the body and the brain.
4. **Stand on one leg whilst brushing your teeth!** This is great for balance, which becomes more and more important as we get older to avoid falls.
5. Mix your nuts. Having **a helping of mixed nuts and seeds** that you eat over the day can drastically improve your health by providing a rich source of nutrients with a wide range of benefits.
6. Suggest a **regular neighbourly meet up**. Invite people over for a brew or sit outside; knowing your neighbours keeps you connected and builds a safer, more convivial community.
7. **Have fun!** Laughter is amazing for our brains. The dose of dopamine stimulates the synthesis of new proteins in the brain, while laughter also reduces stress and boosts mood. The average four-year-old laughs 300 times a day, whereas the average 40-year-old laughs just four times!



*Kenny, R A, 2023. *Age Proof*. 1st edition. London, Lagom
Image © Centre for Ageing Better



Drink



Move



From 1 May
30 DAY
CHALLENGE



TAKE FIVE TO AGE WELL



Think



Eat



Connect & Engage

Why now?

The Take Five to Age Well campaign tackles an urgent national health challenge: we have an ageing population at a moment of overwhelmed social care and NHS services.

At the same time, there's an ever-increasing number of people determined to live well in later life. An average care home costs over £800 a week, and many people want to stay independent, meaning that ageing healthily and happily is more important than ever before.

Alan, 80, has attended almost all of Dr. Vseteckova's talks on 'Ageing Well' (the area of research which ultimately led to the programme).

"I was a project manager, and I treat my health like a project," smiles Alan, "It's important to me because I want to avoid being in the healthcare system for as long as possible, as there are many people more in need of appointments than me."

Alan is part of a growing community of people for whom ageing well is more than a concept, it's a necessity.

 Join Alan and thousands of others
www.bit.ly/takefivetoagewell

We need you!

Do you have a story about your own health and wellbeing? Do you have concerns around ageing healthily and happily? Would you like your experiences to shape the next steps of Take Five to Age Well?

If so, Dr Vseteckova and her team would love you to play a role in this exciting new programme.

 **Have your say!**
Email takefive@open.ac.uk

Get involved

Take Five to Age Well is part of Open Societal Challenges (OSC), a revolutionary approach to research, powered by collaboration, passion and an over-arching goal of tackling the real-world challenges affecting our planet and society.

Inviting pitches from external business and charities, then partnering them with prestigious OU academics, OSC is the only known research programme to be both challenge-driven and community-first.

Under the themes of Sustainability, Tackling Inequalities, and Living Well, it tackles real-world challenges in a unique, practical, effective way.

 **More information**
www.bit.ly/ou-osc

The Open Futures Fund

How an OU scholarship changed Pete's life

"My motivations for joining the armed forces were my family background, the sense of wanting to give something to society, and lastly... having watched Top Gun."

Pete, OU student and Disabled Veterans' Scholarships Fund (DVSF) recipient through the Open Futures Fund, is the kind of person to look back on his journey with a sense of humour.

In fact, it's this infectious joy and unbridled positivity that makes him who he is: ambitious, self-effacing, and a genuine pleasure to spend time with.

Following his military discharge from the Royal Navy, it would have been easy for Pete to wallow in his misfortune, but by his own admission, he doesn't do 'easy'. Determined to turn hardship into opportunity, Pete grabbed every opportunity that came his way with both hands, and is now defying the odds by studying for an MBA, all thanks to the generosity of OU donors.

Pete's story

"I joined the Royal Navy as an Aircraft Engineer in May 2001," recounts Pete, "But shortly after that, the Twin Towers tragedy occurred, which really sparked the narrative of my naval career. There was a shortage of battlefield helicopters, leading to me being lent to the RAF and carrying out active service in Iraq and Afghanistan."

Right from the start of his military journey, then, Pete was left with no choice but to get used to unexpected surprises.

One such surprise was being asked to write up aircraft documentation in the middle of the freezing Arctic, a job Pete remembers as one of the more unusual experiences from his career.

"The military puts people in some very strange environments, many of which sound incredibly weird, but to us they seem completely normal!", he laughs.

However, one surprise he was less prepared for was his military discharge. Following a debilitating injury to his ankle, which led to numerous operations and three years in intensive rehabilitation, the decision was taken that he was no longer able to carry out his duties.



My scholarship has enabled me to move forward, and work towards a lifelong dream of running my own business.



The scholarship

Thankfully, a far more pleasant surprise was just around the corner: discovering DVSF.

"I was searching online for universities that would take my military career as a credit towards a degree," Pete tells us, "when I stumbled across the scholarship. I applied immediately. And when I found out I'd been given a funded place on the MBA, I was shocked, slightly overwhelmed, and genuinely humbled that there were people out there willing to support veterans like me."

"My scholarship has enabled me to move forward, and work towards a lifelong dream of running my own business. I'm the sort of person who, if I have a weakness, I want to plug that gap. This scholarship enables me to do just that, going out of my comfort zone and learning so many new things."

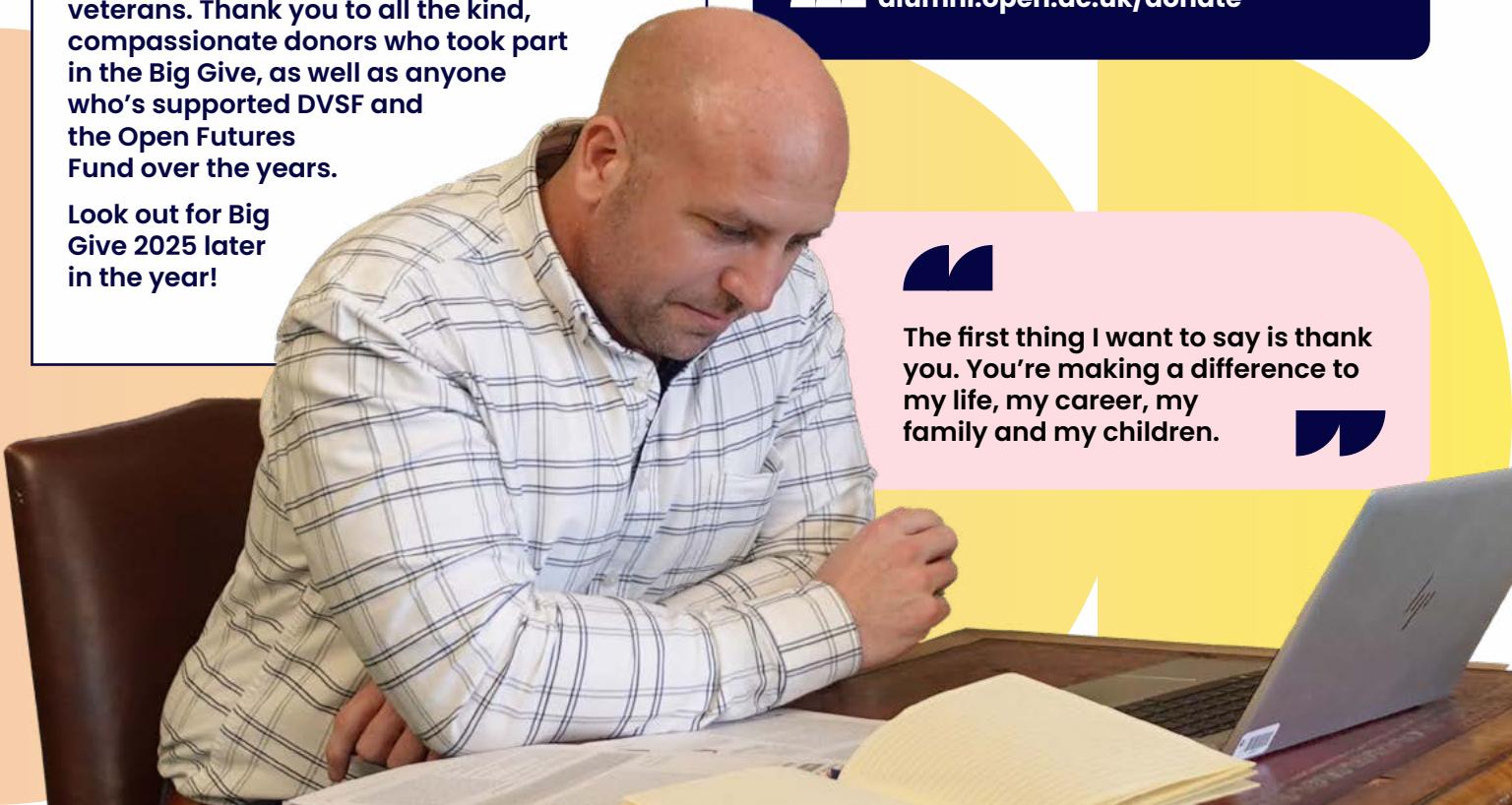
Enrolling on his MBA, Pete quickly learnt that OU study can be almost as unpredictable as life in the military, with remote learning alongside working full-time throwing up all kinds of twists and turns.

From the most unusual place he's studied: on the top of Cleve Hill overlooking Cheltenham Races, to the biggest challenge of working remotely: his attempts to study early on a Sunday morning being interrupted by his 19-year-old son coming home from a night out at 6am, Pete's life has continued to surprise him, but in the most wonderful ways.

The Big Give

Our 2024 Big Give Christmas Challenge raised an incredible £68,451 for DVSF, changing the lives of even more disabled veterans. Thank you to all the kind, compassionate donors who took part in the Big Give, as well as anyone who's supported DVSF and the Open Futures Fund over the years.

Look out for Big Give 2025 later in the year!



Words of wisdom

"If there is anybody out there considering applying for a scholarship," says Pete, "I would say stop thinking about it and do it. The time you spend mulling it over, you could have written the application and sent it off."

For the supporters who've so generously supported DVSF and the wider Open Futures Fund, Pete has an equally conclusive message:

"The first thing I want to say is thank you. You're making a difference to my life, my career, my family and my children. And I also know that it's not just about myself. The military are a community, so you'll also make an enormous difference to my peers and my friends. Honestly," he smiles, "Thank you so much."

 **Discover more scholarship stories**
www.bit.ly/offvideos

Life-changing scholarships

DVSF is one of five strands of the Open Futures Fund, a bespoke scholarships programme providing people from disadvantaged backgrounds with access to fully-funded higher education. Since its introduction in 2018, the Open Futures Fund has provided 660 scholarships to disabled veterans, unpaid carers, lower-income Black students, young people who have experienced time in care, and people seeking sanctuary in the UK.

The Open Futures Fund is only possible through the kindness, love and generosity of the OU family.

 **Support more people like Pete**
alumni.open.ac.uk/donate



The first thing I want to say is thank you. You're making a difference to my life, my career, my family and my children.



Cyfarwydd, cynefin, hiraeth

Reimagining 'Welshness' through cultural heritage

What does it mean to be Welsh? Is nationality intrinsic to one's sense of self? How do you even define a national identity, particularly in modern, pluralist times?

Those are just some of the questions being explored through Wales REACH (Residents Engaging in Arts, Culture, and Heritage), a transformative initiative connecting Welsh communities with their rich cultural heritage.

Through practices such as *cyfarwydd* (the art of storytelling) and the distinctly Welsh concepts of *cynefin* and *hiraeth* (senses of belonging and a deep yearning for connection to home and heritage), it promotes wellbeing, enhances cultural accessibility, celebrates creativity, and fosters community cohesion across contemporary Wales.

Celebrating Welsh heritage

In the traditional archetype of 'Welshness', it's clear that arts and cultural heritage are fundamental.



To be born in Wales, not with a silver spoon in your mouth, but with music in your blood and with poetry in your soul, is a privilege indeed.

Brian Harris
Poet



But as Wales grows increasingly diverse, Wales REACH ensures that this cultural history remains as relevant now as it's ever been. Working in partnership with underserved communities, the project consists of locally-led, community co-designed activities and bespoke arts tutoring, approached with the ethos that a community should not be defined by its borders or its geography, but by its people.



Thanks to
the National
Lottery
Players

Cultural outreach

By amplifying the voices of often overlooked groups, Wales REACH encourages an inclusive and authentic representation of Welsh culture. Currently, it is focused in five areas:

- **Butetown, Cardiff:** Engaging residents from ethnically minoritised backgrounds, promoting cross-cultural and cross-generational dialogue and the sharing of traditions.
- **Dyffryn Nantlle, Gwynedd:** Serving primarily Welsh-speaking communities, the arts are used to celebrate and preserve language and heritage.
- **Pembrokeshire:** Offering a platform for older residents in areas with poor transport links to participate in cultural activities, strengthening social bonds across communities.
- **Rhondda Cynon Taff and Vale of Glamorgan:** Engaging with learning-disabled and neurodiverse individuals to celebrate their creativity, history and perspectives.
- **Sandfields, Port Talbot:** Connecting with post-industrial communities, many of whom face insecure housing experiences, fostering resilience through arts, culture and local history.

These participants are not just learning about their heritage, they are shaping it.

Through storytelling, workshops, and exhibitions, Wales REACH creates a space where people can explore their personal histories while contributing to the wider cultural fabric of Wales, and begin to reimagine that long-established national identity.

Wales REACH is a partnership between the OU in Wales, Amgueddfa Cymru, multiple housing associations across Wales, and is supported by the National Heritage Lottery Fund, ensuring that Welsh heritage remains vibrant and accessible for years to come.



Find out more and connect with the team
www.bit.ly/walesreach



The storytelling sessions helped me connect with my roots. I now see how my own heritage fits into the Welsh story.

Butetown resident



Finding tomorrow's entrepreneurs

How Open Business Creators is unlocking new talent

What links life-saving resuscitation training for schoolchildren, innovative merchandise celebrating the growth of women's football, and pioneering mentorship for university students living with disabilities?

The answer lies within Open Business Creators, the trailblazing programme supporting, empowering and championing the bold ideas of tomorrow's entrepreneurs.

All three of those initiatives (and many, many more) have been developed through this exciting platform from the OU's Research and Enterprise team, to support students and cultivate wider social reach.

Specifically aimed at under-represented demographics in the field of business, Open Business Creators provides generous development grants, free learning content, skills development, and business plan assistance, helping aspiring entrepreneurs turn their business dreams into a reality.

Here are just a handful of the start-up businesses launched with Open Business Creators:

ACT Student Support

ACT Student Support offers specialist one-to-one mentoring for students receiving Disabled Students' Allowance in further or higher education.



Participating in Open Business Creators has allowed me to share my ideas and concepts with other business professionals, demonstrating the potential of a social enterprise to support disabled students.

Tara
Founder, ACT



 Learn more
www.bit.ly/obcactsupport

With almost half of UK adults considering starting a business or side hustle in 2025*, there's never been a better time to support the entrepreneurs of tomorrow.

*<https://www.enterprisenation.com/learn-something/almost-half-uk-adults-thinking-starting-business-2025>



Becca and Jade, AFTA Studios

AFTA Studios

Football fans Becca and Jade spotted a significant gap in merchandise for women's football and wanted to celebrate and contribute to the growth of the women's game through vibrant cartoons, compelling storytelling, and unique video content.

 **Learn more**
www.bit.ly/aftastudios

Resus Rangers

Resus Rangers delivers First Aid lessons in primary and secondary schools through engaging animated resources, teaching schoolchildren vital life-saving skills in a fun, interactive way.

 **Learn more**
www.bit.ly/resusrangers

RE(YOU)S CIC

RE(YOU)S CIC is a community interest company dedicated to transforming resource sharing and promoting sustainability. It empowers individuals to share, exchange, and repurpose items, reducing waste.

 **Learn more**
www.bit.ly/reyous

Got a business idea up your sleeve?

With an exciting calendar of activity (including competitions for budding entrepreneurs), the Open Business Creators website has everything you need to know about taking that next step.

 **Get involved**
www.bit.ly/openbusinesscreators

Make It at Market

The OU/BBC co-production transforming creativity into income

For Dr Aqueel Wahga, Senior Lecturer in Management and Director of the Centre for Social and Sustainable Enterprise (CSSE) in the Faculty of Business & Law, working on the OU/BBC co-production *Make It at Market* was a first foray into the world of television production. As one of the OU's academic consultants on the programme (alongside esteemed – and newly retired – colleague, Professor Emeritus Richard Blundell), Aqueel was tasked with advising, informing and fact-checking the fascinating content put together by production company Flabbergast TV for the BBC.

Make It at Market promotes what Aqueel calls 'Lifestyle Entrepreneurship', a re-emerging tradition in which craftspeople and creative hobbyists are being encouraged to turn their passion into a revenue stream. From chocolatiers to coppersmiths, via signwriters, crocheters and the lesser-spotted 'cutlery artists', the programme introduces viewers to a wide variety of creatives and artisans, pairing them with experts and encouraging them to utilise their gifts for financial benefit.

"During a cost of living crisis, we've supported people to realise the potential of their skills and use those to find alternative means of generating income," shares Aqueel, "*Make It at Market* is about how craftspeople often struggle to see the

potential in their abilities; we can empower them to translate their hobbies into income."

Continuing the distinguished, long-standing partnership between the OU and the BBC, Aqueel's involvement with the show predominantly took place at the start and end of the filming process, or what's known as pre- and post-production. Aqueel and the team were able to offer informed insights to assist the programme-makers in their quest to promote Craft and Lifestyle Entrepreneurship.

However, as well as providing input, Aqueel himself learnt lots of things along the way.

"I was really surprised by the amount of untapped creativity not being utilised around the country," he reflects. "Collaborating so closely with the BBC on this show also gave me a great feeling of pride and responsibility. This platform has given us a much wider scope to reach and inform more people, allowing us to make a genuine social contribution."

What is *Make It at Market*?

Hosted by the ever-engaging Dominic Chinea of *The Repair Shop* fame, *Make It at Market* takes a deep-dive into the creative process of craftspeople and talented hobbyists, and provides expertise and guidance to help them turn their talent into a freelance career.

Celebrating the proud British traditions of arts and crafts, market trading, self-started businesses and handcrafted produce, each episode follows two creative artisans on their journey to recognising their own potential, coaching them through the daunting steps needed to take their wares into the world.



Watch the episodes on iPlayer
www.bbc.in/43ws0Bo

The importance of OU input

Speaking to Dr Aqueel Wahga, he is proud to point out that the OU and its renowned Business School were keen for the case studies featured on the show to not be exclusively for-profit enterprises. As such, some of the business ideas in the series itself were sustainable, socially and environmentally, aligning well with the OU's environmental and social responsibility justice goals.

Another substantial input from the OU academics was raising the importance of not only featuring the success stories, but also the failures.

"For potential entrepreneurs, failure is really important," says Aqueel, "It's so important to learn lessons, and to be prepared for adversity. Having said that, starting a business shouldn't be viewed as risk-taking, but risk-management. That's why seeing less successful case studies helps entrepreneurs make sensible decisions."



Presenter Dominic Chinea

Image © Flabbergast TV Ltd

A two-way relationship

As well as advising on the production, the benefits of this collaboration for the OU are substantial.

Not only is there that aforementioned greater reach and enactment of the social justice mission, but links to OU content appear at the end of each episode via OU Connect.

Case studies from the programme have even been incorporated into OU teaching and learning, allowing the students of tomorrow to continue reaping the rewards of this fascinating production.

 **Learn more about the show on OU Connect**
www.bit.ly/makeitatmarket

Centre for Social and Sustainable Enterprise

The Centre for Social and Sustainable Enterprise (CSSE) addresses the connections between entrepreneurial activity, innovation and the transition towards more environmentally and socially sustainable ways of doing business.

 **Find out more**
www.bit.ly/oucsse

Aqueel's advice

Finally, we asked Aqueel if he has any advice for anybody wanting to follow the path of the *Make It at Market* entrepreneurs, starting their own craft business or trade. His response? Unequivocal.

"Just go ahead and do it!", he urges, "Don't wait. After all, ideas are only ideas until you implement them. Your thinking should be led by your actions, not the other way around."

With his work on the show informing and empowering people all over the country – from a wide range of backgrounds, sectors and life experiences – to see the opportunity out there for those ready to take it, it's abundantly clear that this project was a labour of love for Aqueel and his colleagues. *Make It at Market* truly is testament to the dedication, commitment and passion of all involved.

Perhaps you could be the next budding businessperson ready to take the plunge? If so, OU study is the perfect place to start.

 **Find out more**
www.bit.ly/openuniversitybs



Jeanette Sloan (mentor) with Tiana Espanon

Image © Flabbergast TV Ltd

A wonderful community

Honouring a growing tradition of legacy donations

Each year, more kind, thoughtful members of our OU family are generously choosing to remember the University with a gift in their Will, in order to continue that proud, shared, OU dream: to keep education open to all.

These legacy gifts are deeply important, making up over 25% of philanthropic support the University has received in recent years. This transformative, selfless generosity is the backbone of essential scholarship programmes, world class research, financial assistance for students in need, and so much more.

We are indebted to everyone who has joined this remarkable, ever-growing community.

The Legacy Garden

Supporters who choose to leave a gift in their Will are also offered the opportunity to have their name honoured on a memorial plaque in our Legacy Garden (to be unveiled after their gift has been received).

A haven of peace, reflection and gratitude, the Legacy Garden is located in the walled garden of Walton Hall, the former manor house within the OU's stunning Milton Keynes campus.

The beautiful plaques, which can include a personal tribute, are engraved with the names of individuals who have supported the OU, reflecting their values, beliefs and motivations for giving.

For many, many years to come, these names will be recognised as part of a kind, inspiring community, steadfastly committed to helping others.



Remembering Ralph

"We can only stand on the shoulders of others if we are taught how."

Those were the poignant words from Ralph Hedge, reflecting on his reasons for choosing to support the OU with a gift in his Will.

Ralph's time studying at the OU truly changed his life, giving him opportunities for education he never dreamed he would receive, so including the OU in his Will was his way of paying those opportunities forward to future generations.

For Ralph, this gift meant the chance to change more lives just like his own.



Born in 1925 in Needham Market, Suffolk, Ralph Charles Hedge left school at 14, and was thrust into the world of work. His career took him from a garage forecourt to Management Accountancy, via the RAF and a post-war posting in New Delhi. However, the one regret Ralph always harboured was that he never got the chance to properly pursue education.

So, when he discovered the OU – "The best thing since sliced bread!", in his words – he threw himself into his studies, completing a degree in Economics. He enjoyed the experience so much, in fact, that he decided to stay on and study Philosophy, obtaining a second degree in his 60s!

When Ralph passed away, he left a letter to the OU outlining his remarkable story, from which the above words are graciously lifted.

This summer, Ralph will be fondly remembered, with gratitude, through a plaque in the Legacy Garden. He is sorely missed and never forgotten.



Learn more

If you're interested in knowing more about remembering the University in your Will, we would love the opportunity to talk to you about what inspires you, and how your kindness could support the OU family of tomorrow.



For more information, please email giving@open.ac.uk or call 01908 659 141.