

OpenDoor



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Professor Teresa Cremin on the importance of reading for pleasure, and how you can play your part!

Welcome to OpenDoor

It is with great pride and enormous gratitude that I introduce this autumn's edition of OpenDoor, the magazine created exclusively for you, the OU's dedicated donor and supporter community. Thanks as ever for all your support. It's only through generosity like yours that your University can continue its vital social justice mission.

In this issue of your magazine, you can read about a remarkable Giving Day, where the OU family came together like never before to change lives through scholarships.

On page 4, there's an exclusive preview of a truly fascinating conversation between bestselling author Kate Mosse and inspiring Carers' Scholarship recipient Rebekah.

Across the following pages, you can also find details on how the OU is playing an integral role in the National Year of Reading, hear from Legacy Manager Lolly on a beautiful event in our Legacy Garden, and read about the latest news and updates on research and student support at your University.

With warm wishes and grateful thanks,

Karen Hart
Director of Development



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A record-breaking Giving Day!

Annual challenge raises more than ever before for life-changing scholarships

On 2-3 July 2026, the OU family came together to take part in The Open University's sixth annual Giving Day, a 36-hour fundraising challenge supporting vital OU scholarships.

To say that you, the University's alumni and donor community, rose to the challenge would be an enormous understatement!

An incredible **1,747** kind, generous supporters gave a gift, raising a truly phenomenal **£254,652!** Breaking previous records of most donors and most support raised, these remarkable results really do highlight the collective power of philanthropy.

This life-changing support will provide scholarships to those who may otherwise have felt access to higher education was out of reach. Open Futures Fund scholarships support people from five distinct groups – disabled military veterans, unpaid carers, low-income Black students, those seeking sanctuary in the UK, and young people who have spent time in the care system – to rewrite their futures and follow their dreams.

Back in June, this year's Giving Day campaign was launched with a few simple but powerful words:

A moment of generosity creates a lifetime of opportunity.

You, the proud OU family of alumni and supporters, supplied 1,747 moments of individual moments of generosity. These moments then became part of one movement: to provide scholarships for people wishing to transform their lives. You provided opportunities that once seemed impossible.

In the coming weeks, a new cohort of scholarship students will begin their OU journeys, joining the OU family forever. Please join us in wishing them a very warm welcome to this remarkable institution.

Thanks again to everyone who has supported scholarship students this Giving Day and beyond. Your generosity is their opportunity.

Lifetimes of opportunity

The Open Futures Fund in numbers

837 scholarships awarded since 2018

430

Disabled Veterans' Scholarships Fund

180

Carers' Scholarships

131

Black Students' Support Fund

60

Sanctuary Scholarships

36

Care Experienced Scholarships



The Open Futures Fund



As a recipient of an Open Futures Fund scholarship since 2023, it's been amazing to see the kindness shown this Giving Day by the OU's incredible alumni and donors.

When I received my scholarship, I truly thought it was a miracle. I couldn't believe it. My dreams were now a reality, all thanks to the kindness of people like you.

Tinta
OU scholarship student,
speaking this Giving Day



Breaking news!

Thanks to the generosity of donors and those leaving gifts in their Wills to the University, even more Open Futures Fund places have been awarded for the upcoming academic year. Now, 95 new scholarship students will begin their transformational OU journeys this autumn!



OpenDoor exclusive preview

Carers in conversation

We're delighted to share with you a sneak preview of an in-person conversation between bestselling writer **Kate Mosse CBE** and inspiring scholarship recipient **Rebekah Zammett**. They sat down this summer to discuss the impact and importance of Carers' Scholarships.

We were so grateful to Kate for inviting us into her home. Over a cup of tea and slice of (truly excellent) cake, she and Rebekah passionately discussed why scholarships can make such a vital difference to the lives of carers. Across topics ranging from the UK's hidden carer community, to the importance of education opportunities for all, via writing, the law, gender equity and even politics – including whether “role model” Rebekah might consider becoming Prime Minister! – the conversation flew by.

The full interview piece will appear in your 2027 edition of OpenMinds alumni magazine, which is due to land in the New Year. In the meantime, we hope you enjoy these exclusive snippets of a fascinating and varied conversation.

Who's who?

Kate Mosse CBE

Author and Carers' Scholarships Ambassador



Kate, a bestselling author, cultural leader and playwright, is a proud Ambassador of Carers' Scholarships at the OU, having spent almost two decades herself as an unpaid carer for multiple family members. She published the acclaimed memoir *An Extra Pair of Hands: A story of caring and everyday acts of love* in 2021.

Rebekah Zammett

Law graduate and Carers' Scholarship recipient



Having been forced to turn down a place at university many years before to provide full-time care for her son, the incredible generosity of OU supporters offered **Rebekah** a route back into higher education in 2020, when she enrolled onto a truly life-changing Law degree.



Kate: How did you discover Carers' Scholarships at The Open University?



Rebekah: I searched online for support for carers, and the only university I found that even mentioned them by name was the OU. And they recognised that for carers, caring responsibilities will always take priority; something that many students could do in a term might take a carer three years, because if there's a crisis you have to react to it.

Kate: And you needed that understanding of your situation, not just a timetable for you to work around.

Rebekah: Precisely. I've been a carer since I was 22 years old and had just become a mother. My baby son sadly suffered a neonatal stroke, resulting in multiple, complex disabilities.

I had been accepted to study for a degree at a brick university before my son was born, but after his birth, that simply wasn't possible anymore.

Kate: That's why these scholarships are so important: carers come in all shapes and sizes, the needs come in all shapes and sizes, but education transforms lives.

Rebekah: And the fact that this flexibility and understanding was baked into the OU model was essential. Thankfully, I was accepted onto a Law degree and never looked back!

Kate: What was it like being a student again? Sharpening your pencils, getting your notebook – I know it isn't quite how it was in my day! – but how did it feel on that first day back?

Rebekah: I have a vivid memory of sitting at the kitchen table, opening the laptop, and being so nervous, literally shaking.

I read through the first few bits of the first module thinking: "Oh gosh, this is really complicated." But on the second reading, I thought: "Oh, I get that. Maybe I am ready." It felt like those study skills were buried inside, ready to come out.

Kate: I imagine that's partly because of your life experiences. Carers have this extraordinary range of skills they have no idea are there until they need them.

And it's just so important to support carers to access higher education. Because anybody could be a carer. Once we acknowledge that, then we need to make sure that we don't lose exceptional talent – writers, architects, doctors, whatever – because of their domestic

responsibilities. We need to make it possible for everybody who wants to learn, to be part of something, to change the world, to have that opportunity.

Rebekah: It really has changed my life. Donors opened a door that I didn't just think was closed – I didn't even know it was there. There are so many reviews into the state of caring, but they're so rarely followed by meaningful action. So to find that the OU had this scholarship specifically for carers was groundbreaking.

Kate: Yes, and all of the language and discussion around caring tends to be about paid social care, and that's extremely important, but there are 8 million of us who are unpaid carers, and we are hidden in plain sight.

...read more

The full, extended conversation will appear in OpenMinds alumni magazine, arriving January 2027.



**The Open
Futures Fund**

Find out more about the Open Futures Fund



Discover more about OU scholarships
<https://bit.ly/ouopenfutures>

Hear more from some remarkable scholarship recipients



Watch inspiring video stories
<https://bit.ly/offvideos>





The National Year of Reading



Why reading for pleasure matters: in conversation with Professor Teresa Cremin

Across the UK, 2026 marks the National Year of Reading. This nationwide campaign is designed to promote the power of the written word and combat the steep decline in reading for pleasure, particularly among children and young people.

To celebrate the National Year of Reading, we sat down with Teresa Cremin CBE, Professor of Education (Literacy) at The Open University, and Co-Director of the OU's hugely influential Literacy and Social Justice Centre.

In a wide-ranging and fascinating discussion, Professor Cremin highlighted the alarming statistics which led to the creation of this urgent campaign, spoke about the vast and far-reaching benefits of reading for pleasure, and gave a whistle-stop tour of how your University is working tirelessly to change the face of reading in the UK.

Let's start with the big question: Why is reading for pleasure so important?

In education, there's an understandable tendency to focus on measurable literacy skills, such as phonics or handwriting, but often this means overlooking 'volitional' reading: that moment when we choose to read for our own enjoyment, rather than because we feel obliged.

However, research shows a clear link between those who read for pleasure and attainment across a wide range of areas. The full list of benefits would frankly be too long to fit in one article, but those who read regularly and volitionally have shown improved academic results, comprehension across all subjects, wellbeing, general knowledge, critical thinking, creativity, self-esteem and even economic outlook. When the skill and the will come together, reading can be remarkably beneficial.

What part does The Open University play in communicating and promoting these benefits?

Next year (2027) is the tenth anniversary of the founding of the OU's Reading for Pleasure Research and Practice Coalition, which is data-led but designed to be practical and accessible for teachers, educators, policymakers and parents. The vision of the Coalition is to enable more young people to choose to become readers, and to read regularly.

We're really proud to have been quite influential in the field of literacy education, and this is in large part because we work so collaboratively. We've partnered with libraries on inspiring reading challenges, advised key government enquiries, worked with over 400 schools to cultivate a whole-school reading culture, and collaborated with other universities, charities and student teachers to leverage reading for pleasure as a tool for social justice.



Reading for Pleasure

How have reading habits changed over the past few years?

There's an international decline in reading for pleasure. Across the world, just 45% of ten-year-olds say they read for pleasure, but shockingly that figure plummets to just 29% in the UK.

Notably, though, there are also exciting opportunities. The physical form of what young people read has diversified drastically, particularly with the rise in popularity of more visual texts, such as graphic novels. We can take advantage of these trends by encouraging children to engage with self-chosen texts in their own ways.

What are the biggest misconceptions around reading for pleasure?

A couple of things spring to mind. Firstly, pertinent to the discussion around different forms of reading, I would say that audiobooks are often overlooked as an amazing tool to encourage people to become readers. However someone chooses to read – be it novels, non-fiction, magazines, comics, or even audio formats – it all counts!

It's also frustrating that some people see reading for pleasure as the "icing on the cake" when it comes to literacy, when it's so much more than that. Volitional reading is fundamental to somebody becoming a reader for life, and developing that enormous arsenal of skills.

Many OpenDoor readers may be parents or grandparents, or have young children in their lives. Is there anything they could do in their own families or communities to promote reading for pleasure?

We can't demand children read for pleasure, but we can entice, engage, model and encourage. As a grandparent myself, I try to help my grandchildren fall in love with reading. This could mean revisiting your own childhood collection, sharing it, and talking about what books mean to you. To talk about reading is almost as important as doing it: when young people are surrounded by readers, reading becomes part of their lives.

The other challenge I'd give to the older generation is to read outside of your comfort zone. If you want to discuss reading with young family members, then it's useful to create shared reference points. Try reading verse novels, manga or anime, and seek out contemporary children's texts. You never know, you might find something you love!



We believe that reading for pleasure is the right of every child.



Mission statement, The Open University's Reading for Pleasure Research and Practice Coalition



Take your learning further!

Language, literature and childhood (Level 3 module)

<https://bit.ly/opendoor301>

Explore all OU Education courses

<https://bit.ly/opendoorallcourses>

Badged Reading for Pleasure online course

<https://bit.ly/opendoorrfp>

The National Year of Reading 2026

GO ALL IN.

Play your part and GO ALL IN.



National Year of Reading 2026
<https://goallin.org.uk>



Join Teresa at OpenDoor Live!

To hear more from Professor Cremin, as well as some of the other remarkable people featured in your magazine, join us online for OpenDoor Live this October.

Taking you behind the scenes of your University, this live online event is an opportunity for you to see the enormous difference your support is making.

Wednesday 14 October 2026, 12:00–13:15.

<https://bit.ly/opendoorlive26>

News in brief

A round-up of partner support

Driven by its social justice mission, your University is proud to explore a number of innovative partnerships and unique opportunities to reach even more people around the world, by working with corporations, foundations and other philanthropic partners throughout the year.

Here's just a handful of some of the major partnership announcements from across the last few months.



Cisco and the OU celebrate 20 years of partnership

For the past 20 years, Cisco and The Open University have worked together to help people develop the digital and cyber security skills needed in an increasingly connected world. Through Cisco Networking Academy, the partnership has supported learners, educators and organisations across the UK and beyond.

More than 30,000 Open University students have benefited directly from Cisco-enhanced learning. The partnership's wider network has reached more than 250,000 learners and trained

over 19,000 educators worldwide, helping to widen access to technology education and skills development.

The collaboration has also supported under-represented groups, including disabled learners, armed forces veterans, teachers and young women entering cyber and technology careers. Looking ahead, we will build on this shared impact, with a continued focus on expanding access to digital skills and education at scale.

OU and Microsoft hub offers free learning in AI skills for all

The Microsoft AI Hub is a one-stop shop for AI knowledge and expertise, launched by the OU and Microsoft to help educate, inspire and transform the workplace.

Aimed at all levels of interest and aptitude, the AI Hub, hosted on the OU's popular OpenLearn site, is set to become the go-to place for everything AI related.

Users visiting the AI Hub can explore the wealth of free, accessible courses designed to build confidence and broaden skills in artificial intelligence and its daily use.

Solutions-based and across-the-board learning

The easy to use platform curates a collection of more than 30 free courses and learning materials – put together by experts at the OU and Microsoft – which explain, teach and inspire the use and adoption of AI.

A new course has just been launched, *AI Essentials: a clear introduction*, which introduces the technologies that make AI work, and shows you how to use some example applications to create entirely new works of art, music, sound, video and text.

Keep an eye on the Hub for a forthcoming competition on this course.



Visit the AI Hub
<https://bit.ly/openlearnai>

Dangoor Education reaffirms commitment to vital policy research

Dangoor Education has generously confirmed a significant new phase of funding for PolicyWISE, the UK and Ireland's leading centre for comparative public policy. Beginning in September 2026, this four-year funding commitment will cement PolicyWISE as the central figure in cross-government policy research and reform, with a strengthened and dedicated focus on mental health and wellbeing.

This next phase marks a major step forward in PolicyWISE's evolution. What began as a promising concept in 2022 is now a trusted platform bringing together devolved governments, experts and academics, to ensure that fairness, transparency and collaboration remain at the forefront of policymaking.

Over its first three years, PolicyWISE has engaged more than 2,500 policymakers, delivered high-impact comparative research, and become a respected partner to governments, parliaments, and research councils, in key areas including intergovernmental relations, education, social policy and public sector innovation. The new UK government's commitment to policy collaboration reflects the practical and research work already delivered by PolicyWISE.

Dangoor Education's renewed investment will include the development of a dedicated mental health and wellbeing programme, applying PolicyWISE's strengths in comparative analysis and knowledge exchange to one of the most pressing policy challenges across the UK and Ireland.

With the support of Dangoor Education, we look forward to watching PolicyWISE thrive over the next four years and beyond!



Find out more about PolicyWISE
<https://bit.ly/policywise>





A celebration of kindness in the Legacy Garden



**By Lolly Marlborough,
Legacy Manager**

In July, I was delighted to be part of the OU team welcoming over 70 guests to Walton Hall campus for the annual Legacy Garden event, celebrating and remembering those who have kindly left a gift in their Will to The Open University.

It was brilliant to be part of such a truly special occasion and one that I feel privileged to have been part of. Blessed with fabulous sunshine and accompanied by the wonderful music of a live string quartet, it was a day filled with warmth, gratitude and reflection.

One of the highlights was an eye-opening presentation about the Open Futures Fund and the life-changing difference it makes to students. We watched some inspiring videos of scholarship recipients sharing their personal journeys, which was incredibly moving. Their resilience and bravery in overcoming significant challenges was incredible, and it was impossible not to be touched by the way scholarships have transformed their lives and given them hope for the future.

I also met a Disabled Veterans' Scholarship recipient and his wife. Hearing his story brought home the impact of philanthropy, while his wife and I quickly discovered we were both devoted Nigella Lawson fans. It is amazing how quickly two strangers can become friends over butter and chocolate!

The plaque unveiling ceremony was another unforgettable moment. Each year, a new set of beautiful plaques is added to the garden, paying

tribute to those whose gifts have been received in the past 12 months, and this year we were thrilled to have the University Vice-Chancellor, Professor David Phoenix, give the touching eulogies.

Professor Phoenix paid heartfelt tribute to each person whose legacy we were honouring, where possible sharing something of their lives and their connection to the OU - including one donor who was so inspired by the OU's ethos of education for all, she asked to be laid to rest in her graduation gown! The Vice-Chancellor also spoke movingly about those who chose to remain anonymous, reminding us that their generosity continues to change lives. His compassion and sincerity made the ceremony especially meaningful.

Guests had travelled from all over the country, yet there was an immediate sense of friendship and belonging. The kindness, generosity and genuine care shown by everyone reminded me that the OU is far more than a university. It is a community united by a shared belief in the life-changing power of education.

Get in touch

If this article has inspired you to find out more about leaving a gift in your Will to The Open University, I would love to hear from you. I'm always happy to answer any questions, with no obligation at all, and share how gifts in Wills are helping to transform lives through education

**Email lolly.marlborough@open.ac.uk
or telephone +44 (0)1908 659039**

A beautiful day on campus

Reflections from Jane, alumna and guest

Having completed her first degree in the 1960s, dear friend of the University Jane Tasker enrolled on an MA in Education at the OU in the 90s, helping her reshape the latter stages of a remarkable career. Since then, she has been a loyal supporter of The Open University and attended numerous events.

We caught up with Jane for her reflections on another stunning day on campus.

Legacy Manager Lolly Marlborough with Jane Tasker



One thing I really enjoy is experiencing other guests seeing the Walton Hall campus for the first time. For many alumni, they have such long associations with the OU, but have never visited campus, and it really is such a lovely place. I love seeing the looks on their faces!

I've been coming to these events for many years, since the garden was in its embryo, and I'm so happy to be invited back year on year.

I really enjoy meeting other former students, talking about their life stories, and hearing about how the OU helps so many people

from different walks of life get a foot on the ladder.

There's always a brilliant variety of speakers; this year, we even got a tour of the XR (Extended Reality) Studios on campus, which were absolutely fascinating. Lots of my friends would love to have these kinds of experiences!

Days like these make me incredibly proud to be a supporter and graduate of The Open University. It really does change the lives of so many people.

Jane Tasker MA
Supporter of The Open University



In YOUR words!

This Giving Day, we asked the OU's proud, generous supporters to leave a message on the donor wall as they kindly made their gift. Here's a small selection of our favourites from the day.

If you left a message, can you spot it here?

It will change your life for the better.

Enjoy your OU adventure!

Very proud to be an alumnus of this wonderful university, and happy to help others to enjoy the experience of studying with one of the best institutions in the UK!

Proud to be a part of this.

It is never too late to educate so go for it!

Everyone should have the opportunity to learn.

Proud to support all those embarking on future education.

Proud to be an OU graduate.

I wish you all the best in your studies. It is hard work but you will be so proud of your achievement.

I am pleased to provide support. The OU has been transformational for me.

OU is a life changer.

Happy to help someone else share the joy of a second chance at education.

My Open University degree has given me confidence I never realised I had.

Keep going, it's hard sometimes, but just push on!

As a previous student whose life was changed by the OU I recommend this wonderful organisation.

I'm glad to be able to help in my own small way.

Glad to support Giving Day 2026 to share the joy of education and learning.

A small contribution to a better future.

I'm proud to be associated with the OU and I hope you will be too.

On behalf of our inspiring scholarship students past, present and future, thanks to everyone who took part in another life-changing Giving Day!

