

OpenDoor



Baroness Jennie Lee

60 years since the
radical White Paper
that mapped out a
revolution

Inside your magazine



The University of the Air

Celebrating 60 years since Jennie Lee's revolutionary White Paper



The Open Futures Fund

Meet Elijah: entrepreneur, OU Business student and scholarship recipient



Attenborough's Secret Garden

Marking Sir David Attenborough's 100th birthday



Legacy giving

Discussing the importance of gifts in Wills with Lolly, The Open University's Legacy Manager



News in brief

A round-up of recent partner support for vital research and scholarships



OpenLearn

How your incredible generosity is driving accessible online learning for all

Thanks for everything

It's my great pleasure to welcome you to OpenDoor, the magazine created exclusively for you, The Open University's wonderful donor and supporter community, as a token of our gratitude, and to show the incredible impact your support is having.

In this edition, you'll learn about how your generosity is continuing to transform lives, be that through crucial scholarships, accessible online learning for all, or the University's ongoing dedication to welcoming and supporting everyone, whatever their background or circumstance.

This mission was set out in the revolutionary *University of the Air* White Paper crafted by Baroness Jennie Lee 60 years ago - which you can explore on the page opposite - and remains just as important as I write this today.

Jennie Lee's spirit of rebellion and justice is the same spirit which is still so visible now among the OU family, and I hope you take this moment to recognise your own contribution to the ongoing mission of education for all. Thank you.

With warm wishes and grateful thanks,

Karen Hart
Director of
Development



Get in touch



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How we look after your data

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Sixty years since Jennie Lee's revolutionary White Paper

This year, the OU family is celebrating the 60th anniversary of Baroness Jennie Lee boldly setting out an ambitious vision for accessible, flexible education, through her *University of the Air* White Paper.

When Prime Minister Harold Wilson announced his radical goal of accessible higher education available to all, he knew just the person to bring it to life. Jennie Lee, then MP for Cannock, set out the details in a revolutionary White Paper, establishing what is now known worldwide as The Open University. From that moment on, the concept of an equitable university that welcomes everyone, whatever their background or circumstance, began to take shape.

With its goal of providing education to millions via the burgeoning power of mass media, Jennie Lee's White Paper proposed a democratised higher education system, where anybody and everybody could have the power to learn, grow and thrive. Since then, millions of life-changing journeys have started with the OU, all of which can be traced back to that pioneering White Paper in 1966.

To this day, donors and alumni are keeping her vision alive with their incredible support and unflinching belief in the power of education.



Jennie Lee: Five fascinating facts

- ✓ **She became an MP at just 24 years old.** Born in 1904, Jennie was voted into Westminster at the North Lanarkshire by-election in 1929.
- ✓ **She was the first ever UK Minister for the Arts.** Jennie trebled the Arts Council grant in six years and widened the focus of investment from the elite of London to Scotland, Wales and the regions of England.
- ✓ **She championed the name 'The Open University'.** Jennie preferred this name to 'The University of the Air', due to the OU's unique open access policy.
- ✓ **She chose to "out-snob the snobs".** Jennie recognised the importance of gaining a Royal Charter for the OU, for legal approval to grant qualifications: "I was quite certain that if we were going to have a university that didn't insult people, I would have to out-snob the snobs."
- ✓ **She left numerous papers and books to the OU.** When Baroness Lee passed away in 1988, she donated a significant archive to her beloved OU.



The Government has decided to establish a University of the Air, that is to say, an open university. There can be no question of offering to students a makeshift project, inferior in quality to other universities. That would defeat its whole purpose.

Jennie Lee
February 1966



Jennie Lee's work transcended politics, leaving an indelible mark on both the arts and education. Her unwavering dedication was instrumental in overcoming opposition and building the foundation for what would become a transformative institution.

Professor Josie Fraser
OU Deputy Vice-Chancellor



Explore the Jennie Lee Archive
Collection at the OU's Digital Archive
www.bit.ly/jennieleecollection

“A complete game-changer”

How the kindness of the OU family is rewriting Elijah’s story

Since 2018, the support of donors like you to the Open Futures Fund scholarships programme has helped a phenomenal 740 people to access a higher education which once seemed out of reach.

One such person is Business Management student Elijah, whose entire outlook changed when he discovered the OU.

Despite his lifelong dream of attending university, Elijah never held much optimism that this dream could come true. Growing up, finances were stretched and work, understandably, took precedent. With many around him either in debt or struggling to get by, he focused on his career, but those education dreams never faded.



I’d always had in my heart that I wanted to go to university, but I never saw that pathway into higher education. Nobody in my family had ever been to university, and a brick-and-mortar uni wasn’t the right fit for me. But the OU showed me that there is another way.



Opportunity knocks

When a family friend pointed him in the direction of the Black Students’ Support Fund – one of five scholarship programmes under the Open Futures Fund umbrella – he applied immediately.

“The scholarship was a complete game-changer,” Elijah beams, “It took away any financial concerns and I didn’t have to leave my existing commitments. It opened my eyes to an amazing opportunity, and I’ve never looked back.”

These commitments include the start-up business Liz Pie Pastry – a food venture he describes as “delivering a modern twist on traditional African pastries” – which Elijah runs with his sister, Elizabeth. From a grass-roots passion project, the siblings have aspirations to take their business global, and he credits his studies for supporting them on that journey.



Studying Business Management was a no-brainer for me. I can apply the concepts I learn on the course directly to the day-to-day running of the business. I always say that the OU is the theory, and work is the practical. It’s the perfect balance.



Juggling work and study

“Sometimes,” laughs Elijah, “I’m literally putting our pastries in the oven, and at the same time going through my study material. Work and the business go hand-in-hand. I’m currently on a global marketing module, and I’m applying what I learn directly to our work, in real time.”

When it comes to having education that fits around his work, it’s clear that the flexible elements of OU study have been priceless.

“I’m so lucky,” he reflects, “Lots of entrepreneurs are working alone, but I have a buddy right next to me: my studies at the OU.”

Elijah’s studies haven’t always been plain sailing, of course, but like so many scholarship recipients, he isn’t the kind of person to let adversity hold him back.

“I had one marketing module which on paper looked like it should be easy,” he recalls, “I thought ‘I’m going to ace this’. Then I got my mark back, and it was the worst I’ve ever had!”





Elizabeth and Elijah Akinfenwa, co-founders of Liz Pie Pastry

For someone like Elijah, this small setback was never going to be the end of the story.

“I swear I saw my lecturer more than my friends and family until I turned those marks around! And I vowed to myself that I’d never let it happen again. But I’d learned you can never take anything for granted. That was such an important lesson.”

A brighter future, all thanks to you

While Elijah’s drive, passion and dedication are propelling his study journey, his scholarship was the key to the door. Without the generosity of the OU family, he may never have accessed higher education.

Thank you. I’ve improved – both academically and as a person as well – all thanks to my studies. You’re having a huge impact on the lives of underprivileged people, and I know a lot more people in my community would benefit so much from an opportunity like this.

For Elijah, and for his business, the opportunities are endless. But whether he’s studying next to a hot oven, or using business theory to solve real-world problems, one thing’s for sure: the kindness of strangers kickstarted this remarkable journey.

And the next step for Liz Pie Pastry? Bringing their signature ‘puff puff mix’ onto retail shelves, sharing a taste of their story with an even wider audience.

Study like an entrepreneur
 See Elijah discuss his award-winning business
 Watch his inspiring video story www.bit.ly/opendoorelijah

Support more students
 Together, we can provide futures full of hope and opportunity.
 Support the Open Futures Fund www.bit.ly/openfuturesdonate

The Bitly link above will take you to <https://donate.stripe.com/aFadR86SU17ifbd6He6c001>

OU Giving Day
2–3 July 2026

Join us on Thursday 2 and Friday 3 July for Giving Day 2026! An inspiring online campaign supporting the Open Futures Fund, Giving Day includes lots of match and challenge funding opportunities to help your support go even further, and change even more lives through the power of education.

Keep an eye on your email inbox and the OU’s social media channels for more!

740 scholarships provided since 2018

393 Disabled Veterans’ Scholarships Fund	162 Carers’ Scholarships	117 Black Students’ Support Fund	46 Sanctuary Scholarships	22 The Care Experienced Scholarship
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Happy birthday Sir David!

The OU and BBC celebrate broadcasting icon's 100th birthday in style

As national treasure and esteemed Honorary Graduate of The Open University Sir David Attenborough celebrates his 100th birthday, a fascinating new collaboration between the OU and the BBC has been announced as part of a season of programming to mark this extraordinary milestone.

Secret Garden, a captivating new five-part BBC series co-produced by The Open University and narrated by Sir David Attenborough, will introduce viewers to the often charming, sometimes daring and always secretive animals that inhabit the hidden natural world right on our doorsteps. As the series reveals, life in these seemingly tranquil spaces is far from gentle, and nature's rules continue to shape the daily struggle for survival.

Throughout his unparalleled career, Sir David has been both a pioneering broadcaster and a passionate advocate for the environment, whilst remaining a proud supporter of The Open University. The latest collaboration between the OU and the BBC serves as a fitting tribute to his lifelong commitment to education, natural history and storytelling.

From pine martens in the Western Highlands to dormice in South Wales, swallows in the Lake District, otters in Oxfordshire and blue tits in Bristol, *Secret Garden* reveals not just the rich and surprising diversity of life across the UK, but also how each species finds its own way to live alongside us.

Through meeting the gardeners that have created these wild oases, the series highlights the vital role that the public can play in supporting nature's recovery. 80% of Britons have access to a garden, and together these gardens cover an area greater than all of our national nature reserves combined - so what we do in our own backyards has an impact not only on the animals that live there, but also on entire populations.

Don't miss *Secret Garden*, starting on Sunday 5 April at 9pm on BBC2.

You'll truly never look at your garden in the same way again.

Secret Garden was made by Plimsoll Productions, co-produced by The Open University and The National Trust in association with ARTE France.

Secret Garden: Behind the scenes

Input and expertise

As Academic Consultants on *Secret Garden*, Dr Kadmiel Maseyk and Dr Lucy Dablin from the OU's STEM faculty advised the BBC and Plimsoll Productions throughout the making of the series.

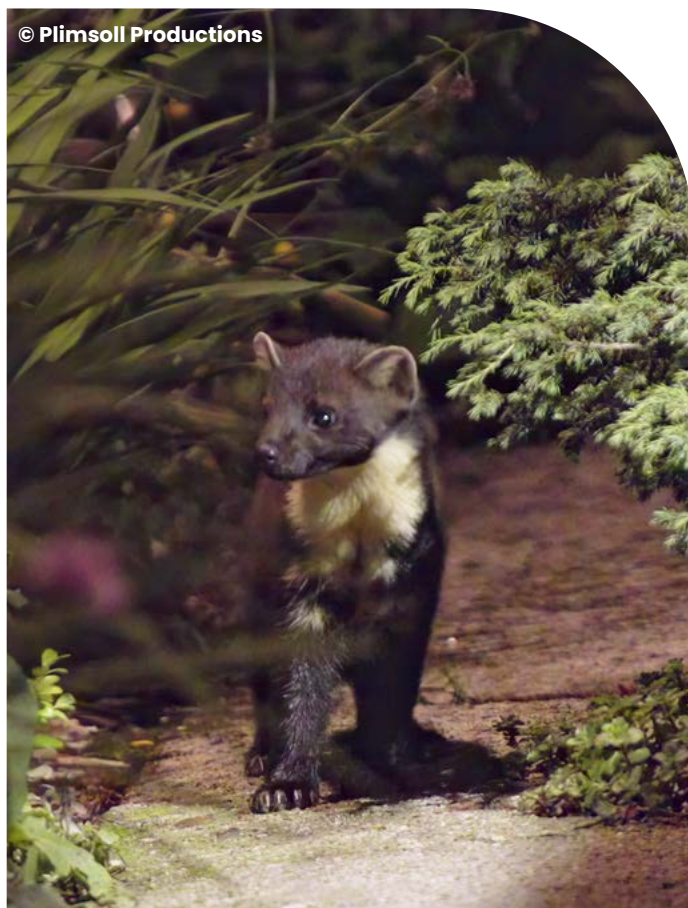


Secret Garden relates to our immediate environment, highlighting the diversity of wildlife not far removed from our everyday lives. Biodiversity is declining across the country, in some cases at an alarming rate. Being aware of what inhabits our natural spaces should encourage people to side with nature, and provide the protection and opportunity for wildlife to thrive.

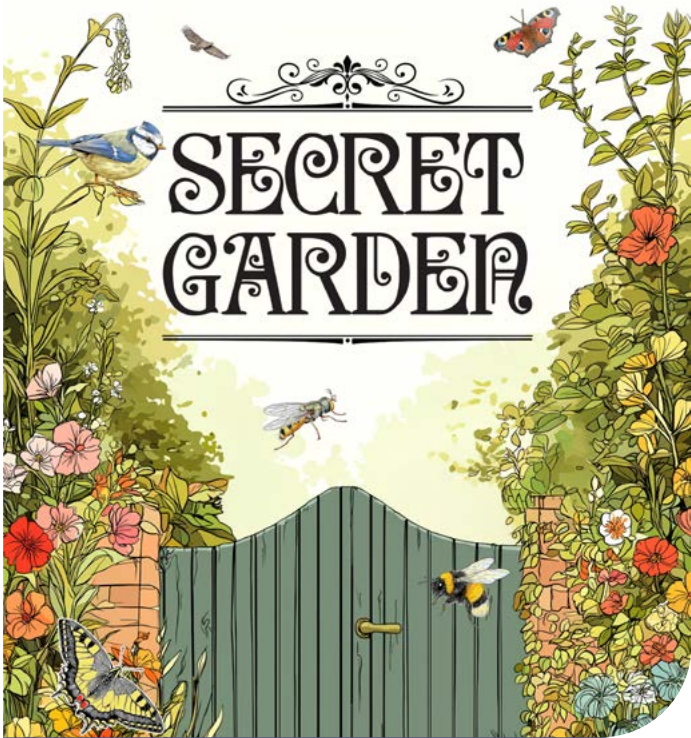
Dr Kadmiel Maseyk

Senior Lecturer in Environmental Sciences

© Plimsoll Productions



Pine marten in a garden in the Western Highlands



Throughout the week, many of Sir David's most-loved series – several co-produced with The Open University – will be available to view on iPlayer, including *Planet Earth III*, *Blue Planet II*, *Frozen Planet* and *Wild Isles*.

The Open University's unique partnership with the BBC continues to inspire public audiences and enhance our students' experience through the inclusion of bespoke and engaging assets within our teaching. Clips from many of the OU/BBC co-productions presented by Sir David will have been embedded into OU teaching for many years. To find out more, visit our celebratory OU Connect page.

 **Explore the co-productions**
www.bit.ly/ouattenborough

To support the series further, Kadmiel and Lucy worked with the OU Broadcast team to produce an interactive guide illustrating what to look for and explore in different types of garden environments.

 **Find out more on OU Connect**
www.bit.ly/secretgardenbbc

A week of celebration on the BBC

Following the final episode of *Secret Garden*, the BBC will present a week-long celebration to showcase some of the most iconic programmes from Sir David's extraordinary seven-decade career. Alongside a rich collection of archive material, two other new programmes will be broadcast; *Making Life on Earth: Attenborough's Greatest Adventure* (a behind the scenes look at the original 1979 series) and *David Attenborough's 100 Years on Planet Earth* (a live event from the Royal Albert Hall).



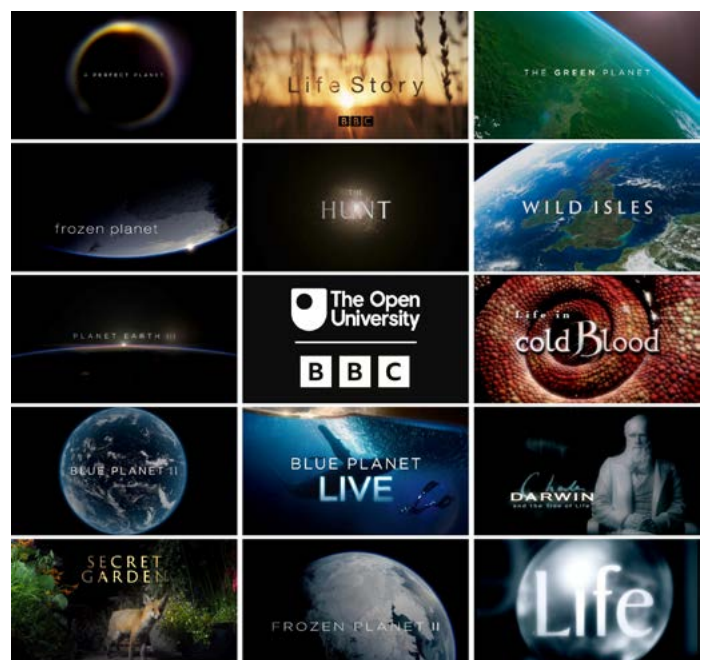
It's impossible to overstate what Sir David Attenborough has given us. His programmes have not only defined science and natural history broadcasting, but they have also changed how we see our planet and our place within it. This special week is a celebration of an extraordinary milestone and of a body of work that continues to inspire awe, curiosity and care for the natural world.

Jack Bootle
 Head of Commissioning for
 Specialist Factual at the BBC



Our long-standing partnership with Sir David Attenborough reflects The Open University's commitment to bringing high-quality, accessible learning to everyone. His work demonstrates the impact that knowledge and understanding can have on society, and we are proud to collaborate with him on projects that inspire viewers to learn more about the world we share.

Caroline Ogilvie
 Director of Broadcast and
 Partnerships at the OU



Please join all of us at the OU in raising a toast for Sir David, and wishing him the happiest of 100th birthdays.

Let's talk about gifts in Wills



Meet Lolly, Open University Legacy Manager

As a proud supporter of the OU, you are committed to a future where education remains open to all.

One of the most impactful ways to help this vital mission continue to thrive is by joining an ever-growing community of compassionate supporters leaving a legacy gift to the University in their Will.

We sat down with the OU's Legacy Manager, Lolly, for a chat about her role, the inspiring alumni she gets to meet and the difference gifts in Wills can make to the OU.

How have you enjoyed your first six months in the role?

I've loved it! I've wanted to work for the OU since I was a child, as my mum's best friend, Pam, worked here - and went on to get a degree and an MBA! She was the most wonderful woman, and she spoke so highly of the University and what a life-changing organisation it is. Now I get to see that first-hand every day. It's been an absolute joy.

What's been your highlight so far?

I just really enjoy meeting alumni and donors, and hearing their amazing stories. It's inspiring to hear how education has opened doors for people in so many ways. I also love a chat and coffee, and I'm fond of a cake or two! My door is always open to alumni who want to chat about their journeys with the OU.

What about your own journey to the OU?

Well, I went to university myself, where I studied Drama and Media Communication. After that, I actually worked as a TV extra for a while. If you look very carefully, you might spot the back of my head in *EastEnders* and *Harry Potter*! But I've always been passionate about finding a role where I can make a real difference to people's lives.

Why are gifts in Wills so important to the University?

These generous gifts ensure that the OU can continue its vital mission for generations to come. Gifts in Wills can support scholarships, research and opportunities for students who might otherwise miss out on higher education.

Can you share some of the most common reasons for people wanting to leave a gift?

Many supporters tell me they want their values to live on: a strong belief in keeping education open to all, and a desire to help people who face barriers to studying, in the UK and around the world. Many people just want to give others the same opportunity they had. Education changed their lives, and they want future generations to benefit in the same way.

We're speaking to you in the stunning Legacy Garden; can you tell us a little more about it?

It's a beautiful and peaceful space on the OU campus at Walton Hall, recognising legacy supporters. I often enjoy walking through the garden on my lunch break, and I recently had the pleasure of meeting Dan, the gardener who cares for the space, who explained how much it changes through the seasons, with different flowers, colours and scents. Supporters also have the opportunity to be remembered through a plaque in the garden, a lasting tribute to their kindness and generosity, after their gift has been received.



What's the best way to contact you?

I'm always delighted to have a chat and answer any questions, with no obligations at all. This could be over the phone, via email or even in person. I also love welcoming supporters to Walton Hall, so if anyone is planning to visit the Milton Keynes area, please do reach out and I would be delighted to arrange a campus tour.

Reach out to Lolly

You can contact me by email at lolly.marlborough@open.ac.uk or by phone on +44 (0)1908 659039. If ever you'd welcome a conversation about supporting the OU, or simply sharing your own unique OU story, I would love to hear from you.

How your gift can build a better future

- Providing life-changing scholarships
- Funding high quality research with tangible, real-world impact
- Helping OU students facing financial hardship
- Supporting your University with an unrestricted gift, to help wherever the need is greatest

 Find out more or get in touch
www.bit.ly/oulegacy



Legacy Manager Lolly Marlborough



The OU Legacy Garden

News in brief

A round-up of partner support

In addition to the generosity of alumni donors, the OU also works with multiple corporations, foundations and partners on a wide range of projects requiring philanthropic support. Here's a whistle-stop tour of some major announcements from the last few months!



Renewed funding for the Floodplain Meadows Partnership

Sustainability organisation the Foundation for the Third Millennium have announced they will continue funding the fascinating, vital work of the Floodplain Meadows Partnership, a floodplain meadow conservation and restoration project hosted by The Open University.

Following a successful two-year programme, supported by the Foundation for the Third Millennium, the Floodplain Meadows Partnership is now focused on a three-year programme of growth across all activities connected to restoration, advocacy, training and engagement, to secure the future of floodplain meadows across the UK.

To ensure its ambitious 70,000 hectare restoration target in England is met, it is essential this partnership maintains maximum presence and pressure. This three-year funding commitment will allow OU academics to continue working with established partners to provide training, monitoring and practical restoration work across all four UK nations.

The Foundation for the Third Millennium, based in Switzerland, supports projects promoting environmental protection and health, social justice and economic independence. To date, the Floodplain Meadows Partnership is the only UK-based project it supports.

The shared goal of this three-year partnership is to ensure that ambitions to restore floodplain meadows – an essential but neglected part of our ecosystem – are not only achieved, but sustained for generations.

 **Learn more**
<https://floodplainmeadows.org.uk>

TESSA begins new phase of teaching revolution

Regular readers of OpenDoor will know all about Teacher Education in Sub-Saharan Africa (TESSA), a long-standing OU teacher education partnership programme which so many of you kindly support. Across Sub-Saharan Africa, TESSA has enabled on-the-ground interventions which have changed the face of education. Since 2006, over two million teachers have used TESSA resources within their professional development – to shape lives, inspire children and transform communities.

The next phase in TESSA's journey to education equity is to help enhance practical elements of what is known as 'pre-service education': the vital training teachers receive *before* they reach the classroom. With a transformational donation of £1.2 million from the Zebra Trust, TESSA will work to strengthen the practical teaching elements of pre-service teacher education programmes. This important work will begin this year in Kenya and Zambia.

A huge thank you goes to the Zebra Trust, and everyone in the OU family who has supported and continues to support TESSA.

 Explore TESSA
www.bit.ly/csgdtezza



John Lewis Partnership backs the care experienced community

As a vocal champion of care experienced young people, the John Lewis Partnership (JLP) has generously reconfirmed its support for the OU's Care Experienced Scholarship, providing a further seven scholarships for the next academic year starting in autumn 2026.

For people aged 30 or under who've experienced care, the Care Experienced Scholarship, created in collaboration with JLP's Building Happier Futures initiative, is a pathway to higher education which may otherwise have remained firmly out of reach owing to circumstance, income and other responsibilities.

In October 2025, students already in receipt of the Care Experienced Scholarship received an exclusive invitation to a 'Building Happier Futures Day', an enlightening careers event hosted at the JLP headquarters in Pimlico, London. Attendees received a guided tour of the firm's head office, an exciting 'speed networking event' with Partners from across the organisation, and an eye-opening presentation on decoding job titles and planning a career.

JLP aims to become the employer of choice for care experienced people in the UK, an ambition they are approaching by providing support such as online and in-person employability programmes, inclusive policies such as additional leave for foster and kinship carers, and education through initiatives like the Care Experienced Scholarship.

 The Care Experienced Scholarship
www.bit.ly/carescholarship

OpenLearn in 2026

Alumni support drives open learning for all

What links the history of forensic science in the courtroom, the impact of AI on the field of social work, conversational Spanish, coaching neurodivergent athletes, and the complex finances behind Hollywood film production?

The answer? These are just some of the thousands of topics available to explore through OpenLearn, the OU's home of free learning.

In 2025, this revolutionary learning platform received incredible support from OpenDoor readers like you. Thanks to the huge generosity of the OU family, this intuitive, accessible, interactive, wide-ranging online platform will now be open to even more people around the world.



By supporting OpenLearn, you are not only keeping learning accessible, you are expanding what is possible. Your donation will contribute to creating new, cutting-edge course content designed to attract and inspire the next generation of learners in the UK and around the world.

Your support is helping individuals access vital online learning, discover a new passion, gain a certificate that boosts their career, prepare for formal university study or simply rediscover the joy of learning at a moment when it feels most needed. You are breaking down barriers for those who might struggle to access formal learning, widening participation in the truest spirit of The Open University.



Simon Ashby
Head of OpenLearn

OpenLearn has attracted more than 118 million visits since its launch in 2006, with learners engaging with courses, articles, videos and more.

Nearly half of OpenLearn users do not have a degree, over a third come from low-income households and 43% identify as having a disability. These numbers tell a powerful story: OpenLearn reaches people who might otherwise miss out on the transformative impact of education.

Now, with 2026 marking the 20th birthday of OpenLearn, the future of free learning is looking brighter than ever, all thanks to the OU family.



Next steps

If you're looking to return to study, try something new, or simply explore the options available to OpenLearn users worldwide, go to www.openlearn.com

Read remarkable learner stories at www.bit.ly/olstories

To support OpenLearn, please visit www.bit.ly/openlearndonate

More than

1 in 10

OpenLearn users click through to the OU website after completing a course

Many OpenLearn courses are 'Badged', meaning they can be used as tangible evidence of Continuing Professional Development.

Trending courses include:

- **Introduction to bookkeeping and accounting**
- **Understanding autism**
- **The science of nutrition and healthy eating**