

Society Matters



The Open University

The Newspaper for all Social Sciences Students and Staff at the Open University

What are we going to look like at 50?



In March this year, Society Matters visited Open University Chancellor, Lord Puttnam, to ask him what the next ten years held for the Open University. The challenges, he told us, are as great, if not greater, than they were in 1969 when the University began. And the economic downturn is the perfect place to start. Yvonne Cook reports

What impact do you think the OU has had on the education scene as a whole over 40 years?

A massive one. Its initial impact was very specifically the professionalization of teaching, which has led to a whole lot of changes in teaching practice and in the way teachers regard themselves. Beyond that, it extended the notion of higher education to large swathes of people to whom it had been a closed shop. It allowed people like me who had missed the opportunity of higher education – normally through economic circumstances – to have a rethink, either because they wanted to improve their job prospects, or simply because they wanted to become more knowledgeable about a subject that had always really interested them – both equally valid reasons in my view.

When I was a grammar school boy in the 1950s, something like six pupils a year, out of a school of about 600, would get state scholarships to university, and the rest of us went out in to 'the workplace'. It was as though there was this gulf between us and the self-selected golden class, who would go on to greater things and run the lives of the rest of us. The interesting thing was that the world had already ceased to be like that before the OU started. What the OU did was to make real, in a vivid way, what had already happened. In the late 1950s I went to night school. If it had been 15 years later, I would probably have done an OU course.

How would you like to see the OU develop in the next 10 years?

If you look at the ideals that drove the OU in the first 10 years of its life, they related to a country in which less than 10 per cent of people went to university. When you get to a point where 40 per cent and rising are going to university, a lot of those ideals need to be re-thought. One of the biggest problems, I think, is that the OU hasn't necessarily gone on that journey.

I sometimes feel – and this is a purely personal view – that the OU evaluates itself in the context of an educational world where the one-to-one tutorial is the norm. And of course this is just not true. The bulk of university teaching has changed out of all recognition, but there is still this sense within the OU that the OU is an alternative to a tutorial model which, for the most part, no longer exists.

Another thing – I'm deputy chairman of Channel Four, and I know that in television, if you allow your commissioning editors to remain doing the same job too long, you develop a kind of closed loop system where the way you do it is the way you do it is the way you do it ... Therefore in television what you try to create is a form of permanent revolution – quite Maoist in a way – where every three or four years you need to churn your editors, not all at once, but in such a way that you're constantly having new people who are familiar with other new people who bring their own new people in.

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HULTON'S NATIONAL WEEKLY

A PLAN FOR BRITAIN

JANUARY 4, 1941

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3^D

Lord Puttnam believes that 2009 is a definitive moment in Britain's history, just like 1941. We need a new plan for Britain.

1969 REMEMBERED | Neil Armstrong becomes the first man to land on the moon | First US troop withdrawals from Vietnam | Richard Nixon becomes President of the USA | Edward Kennedy's car crashes at Chappaquiddick | In Los Angeles the Charles Manson murders take place | First automatic cash machine (ATM) is opened in the USA | The microprocessor is invented | ARPANET, the predecessor of the internet, is invented | The Palestinian Liberation Front is formed | Britain deploys troops in Northern Ireland | The death penalty is abolished in the UK | First Concorde test flight takes place in France | The Boeing 747 jumbo jet makes its first flight | The Beatles make their last public appearance on the roof of Apple Records | Average UK House Price £4,640

Editorial

Welcome to the twelfth edition of *Society Matters*. Since 1998 our newspaper has dealt with a range of issues: conflict, peace, welfare, poverty, health and disease, climate change, global warming, multiculturalism, the war on terror, insecurity, identity and self image, media and political spin, overseas aid, arms sales, tsunamis, famines, religious bigotry, rights and responsibilities, family life, refugees, immigration, the history of ideas, political representation, penal policy, mental ill-health, child welfare, and the social care of the elderly.

This issue explores those priorities that first guided the University 40 years ago. Our theme is widening access to higher education. In July 2009, the prison population in England and Wales grew to a record high of nearly 84,000 - up 66% since 1995. It is therefore timely the University is about to embark on a significant initiative to broaden access to higher education for prisons. Our four-page centre section highlights some of our successes, and demonstrates how the University hopes to overcome some of the problems associated with prison education in the future. To celebrate the OU offender learning experience I have used OU offender learner testimony as footers at the bottom of each page. (I was running out of quotes after 11 issues!) I am delighted that Lord Putnam, Open University Chancellor, took time out from a busy year to talk to us about what the University might look like in 2019.

Society Matters 12 focuses on the new challenges for the Faculty and the University. The internationalization of our curriculum and marketing strategies will certainly be high on the agenda from 2010

onwards. On the curriculum itself, two new foundation degrees, one in counselling, the other in personal finance, are outlined, as well as innovative new Level 3 courses in crime and justice, and economics. New this year too is our co-produced course (with the Mathematics, Computing and Technology Faculty) on ethics and the environment, TD866 *Environmental Responsibility, Ethics, Policy and Action*.

Society Matters 12 also includes a message from Africa by Kofi Annan, the former Secretary General to the United Nations; a revealing article about medicine, health and poverty in the developing world; features on ageing in the UK and its implications for social policy; a sideways look at politician expenses; the importance of financial education in the current world-wide recession, and an update on the University's green credentials. The issue also includes analyses of the recent privatization of UK universities, the environment and happiness, UK poverty and inequality, and the importance of sustained UK media analysis for social scientists. There are also a wide range of student and Associate Lecturer contributions on autism, on how Margaret Thatcher saved the OU, on Scotland revisited, and, last but not least, an analysis of history's top ten fiscal stimuli.

We live in difficult times. In July 2009, the Institute of Fiscal Studies predicted key public services, including higher education, would face a 16.3% cut between 2011 and 2014 as the Labour and Conservative parties ring-fenced spending on schools, health, defence and overseas aid. Cuts clearly will impinge on the University as the country comes out of recession. On the eve of publication the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills announced a £2.5m cut in the Open University budget for next year.

All universities were affected by the revised budget allocation, but the Open University was hit hardest of all.

This is also the last issue for our designer, John Hunt. John has worked with me since the beginning, and his contribution to the high production values of *Society Matters* cannot be underestimated. I shall miss the homemade cakes in Two Mile Ash enormously. These kept us going during the long hot summer afternoons in his home as we laid out the pages prior to print production. *Society Matters* is very much a team effort, and that includes Julie Laws my copy editor, and the work of Gary and Kate, our cartoonists. I hope you enjoy this issue and if you want to write for the next please contact me.

Richard Skellington, July 2009

Bog standards

I'm not sure where you do your University studies, but according to a recent survey the loo is as good a place as any. The survey by the charity *Tearfund for World Toilet Day* (the mind boggles) suggests that more than 14 million people in the UK read newspapers, books and magazines on the toilet. The charity has a serious objective - to highlight the plight of the 2.5 billion people in the developing world who do not have a clean, safe place to go to the toilet. Over 900 million of these people do not have access to clean water. So, if you are on your throne reading *Society Matters*, just think how fortunate you are.



New university Green League table highlights need for environment management

The Open University slid down the Green University League table during 2008-9, falling to 107th position from 75th the previous year (see *Society Matters* No. 11 and peopleandplanet.org/green-league-2009)

The Open University slid down the Green University League table during 2008-9, falling to 107th position from 75th the previous year. University spokesman Mike Sackett said the OU's position in the table was not a fair reflection of its environmental performance. 'We are very different from other universities, and the scoring system does not take that into account. It is designed for traditional universities who have lots of students on campus.' The University gains no points for being a distance teaching institution.

The University was one of 31 universities to gain a third class degree. Its score fell from 27 in 2008 to 22 in 2009. Last year the University earned a lower second classification. This year, 11 universities out of 126 surveyed failed to gain a classification. Eighty-three universities secured either a first, upper second, or lower second class rating.

'Some sections of the assessment questionnaire are irrelevant to us', explained Mike. 'For example we can't score points for measuring and reducing carbon emissions associated with students'



daily commuting and travelling between campus and home at the start and end of term, because our students don't do that. This is inherently better than conventional universities, but gains us no points.'

The OU also lost marks on environmental management and ethical investment because it lacks formal institutional policies in these areas, despite its good practice, he added. The University is now looking at the adoption of an ethical investment policy and using an external environment management system to carry out an

environmental audit which should ensure it gains recognition for what it is doing.

The People & Planet Green League is the only league table showing the environmental performance of Britain's universities. Nottingham Trent University, LSE and Oxford Brookes University top this year's Green League, which has seen considerable improvement in environmental management and policy across much of the HE sector. Unfortunately, argue People & Planet, many universities are consistently failing to effectively manage their environmental impact. Some of the UK's leading universities, well respected for their research and teaching on sustainability and climate change, fail to effectively improve their own environmental performance.

People & Planet argue 'it is clear that the current voluntary measures are not enough. A carbon reduction strategy driven by the government for the whole Higher Education sector, using the most powerful tools available to drive the change needed across the board, is called for from 2010.

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The OU has allowed itself to solidify, partly as a result of a great deal of success, it has to be said. But as I see it, for any academic institution, that's a real danger in a very fast changing world. What I hope will happen - and it will happen because the university itself will realize the need for it - is a form of internal re-evaluation. Who are we? What more could we do? What are we doing well, what are we doing badly? I think this already happens at an intellectual level, but I am not sure it happens on a day to day visceral level.

Technologically, the OU has made a series of quite brilliant leaps from being TV-based, but I don't sense it has made that same metamorphosis emotionally. Some people would say that's nonsense. But as I see it, my job as Chancellor is to be a goad, to be the grit in the oyster, to keep saying why not? Why can't we? How could we? My whole emphasis on being 40 is to say 'what are we going to look like at 50?' The next 10 years could be amazing. So I want 40 to be a staging post to 50, not too long a moment of self-congratulation.

So do you think what happens in the next 10 years could be more complex and far-reaching than in the last 40?

It will be. And if any university in the country has the ball at its feet, it's the OU. But I'm not sure they entirely know where the goal is.

We are at the point right now where the nature of the challenges that face the nation are of a different order than they were at any other time since 1939, because of the vast number of unknowns. You could equate the threat of Nazism with the threat of climate change in that both offer massive challenges ... we know they're real and we know they're not going to go away. The nature of the challenges climate change represents is immense; as a result the nature of the global opportunities for teaching and learning institutions are similarly immense, as a result of which their responsibilities become immense.

We are unquestionably at a point in history where the aims and the objectives of the university are going to have to be closely connected

to the aims and objectives of society - again. It happened 40 years ago, with teachers, and now it's going to happen again, but in a far more complex form.

What does this mean in practice?

Two examples: we at the OU are going to have to play a bigger role in the education of people in prison. And we've got to do for the social services world what we did for the teaching profession. Not doing it on the margins, as we are now, but mainstreaming and optimizing it. We should say to government 'do you know how much more we could do? Don't you want every person in social services to aspire to having a Masters degree? We know how to do that for you. You want a programme like the Teaching Awards, where every year the very best work in social services gets an hour of network television. We can help you with that, but these are the resources we need to do it.' I think the relationship between the OU and government has become somewhat complacent. As a result we shouldn't be surprised if we are taken for granted.

Do you think the economic downturn is entirely bad news, or do you see any opportunities arising from it?

For me, the economic downturn is, in a sense, a socialist dream, because it's the realization of exactly what I and many other people have been saying all our lives, which is that the relationship between the marketplace and society is an imbalanced one, and an ugly one. This is a really interesting moment in history. Are we just going to put the ship back in the bottle the way it was, and rely on human greed and human ambition to drive society forward? Or are we going to strip it down and think again?

I am enormously influenced by an issue of the magazine *Picture Post* from January 1941, a month before I was born, which was entitled *A Plan for Britain*. It sets out exactly why Britain post-war could not be what Britain was pre-war. What was the point of ordinary people giving their lives, if all they were going to be offered was more of the same as had existed before the war? And of course that was a physical war; this is an economic and environmental war, but we are at exactly the same point now. So this is a fantastic moment in history - and this affords me the opportunity to display

my credentials as a real socialist, which has been an extremely difficult thing to be for the last 10 years.

How does this relate to the OU?

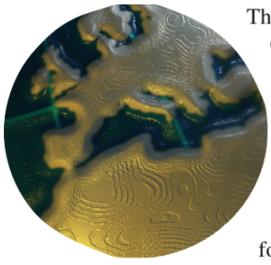
The OU is about a whole set of values, the underpinning value being education and the economic and cultural opportunity that comes with it. I think we are sitting on the cusp of the ability to realize the kind of socio-economic dream that we grasped at and dropped in the 1950s. There is no point in my party continually referring back to the Atlee government as being the greatest government there ever was, unless we are prepared to drill down and look at what those achievements were, and attempt to replicate the best of them. Well, we did look, but then decided that the only way we could do it was in partnership with the private sector. The problem is we never understood the private sector. I've spent most of my life trying to get money out of the private sector to pay for the skills of the same people they want to employ. They want the people, they want the skills, but they've never been prepared to adequately train them. It has been a 40-year battle.

With your background in films and media, is there something in the curriculum you think we should be teaching in the next 10 years that we aren't teaching now?

A chap who runs the biggest special effects company in the world was telling me they can't get the quality of trained staff they need. Their recruitment is principally in France and Germany because UK universities are not turning out people with the skills he needs. Why? Because we are still emphasizing a broad education, and they need very specific skills. I won't go too far down that road because there are areas where the nature of the OU makes it extremely difficult to address this issue - high-end stuff where you are hands-on with pieces of equipment which are not generally available. But I do think anyone with an OU degree should be brilliantly familiar with information gathering on the web. The idea you will graduate from the OU without being a world-class researcher yourself, should be nonsense. We should be challenging students to find their own links, and their own information. I'm not sure we're doing this enough.

Internationalizing the social science curriculum

Nicola Yeates, Director, International Strategy Project and Senior Lecturer in Social Policy, explores some of the reasons why one of the faculty's greatest challenges is so important for the future of the University



The OU's strategic priority of expanding global reach has assumed particular urgency. In the context of restructured government funding such expansion is expected to realize growth in income streams from educational provision outside the UK, and to reduce dependency on Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) funding. While these motivations may be considered entrepreneurial, there are other important reasons why curriculum internationalization is desirable.

One set of reasons concerns student knowledge, interest and demand. In the UK, widening participation strategies and changes to student financing mean that the student body represents a greater diversity of 'global experience'. Many students bring extensive knowledge and experience of living and working overseas to their studies. For others the growing interest in international/global affairs can be attributed to the 'glamour factor' or the perceived effects of a 'shrinking world' on employment, travel and living options. There is no doubt that many UK-based students are attracted by a higher international content in their studies.

Another set of reasons concerns intellectual agendas. The 'global turn' in social sciences has impacted on research and scholarship in significant ways, and the 'old' Anglo-centric parochialism is giving way to an internationalist dynamic. This is more than about scattering curricula with 'international' terminology and non-UK/English examples; it entails embracing the construction of theoretical models that are relevant to the 'developed' and 'developing' worlds alike. This interest is occurring at the same time as the tenets of methodological nationalism traditionally prevailing in the social sciences are being increasingly questioned, with the deconstruction of knowledge gravitating around bounded notions of state and society.

Overseas (non-UK) registrants comprise over 7% of students on courses in the Faculty of Social Sciences

These factors are working through to the curriculum, often through peer-driven review processes. In social policy, for example, internationalist and global courses and awards are becoming increasingly numerous and prominent, and are being offered instead of traditional British-focused courses.

The social policy subject benchmarking statement has been instrumental in codifying this trend, as well as adding impetus to it. It lists knowledge of the 'international and supra-national dimensions of Social Policy' and understanding of the application of theories and concepts to 'international contexts'. Postgraduate and taught doctoral programmes are being set up, linking curricula to professional development. These are successfully attracting students from a range of international policy making, practitioner and campaigning backgrounds. Such developments are not confined to Social Policy.

90% of non-EU students are based in Europe (principally Switzerland)

From this perspective, the question may be less one of why internationalize, and more one of why not internationalize the curriculum. Given that internationalization can enrich the curriculum – reflecting wider intellectual currents and making it more attractive to students whatever their national and social origin and wherever their country of residence and study – compelling reasons need to be advanced to make the case for not doing so.

Just under half of non-UK EU students are located in the South of Ireland. Germany, Greece, Belgium, the Netherlands, Italy, France and Spain comprise most of the remaining students

It is clear that the internationalization agenda expands the parameters of curriculum development. To consider further what this entails in terms of what it might mean for the Faculty, a series of discussions have taken place this year to consider what internationalization might mean for our curriculum – both its content and its delivery.

These discussions raised important questions. What are the possibilities, risks and points of tension in curriculum internationalization? What is an appropriate value base to frame curriculum internationalization? What is best practice in the sector? How can we as a Faculty combine our strengths with best practice in the sector to good effect?

These raise issues for diverse areas of OU teaching, ranging from the role of online provision, through open learning and international partnerships in expanding our global reach, to implications for curriculum planning and development and for teaching and learning practice. These discussions and conclusions informed the development of a Faculty strategy paper, presented and discussed at the June 2009 Faculty Committee meeting. Key elements of the paper are summarized as follows.

First, the strategy paper privileges ethical internationalization and the extension of the university's historic social justice mission through curriculum internationalization.

Extending this commitment to social justice is not 'merely' a question of ethics it bears on the OU 'brand' in the UK and overseas. Ethical internationalization makes good long-term business sense. It is not a luxury we can do without.

This does not mean de-linking internationalization from questions of economy, resources and markets. But it does mean steering towards activities that extend access to higher education and widen our market reach. It means working and collaborating with organizations and partners with similar values and concerns. Where overseas partners (especially those in 'developing' countries) are concerned, ethical internationalization privileges non-predatory, genuinely collaborative relationships that are supportive of capacity-building, access to education and social justice.

Second, the strategy paper emphasizes designing curricula that in content and delivery terms are attractive, accessible, intelligible and available to the widest possible range of students, whatever their national and social origins, identity and location. Curriculum internationalization thus addresses fundamental aspects of the educational process. It does not rely on prior knowledge of local origin, and all students should enjoy equal opportunities for advancement in an inclusive learning environment. This is why it is important to link widening participation and 'home internationalization' (the 'devolution' – four nations curriculum strategy) and 'overseas internationalization'.

Third, the Faculty would work towards an internationalised curriculum. This involves collaborative participation within the Faculty, with other Faculties, and other parts of the OU (e.g. Marketing, LTS, OUW, OUVS). No part of the curriculum is in principle excluded, though the Faculty aims to operationalize curriculum internationalization flexibly in a focused, resource-efficient and effective manner. For example, different strengths and capacities of subject areas in terms of what could be contributed would be recognized.

Realizing the aspiration of curriculum internationalization will require a clear programme of action over the short, medium and longer term. Weighing up internationalization priorities and actions, and those drawn from other key OU and Faculty strategies is a particular challenge given the current resource difficulties. A successful strategy would be one which takes an expansive view of curriculum internationalization, and which capitalizes on its synergies with various other OU and Faculty priorities.

Wealth leaves a big carbon footprint

New Green Life rankings, based on a selection of 350 databases and surveys about people's lives, from income to housing and attitudes to environmental issues, have shown there are two Britains – those locations that are 'enthusiastically green' and those that are 'environmentally unconcerned'.

One of the least deprived postcode areas in the UK, Redland in Bristol, topped the Green League. Eight out of ten residents were found to be 'enthusiastically green'. Towards the bottom of the table, the researchers located Basildon where only four out of ten residents were environmentally empathetic. Postcode areas in Essex and Liverpool featured prominently in the lowest ten locations. North End, Portsmouth, finished bottom.

Who are these green supporters? The research found them to be well educated and employed in the professions with high levels of household income. Postcode areas with low green support were populated by households living on benefits and characterized by unemployment and urban deprivation.

However, while attitudes polarized according to location status, the researchers found that wealthy areas of green support were also characterized by bigger carbon footprints. Wealth brought residents the opportunity to purchase sustainably produced organic produce for example, but they were also associated with a greater incidence of long-haul flights and luxury cars, often 4 x 4s with larger engines.

The environmentally unconcerned tended to be males who read tabloids and were football supporters. They were found to be less likely to recycle or use energy-saving light bulbs. However, being generally poorer, they tended to fly less, cycle to work, and use public transport far more. So while people on lower incomes generated less waste, the wealthy who claimed to be living green lifestyles were found to be more likely to contribute to global warming.

Source: CACI, December 2008



DD306 Living Political Ideas wins first prize

One of the Social Sciences' newest courses has won a prestigious award. The British Universities Film and Video Council gave first prize to DD306 *Living Political Ideas* in its 'Courseware and Curriculum' category at its recent 'Learning on Screen' awards ceremony. The third-level Politics and International Studies course was the University's first multimedia offering to be delivered entirely on DVD-ROM and the VLE.

The course promotes independent learning through an interactive and integrated learning journey for students. The aim throughout is to stimulate students to be open to competing ideas and interpretations, to see ideas alive in debates, and learn how to formulate a strong argument and put forward their own views on a question.

The course team are delighted the judges recognized DD306 as an innovative way of delivering a course of real depth. The judges found DD306 engaging and stimulating. It is a credit for the Faculty and the University's Learning and Teaching Solutions (LTS) partnership.

Co-chair Raia Prokownik commented, 'The judges' influential endorsement of the course reinforces the positive feedback we've had from students studying the course in its first presentation. They've reported they are really enjoying the course and actually prefer this method of delivery.'

The students study various topics, called Rooms on the six DVD-ROMs. In the first three weeks of each Room, the students follow the material on the DVD-ROM. In the fourth week they review the Room's work, with self-evaluation activities and an opportunity for participation in an on-line discussion forum.

DD306 does not teach abstract political philosophy, but shows how ideas exist, come alive, and inform and circulate in politics as well as theory. The course explores how ideas play out in



G20 Meltdown, City of London on the eve of the London G20 Summit. Outside the Bank of England

practice in the social and political world about us, both now and in the past. Video is a good medium for exploring the way people's lives are lived, and the DVD-ROM format makes it easier to look at the relationship between the two – ideas in theory and ideas in practice.

The course encourages students to think for themselves. In Room 5 the question is asked whether violence is a central aspect of modern ideas about the nature of politics. Students work with case studies and theory texts to develop a critical understanding of how modern political ideas are entangled with understandings of violence. The DVD-ROM format allowed the course team to insert illustrative prompts to help students' reading, and to show students how to work between the theory texts and the case study materials.

The award is especially gratifying for key members of its 20 strong course team. Special thanks are due to Jef Huysmans (Co-Chair of the production course team), Mike Dawson (Course Manager), and to Professor Andy Dobson, whose creative ideas played an important role earlier in the production of the course. Jo Mack, another member of the course team and an executive producer in charge of audio and video production at the Open University, with a background in broadcast television, was involved from the start to the finish.

For more information on DD306: www.open.ac.uk/courses/tasters/dd306/

Forty years on: how Mrs Thatcher saved the OU

Thanks to the Freedom of Information Act, Humanities student Paul Rowlinson has been digging into the cabinet papers of thirty years ago, and discovers that while Mrs Thatcher cut the kiddies milk she saved the Open University



I can remember it quite vividly, even though it was some years ago. At the tender and naïve age of twelve, I became involved in what was probably my very first political discussion, while standing in the queue for school dinner, with 'the dinner lady'.

We were discussing The Iron Lady, as Margaret Thatcher would later be known. It wasn't just the two of us involved in this debate. My friends were getting quite excited too, and with good reason – the General Election

was imminent and it looked like history was about to be made. It was becoming increasingly likely that Britain would elect its first woman Prime Minister.

For whatever reason, we youngsters thought that this was a good thing, though I can't remember exactly why. Perhaps we thought Maggie must be nice because she was a lady; softer, feminine and altogether warmer than her old opponent Jim Callaghan, who seemed rather ratty, careworn and cold. Perhaps there was a kind of kid's logic in wanting females to be in authority. It is quite normal as a child to prefer the authority of your mother to that of your father. Or was it the discipline of a female teacher over a male teacher that appealed most: more sympathetic, less harsh, more understanding, probably less physical and altogether far more sensitive?

Thatcher made any male leader of the time (and quite probably ever since) appear lacking in the wherewithal that would earn them the status of Alpha Male. They were unable to compete with Margaret's apparent excess of testosterone and she carried on regardless of what people thought, just as she always had done.

In her book *The Path of Power*, 1995, Thatcher wrote: 'I was hailed in a modest way as the saviour of the Open University. In Opposition both Iain Macleod and Edward Boyle, who thought that there were educational priorities more deserving of Government help, had committed themselves in public against it. And although its abolition was not in the manifesto, many people expected it to perish. But I was genuinely attracted to the concept of a 'University of the Airwaves', as it was often called, because I thought that it was an inexpensive way of giving wider access to higher education, because I thought that trainee teachers in particular would benefit from it, because I was alert to the opportunities offered by technology to bring the best teaching to schoolchildren and students, and above all because it gave people a second chance in life. In any case, the university was due to take its first students that autumn, and cancellation would have been both expensive and a blow to many hopes. On condition that I agreed to reduce the immediate intake of students and find other savings, my Cabinet colleagues allowed the Open University to go ahead.'

Maggie was never one for caring what people thought of her. In 1971 she earned the title of 'Thatcher, Thatcher, Milk Snatcher' while Secretary of State for Education and Science, for taking milk away from schoolchildren.

This really does seem a remarkably cruel thing to do. But since the Freedom of Information Act 2000 has allowed us to see the minutes of Cabinet meetings when 30 years have passed, there is evidence that, though she was the Minister who had to drop this bombshell, she was in fact against it, but outvoted by the rest of the Cabinet. Apparently, they demanded that she implement a cut. Of course, they wouldn't be the ones to deliver the bad news. Margaret had to make a cut in education somewhere. It was decision time.

She decided the milk had to go.

It appears that Cabinet had to make a quite different decision in 1970, a year earlier; one that all of us OU students ought to be aware of, but most likely are not. They had to decide whether to abolish the Open University. Though most ministers were in favour of axing it, Maggie argued for it. So Margaret Thatcher saved the OU. Yes, that's right. Mrs T saved the OU!

The Conservative government wanted to cut the OU from the budget, or make severe cost-cutting measures at the very least. There was undoubtedly a more political motivation, as it is generally thought of as a Labour invention, based as it was on an idea by the sociologist and anthropologist Michael Young and implemented by Harold Wilson's government. Regardless of its history, Thatcher saw it, perhaps rather like school milk, as being a relatively low cost way of achieving the desired results.

Though she saved the OU, I'm not convinced that Margaret Thatcher fully understood all its basic principles of operation. While Prime Minister, she visited the campus in Milton Keynes and after being shown around a few of the buildings, asked, 'And where are the students?'

I'm sure we can forgive her small social faux-pas compared to her legacy to all of us. While we have the late Lord Young of Dartington to thank for dreaming up the OU in the first place, we probably wouldn't be here celebrating the fact if it weren't for dear old Maggie!

So when you pick up your degree, or whatever it is you're working towards, and feeling justly proud of yourself, and eternally grateful that there is this wonderful institution called the OU, don't forget to whisper a few words of thanks to Mrs Thatcher. But not too loudly, in case a malnourished ex-schoolchild of the 1970s is listening.

See: The National Archives, Catalogue Reference: CAB/129/151. 29 July 1970 and the web page www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?storyCode=156304§ioncode=26

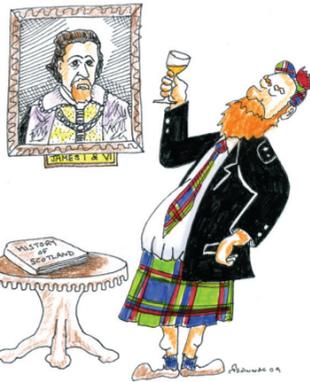
Hoots man!

Graeme Arnott, who has just enrolled for D853 Identity in Question? takes a sideways look at our Scottish pages in issue 11

Ah've tackin sime time aff fae waving ma saltire and dyeing ma hair ginger, tae sae ah'm new tae this Social Sciences department, but man yir teachin techniques are braw: 'specially yon article on conspiracies. We dae like conspiracies up here cos it fuels oor sens a inferiority.

Noo that weer next tae independence ah thought tae maself that a better get wan ae they identity things that aw the modern people are taikin aboot (even tho they dinae sem tae hiv wan, or hae mair than they ken whit tae dae wi) so I've enrolled oan D853. Ahm hopin' that wance ah get ma identity fixed up then ah'll be in a position tae get sum histry back, cos it the minut it seems tae hiv disappeared.

Ye see wance upon a time Jamie VI was the high heid yin up here, but the big noises doon sooth wir gie keen oan him anaw, so they wur quite willin' tae ourlook his Scottish identity because they liked the that he also had a proddy identity. Aw this meant that he became Jamie I but it didnae really mean that he stoapped bein' James VI. Funnily enough his wee boy later became Jamie VII and II.



Noo he got kicked oot by King Bully and a gang o' Rangers supporters. Mind you, some folk wirnae chuffed at aw. Wan o these wiz Bonnie Dundee, an' he led army of Jacobites at the Battle of Killecrankie in 1689. Ah had ae thoct that Killecrankie wiz in Perthshire no Ireland, so maybe ah'll hiv tae dae a geography course tae. There wiz that stramash at Glencoe tae, and there wiz that much blood spilt that there still trying tae clean it up, when some hielan folk wirnae that impressed wi the adjective 'Glorious' (or was it a sign?).

See me, ah think it wiz deliberate. I think yon article wiz meant tae form an ironic diptych wi aw that spiel aboot independence. An' ah think it wiz meant tae get me started oan thinking aboot identity. So top marks for inventive teachin' techniques. Yie never ken how these things work, maybe if we hadnae lost oor history we mite no be quite so keen oan inventing oor national identity. So many thanks then for the immediate introduction into the idea of how national identity can be understood as construction in reaction to perceived cultural imperialism.

Ah'm awa ra noo.

Who cares about the white working class?

Social class, according to Runnymede Trust research published in January 2009, is the leading factor in white working-class discrimination. The white working class was found to be discriminated against because of a range of factors – accent, style, food, clothes, postcode and even name. The research showed that white working-class disadvantage is largely class-rooted, and not based on ethnic prejudices.

The Trust warned against those who believe that widening class divisions will boost the British National Party and the agendas of the far right. These alarmist projections were little more than veiled attempts to curb 'race' equality.

The Trust concluded that Britain remains blighted by class divisions and inequality. Class was key to how people perceive their relative status in Britain today, and with the recession biting, class will increase in importance on social and political agendas. Socially, Britain remains dominated by those long-lasting class divisions that have shaped us in the last 40 years.

Rob Berkeley, The Trust's Director, commented, 'There is an urgent need to ensure that a re-emergence of class on to the political agenda will not feed divisions, but promote equality for everyone.'

Women managers have 187-year wait

According to Chartered Management Institute research, women managers will have to wait a staggering 187 years before they will be able to achieve equal pay with men if current rates of progress for closing the earnings gap are a guide. In the 12 months to March 2008, the average UK woman manager earned £32,614 while her male counterparts earned £46,269. The survey of 40,000 managers across all grades found that at the current rate of pay increases (women managers earned 0.2% more than male managers in the year to March 2008) it would take women managers until 2195 to catch up. The prospects are worse for those aspiring women managers in the IT industry and even worse in Scotland, where the Institute estimated it would be 2366 before parity was achieved. The lowest paid managers anywhere were women in Wales. The lowest disparity was in pharmaceuticals and the biggest in insurance where male managers earned 45.2% more than women.





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A wide range of academics from the Social Sciences Faculty contribute to the Society open2.net blog on issues of contemporary relevance and importance plus they show their lighter side too.

Please login to:
www.open2.net/blogs/society/index.php

Did you know?

- 15 million people in the UK are currently single; half are looking for a long-term relationship
- 12 million single people in the UK have not had a relationship for more than 18 months
- 4.7 million people in the UK visited a dating website in 2008
- Glasgow has the greatest deficit of males compared with females
- Reading has the greatest deficit of females compared to males
- 88% of women are not bothered by baldness in men



Financial education is vital in an uncertain world

Expanding our financial courses and awards is even more important during an economic crisis. Ian Fribbance, the Faculty's Associate Dean of Teaching and Learning Enhancement, outlines the rationale behind our new curriculum

On the face of it, the biggest financial crisis since the 1930s might not seem like the ideal moment for the OU to be further developing its curriculum in the area of financial services and personal finance.

Who would want to write the speeches that will accompany the launch of the new Foundation Degree (FD) in financial services – a qualification aimed at people either already working in the sector, or aiming to get a job in it – at a time when banks are shedding thousands of staff and other financial services firms are scaling back on recruitment or making redundancies of their own? It might seem to be a hard pitch to make to financial services employers that now is the time to invest in their staff and sponsor them to undertake the FD.

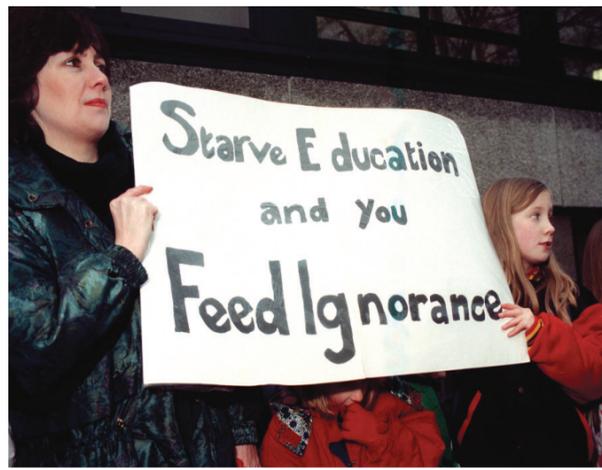
Similarly, production of the new level 2 course, DB234 *Personal Investment in an Uncertain World* – due to present for the first time in May 2010 – is highly challenging when undertaken against a backdrop of ever-changing financial developments. With the economy in crisis, it might look as if the OU is following a high-risk strategy in investing resources in these new initiatives.

As ever, things are more complex than might appear and 2009 is actually a crucial moment for the University and its partners in the development and delivery of the new financial curriculum and the FD in particular. Just as the decision to introduce DB123 *You and Your Money: personal finance in context* from November 2006 proved to be highly prescient, so these new developments should produce major benefits in the long term.

DB123 has been a major success in its own right, attracting 6,000 students in two and a half years – a recruitment triumph by any standards – with a high retention rate and positive feedback from students and tutors. It also opened up dialogue with a range of external partners. For example, the course secured endorsement and sponsorship from the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants – whose money has been used to fund widening participation activities for *You and Your Money* across the UK regions and nations – and led to work with bodies as diverse as Age Concern and the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE).

You and Your Money was also an academic achievement in that it clearly related personal finance issues to their changing economic and social context, perhaps for the first time. This was highly significant. Some of the issues raised explicitly by the course, such as the high and rising levels of personal debt in the UK, the decade-long enormous rise in property prices, the liberalization of the financial services industry and the new financial products that this created, have all proven to be key elements in the current crisis. The course also staked out a particular OU 'take' on personal finance issues that stressed the importance of looking at the wider economic and social picture.

In the same way that *You and Your Money* came to help define the emerging subject area, similar arguments apply now about the development of the level 2 course and the Foundation Degree. *Personal Investment in an Uncertain World* – the follow-on course



Parents and teachers lobby Oxford Council meeting against cuts in education expenditure

from *You and Your Money* – looks at the many fascinating and difficult choices facing both investors and financial advisers in the rapidly changing economic world. It develops key themes, such as the role of ethics, the ever-evolving approach to regulation and financial innovation, and structural economic change, that inform and underpin many decisions about investment. There seems little doubt that the course will appeal to many of those students who have enjoyed *You and Your Money* and many other students too.

The case for the FD is also strong. The current depression – however severe and protracted it may prove to be – seems unlikely to radically alter certain structural economic changes. By 2006, the UK financial services industry was employing over 1.2m people, almost 5% of the total UK workforce, and financial services was contributing almost 11% of UK GDP. Thus the financial sector is much bigger than others where there are qualifications like FDs that have been running and recognized for many years.

In an economy now clearly specialized in the provision of services, knowledge-intensive industries like finance are going to remain important across the UK, and financial services is an industry assisting regeneration in a number of specific regions and localities. The employment and GDP numbers may shrink for now, but financial services will continue to be important to the UK economy in the future. Crucially it will be an industry in need of an increasingly educated workforce to respond to new challenges, such as those posed by the current economic conditions.

Some financial services restructuring also offers positive new opportunities for an increased role for education. For example, as some firms merge, and different employee groups with disparate experiences and training are brought together, industry-specific vocational education offers many new openings, such as the possibility of common educational development to help bring those

disparate groups together. Although training and education budgets are often reduced in downturns, there is evidence that it is the firms that continue to invest in training that succeed in the future. So many financial services firms – for whom experienced and knowledgeable employees are a key asset – are likely to develop (or at least continue) their educational and training programmes.

One of the major causes of the current problems has been widely argued to be inadequate or inappropriate regulation. Part of the mix of that inadequate regulation has been an industry that has grown far ahead of its educational standards, requirements and provision. In the face of the crisis, it is inevitable that regulation policy and practice will change rapidly – at a minimum, the Financial Services Authority will change significantly, if indeed it survives in its current form in the long term. For example, the FSA's Retail Distribution Review published in November 2008 signalled that new minimum entry qualifications for financial advisers would be established. These minimum qualifications are intended to be at national qualification level 4 (or level 1 of a FD) and would be a requirement from the end of 2012, along with compulsory ongoing continuing professional development. The FD delivers skills and knowledge at levels 4 and 5 in the national framework (or levels 6–8 in Scotland) and incorporates credit for professional qualifications. Within this changing context for regulation and professional education it is increasingly important for financial services employees to understand many of the issues covered in the FD, including the changing economic social and policy context, the changing nature and type of regulation, and the changing environment for financial planning and investment decision making. In general, the level of education required to work in the financial services industry can only increase in the future.

The FD is also continuing the work started with *You and Your Money* in developing and delivering important new external work and partnerships for the Faculty and the University. It is enabling us to work closely with the National Skills Academy and FDF (formerly Foundation Degree Forward) and we are planning to pioneer collaborative delivery of the FD across a number of Further Education Colleges.

Who could have failed to notice the answers by the Chairmen and Chief Executives of RBS and HBOS when appearing before the House of Commons Select Committee in February 2008 that none of them had banking qualifications and – remarkably – that they hadn't appreciated that their munificent lending models would be subjected to stress during an economic downturn that apparently they could not foresee either?

Perhaps Sir Fred Goodwin should take advantage of his early retirement to become a student on the OU's Foundation Degree – courses like *Personal Investment in an Uncertain World* would certainly teach him that asset price bubbles, and over-generous lending practices and bank runs are nothing remotely new (though clearly he would have to pay his own fees).

Gap between rich and poor widest since 1960s

In the three years after the 2005 general election the incomes of the poorest fell and those of the rich rose. The gap between rich and poor is now the widest since modern records began in the early 1960s. Income inequality at the end of Labour's eleventh year in power was higher than at any time during Margaret Thatcher's premiership.

Deprivation and inequality in the UK rose for a third successive year in 2007–08 according to data from the Department for Work and Pensions. The numbers of children and pensioners living in poverty are still increasing. Almost 17,000 more children in England are on free school meals in 2009 compared with 2008 according to government data.

Since 2005, the poorest 10% of households have seen weekly incomes fall by £9 a week to £147 once inflation is accounted for, while those in the richest 10% of homes have enjoyed a £45 a week increase to £1,033.

Even before the onset of the UK recession, official figures showed that only the better-off families were spared from a squeeze on living standards.

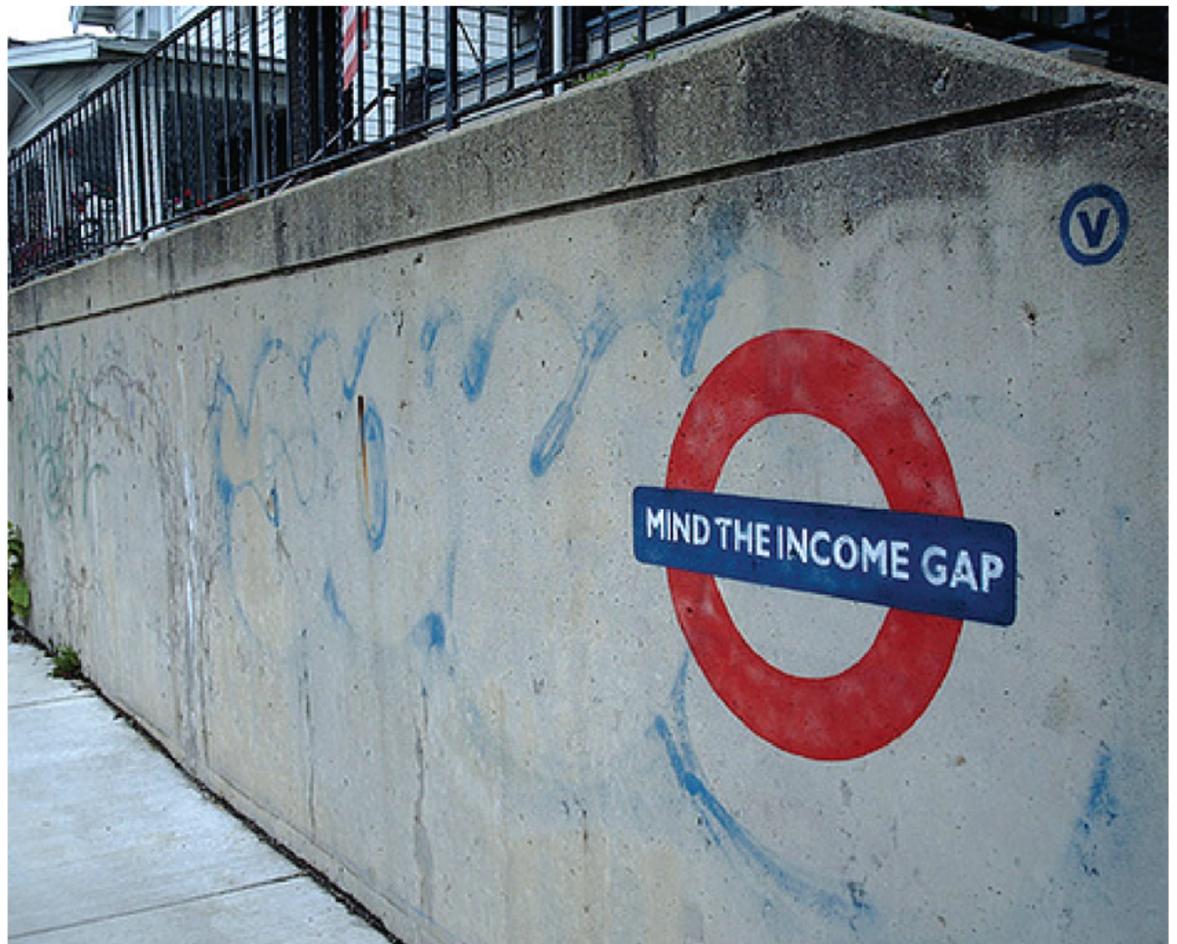
The data also show that the second poorest 10% of households have had a fall in income since 2005. Overall, the poorest 20% saw real income fall by 2.6% in the three years to 2007–08, while those in the top fifth of the income distribution enjoyed a rise of 3.3%.

Rising inflation eroded the real value of state benefits and tax credits. Meanwhile, the number of working adults living below the official breadline rose by 300,000 to 11 million, with childless adults the worst affected. With financial help from the state concentrated on pensioners and the young, one in seven working-age adults without dependent children are now living in poverty – the highest ever level.

Labour's 2010 goal of halving child poverty from the 3.4 million total at the turn of the millennium is now in ruins. Child poverty has been reduced by 16%, but the government would need to spend £4.2bn a year to hit its 2010 target. It allocated only £200m in the April 2009 budget.

Britain's economy contracted by a record 5.6% over the past year as output fell for a fifth straight quarter, the government revealed in June, thus dashing hopes that the steepest decline in growth since the 1930s might be nearing an end. The Office for National Statistics said gross domestic product fell by 0.8% in the three months to June, more than twice the predicted decline.

The figures are the worst since the 1930s, excluding the Second World War and its immediate aftermath.



How come so few experts failed to spot the credit crunch coming?

We would have been better off asking chimpanzees about the credit crunch it seems rather than the experts. Richard Skellington finds comfort in an old book

I am sure you have read about the vast number of experts who failed to predict, if not the scale of the financial crisis, at least the prospect of it. How was it that so few 'experts', including some eminent academics, did not see it coming, even as late as last year?

The answer may surprise you. According to the book *Expert Political Judgment: How Good Is It? How Can We Know?*, 'experts', when tested, were found to be less accurate in their forecasts than a control group of chimpanzees. In this book, Tetlock explores what constitutes good judgment in predicting future events, and looks at why experts are often wrong in their forecasts.

Tetlock's thesis was based on two decades of research into 284 people who made their living 'commenting or offering advice on political and economic trends'. He asked them to predict what would happen in the world in answer to a specific question. Would oil prices rise or fall? Would there be a boom and bust? Would we go to war? And so on.

Tetlock found that the intelligence failures surrounding the invasion of Iraq dramatically illustrated the necessity of developing standards for evaluating expert opinion. When he concluded, in 2003, Tetlock's experts had made 83,361 forecasts and he correlated the outcomes with the facts. He concluded that the experts' predictions were less accurate than would have been the case had he asked a



City gent reads the London Paper with headline Black Friday. City of London

randomly controlled group of chimps. He discovered that experts were often no more accurate than 'reasonably informed laymen'. He also found that the *more* certain the expert the less likely that expert was proved right.

He concluded, 'In this age of academic hyper-specialization, there is no reason for supposing that contributors to top journals – distinguished political scientists, area study specialists, economists and so on – are any better than attentive readers of the *New York Times* in "reading" emerging situations.' I find that thought deeply comforting, dear reader, don't you?

It is the somewhat gratifying lesson of Tetlock's thesis that people who make prediction their business – people who appear as experts on television, who are quoted in newspaper articles, advise governments and businesses, and participate in punditry roundtables – are no better than the rest of us. The question that screams out from this enlightening little book is why the world persists in believing that 'experts' exist at all.

Philip E. Tetlock, *Expert Political Judgment: How Good Is It? How Can We Know?* Princeton University Press, 2006.

The global downturn 2009

- IMF forecast for global growth – 0.5%
- ILO forecast for worldwide unemployment – 40 million increase
- UK forecast for repossessions – 120,000
- US forecast for repossessions – 3.2 million
- Number of European failed companies – 200,000
- Number of global bank collapses 2008 – 14

Recessions are bad for your health

The recession will have deleterious impacts on the nation's health as the market share and profitability of fast-food chains such as Domino's, Subway, McDonalds, Cadbury's and KFC rise in response to people placing cost effectiveness above all other considerations when it comes to eating habits. Even the supermarkets are reporting increases in 'value' and own brand products as other markets decrease. Organic producers and retailers are particularly vulnerable as consumption patterns adapt to leaner times.

According to the *Wall Street Journal*, the only US sectors to fare well during the Great Depression were 'purveyors of cheap vices': fats and oils, tobacco, sugar and confectionery. Morbidity and mortality rates are sure to increase during this economic downturn, as more expensive pursuits, such as gym membership, decline as the recession bites deeper into middle-class habits.

Financial crisis could claim 50 million jobs by the end of 2009 as economy grinds to a halt

The International Labour Organization (ILO) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) had dire warnings of increased risk of social unrest for the British and world economies in two reports published in January 2009. The ILO predicted that the world unemployment level could grow from 179 million in 2007 to 230 million in the worst possible scenario by the end of 2009. In Africa and South Asia, the ILO predicted that a further 200 million workers could be pushed into extreme poverty. Even East Asia, which has the lowest world regional unemployment rate, could see its jobless total rise from 3.5 to 5.5%.

At the same time as the ILO report was published, the IMF predicted that world economic growth would fall to 0.5% by the end of 2009. In the UK, now deep in recession, the economy will shrink by a further 2.8%, the greatest fall of all the developed nations. In the same month, the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, reported that developed economies would be hit hardest.

Unemployment in the UK reached its highest level for 12 years in June 2009, at over 2.2 million, and is expected to rise to 3 million by 2010.

Chief UK scientist predicts 'perfect storm' by 2030

Global upheavals, including food shortages, insufficient energy sources, scarce water supplies and increasing conflict over diminishing resources, will occur before 2030, according to the new government Chief Scientist, Professor John Beddington

A 'perfect storm' will result in mass migration as people flee worst-affected regions, public unrest, and significant rises in cross border conflicts, especially in the developing world.

Beddington warned environmentalists and politicians attending the Sustainable Development UK Conference in late March 2009 that growing population and improved health rates will trigger an increase in the demand for food, water and energy, at a time when other factors, including climate change, were having an impact on access and distribution.

By 2030 the world's population is expected to rise from around 6.8 billion today to 9 billion. People will move in massive numbers in search of food and water, crossing national boundaries and

moving between countries and nations. The UN expects world food consumption to increase from 1.5bn tonnes in 1980 to over 3.5bn tonnes by 2030. Energy usage in 1980 was equivalent to 7.223 tonnes of oil and is expected to reach 17,014 tonnes by 2030.

In 2009 global food supplies are low – at 14% of annual consumption. 'Our food reserves are at a 50 year low' Beddington explained. 'By 2030 we need to be producing 50 per cent more food. At the same time we will need 50 per cent more energy and 30 per cent more fresh water'. Beddington, who was formerly Professor of Applied Population Biology at Imperial College, London, is an expert on the sustainable use of renewable resources.

Tax havens deprive developing nations of £90bn a year

The role tax havens play in depriving countries of tax income has been highlighted by evidence from Oxfam. At least £6.2tn of the wealth of developing countries is held offshore by individuals, depriving them of annual tax receipts of between £64bn and £124bn each year.

Oxfam's research, published in March 2009, did not account for money held offshore by private companies, which adds further to the ability of developing countries to improve services in health and education, and to offset the impact on poor people of climate change. The scale of loss is estimated to exceed the \$103bn developing countries receive annually in overseas aid. In the UK the scale of tax avoidance is 15 times more than the total amount of benefit fraud.

Oxfam calculate that £16bn a year would be sufficient to give every child in developing countries a school place. Kirsty Hughes, Head of Policy and Advocacy at Oxfam commented, 'The financial

crisis shows our leaders can no longer afford to stand by while tax havens take billions of pounds from the pockets of tax payers in rich and poor countries alike.'

Oxfam is campaigning for new rules to allow countries to identify individuals and organizations who illegally avoid tax and enable them to recover lost income vital for their future.

At the G20 summit in London in March a crackdown on tax havens was announced by G20 leaders. The crackdown followed the publication by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development of a list of countries who failed to comply with OECD guidelines, most notably Switzerland, Singapore, Chile, Belgium, Luxemburg, Austria and those who have failed to commit to the OPECD standard, Costa Rica, Malaysia, the Philippines and Uruguay.



What can you buy with the cost of the first bank bailout: £617bn?

The British government has intervened several times in the financial system since Northern Rock collapsed in late 2007. Conservative costs of the bank bailouts have been put at £617bn. Of course, you could almost wipe off the National Debt with £617bn, but you could also purchase:

66 London Olympics, 423 years operational spending in Iraq, 24,680 new schools, 75 years of the current government expenditure on education, 237 aircraft carriers, or nearly 100% of the UK annual budget of £618bn

This bank bailout figure of £617bn is 75 times the amount pledged by the UK government to combat climate change.

Coming out of the recession: how crash courses can bridge the financial skills gap

Alan Shipman, Lecturer in Economics, explores the roots of the current banking crisis and examines some solutions, including improved financial education

In 2008 we joked about the City of London falling into a black hole, 'space: the final financier'. We toyed with the idea that the banks would turn back into the coffee shops they started out from. However, by the summer of 2009, a global rescue plan reminded us that the banks, however badly run, are 'too big to fail'.

Governments cannot afford to let large banks go out of business, because the collapse of one could drag down many others with it. Banks keep only a small proportion of their depositors' money as ready cash. The rest of it is lent out, often for long periods, to businesses to buy materials and capital equipment, to households to buy homes, or to governments to finance long-term infrastructures that will last for several generations and can't all be financed by one generation's tax.

Because banks lend for the medium and long term, while still giving most savers instant access to much of their cash, any bank can be caught out by a 'run', when lots of customers choose to withdraw their money on one day. That is why the government had to lend over £30bn to Northern Rock in 2007, and nationalize it in 2008.

Banks are made financially vulnerable by a feature that is economically vital. By converting short-term savings into longer-term investment, they play a key part in generating incomes, employment and production growth. Many existing businesses could not make profits, and many new ones could not launch, if they weren't able to borrow to invest in premises and equipment. In addition, the housing market grinds to a halt when banks can't extend or refinance mortgages, as millions in the UK and Ireland are now finding to their cost.

But how did banks get into this mess? Ironically, the 'toxic debt' that has knocked a hole in their finances resulted from a change in strategy that was supposed to make their business much safer. Banks sought to get round the mismatch between their short-term deposits and long-term loans by selling on the loans to other investors. This took the risk off their balance sheets and raised new capital with which they could offer more loans.

Securitization has a long history, and was seen by many – including the regulators – as a logical step for the 'High Street' banks. It enabled banks such as Northern Rock to grow rapidly, by raising new capital from the securitization of loans rather than the traditional way of taking deposits or tapping shareholders. This brought competition into a banking market that (said official enquiries) was making excessive profits and operating a complex monopoly in business banking. It gave a clear reason for High Street commercial banks to deepen links with the investment banks that channelled funds to big businesses and governments. The USA ended its previous legal separation of the two activities, and Europe encouraged the expansion into 'universal banking' that had begun with the Big Bang deregulations in the early 1980s.

According to inquests into the subsequent meltdown, this new source of funding enabled banks to grow too fast, not paying sufficient attention to the quality of their borrowers and the risks of lending to them. In fact, banks were given strong incentives to enter the risky 'sub-prime' market, extending ever bigger loans to ever poorer customers.



To attract and retain depositors in the more competitive market, they needed to offer good interest rates. However, the returns on traditionally safe loans (to governments and 'blue chip' corporations) were very low. Subdued inflation rates, and plentiful capital put into global markets by the fast-growing, high-saving Asian economies (especially China), were a further reason why traditional safe clients could borrow very cheaply, and banks had to look to riskier clients to get a higher return on their loans.

Sub-prime mortgages were especially attractive because they seemed to generate high returns without any increase in risk. Mortgages were secured against houses whose prices had been rising steadily for years – with good arguments as to why. In Britain and America, planning restrictions and increasing numbers of households would keep demand rising ahead of supply.

The banks' ability to resell their loans may have made them less careful in their credit checks on borrowers. Why worry about a loan going bad next year if it will be off your books next week? However, it seems that the banks were 'reselling' their securitized loans only to other banks, while often buying similar securitizations from them. Some banks, knowing they were holding risky debt, had bought insurance for it (through the now notorious 'credit default swaps'). Others were falsely reassured because credit rating agencies, licensed by the regulators, had rated the securitized debt 'investment grade'.

Securitized debt and other 'derivatives', designed to make the world safer for banks and businesses, had been speculatively traded on a huge scale 'off balance sheet' and out of regulators' sight. This caused an international bubble in share prices as well as house

prices, which greatly overstated the wealth available as security for banks' expanded loans.

When investors began to realize this, they ceased to trust securitized debt. This meant that banks which had been raising funds through securitization suddenly ran out of money. Northern Rock was the first to go, but most UK banks and many building societies were trapped in the same way because they were unable to make new loans: interest rates rose and house prices started to fall, forcing more borrowers to default, and turning prime loans into sub-prime.

The world was suddenly confronted with the spectre of 'de-leveraging', in which banks' capital is reduced, forcing them to call in old loans and cease making new ones, and forcing borrowers to cut their expenditure. The ensuing recession gets even worse if inflation, the gradual rise in consumer prices, turns to disinflation and falling prices. People then postpone their non-essential purchases, and borrowing has a real cost even if the interest rate has been driven down to zero.

The policy reactions have been very different. Central banks have poured in public money to fill the banks' capital gap, nationalizing where necessary, so that they can start to lend again and avoid a further collapse in investment and asset prices. Governments are running wide budget deficits – spending more than they collect in tax – to reverse the fall in demand caused by households and businesses having to save instead of borrow.

However, while governments grapple with these macro-economic problems, financial regulators and managers have an equally serious problem at the customer level. Why should people bother to save when the interest rate is a fraction of a percentage point (below the rate of inflation), and when they see reckless borrowers being bailed out? In addition, why put savings in banks, when some of them need state help to pay it back? Once it has been stabilized, those in charge of the system will have to work hard to rebuild public confidence in it.

The Open University's new personal finance courses are designed to play an important part in this process. DB123 *You and Your Money* is already helping thousands of students improve their understanding of banks, insurance, housing and pensions, the sometimes hidden hazards of saving and borrowing, and teaching them the steps to take when the crisis in global finance starts to impact on household finances. DB234 *Personal Investment in an Uncertain World* will deepen this understanding, becoming one of the first courses to explain the new (and risky) world of 21st-century banking and financial markets, alongside traditional portfolio building.

Equally importantly, these courses, and the Financial Services foundation degree, will enable those involved in delivering, marketing and regulating financial services to understand how social context and economic conditions affect their delivery. The University will build on new Financial Services Authority initiatives to raise the professional qualifications of financial advisers towards degree level. Educating providers and users will help the industry persuade us that the banks and their financial products are once again safe places to save and invest, and will deliver the skills needed to cope with financial complexity, even if they cannot guarantee prevention of another crash.

Beat the credit crunch with sex

With the credit crunch biting and the recession deepening what better way to save money than to stay indoors and engage in sexual pastimes.

According to a YouGov/Terrence Higgins Trust survey of 2,000 adults, sex was the most popular free activity, ahead of window shopping and gossiping. It seems that the Scots are even more likely to indulge in amorous pursuits: 43% chose sex over other pastimes, while over 35% did so in the South East.

Rebecca Findley of the Family Planning Association advised, 'If anyone's having more sex at the moment whatever the reason, do think about your contraception and your condoms. And you can get all these for free on the NHS.'

I wonder if the course team of DB123 *You and Your Money* has cottoned on. It is comforting to know that contraceptive companies will not go bust during the recession.



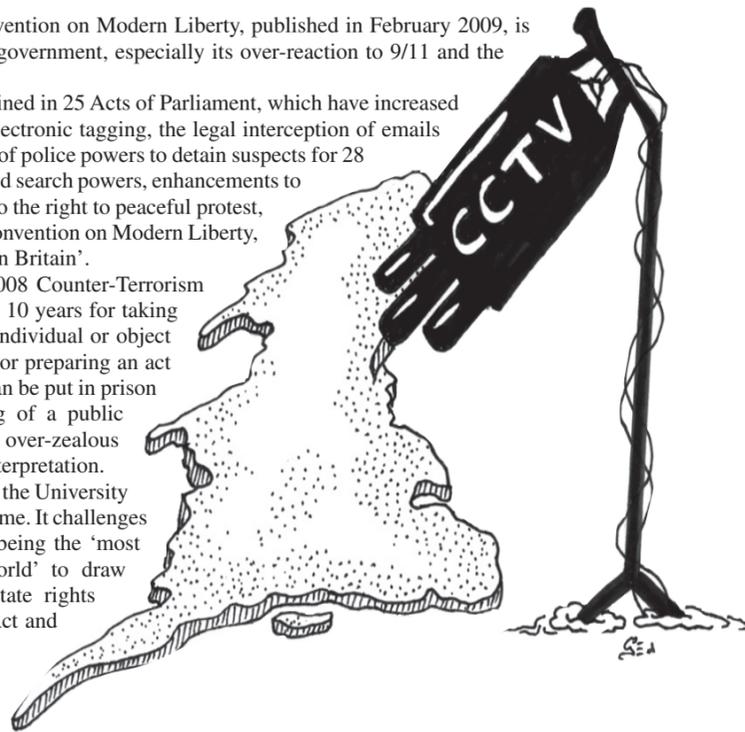
Civil liberties eroded by 10 years of New Labour

A new audit of laws, compiled by the Convention on Modern Liberty, published in February 2009, is highly critical of New Labour's decade of government, especially its over-reaction to 9/11 and the war on terror.

Commenting on the 60 new powers contained in 25 Acts of Parliament, which have increased individual and mass surveillance through electronic tagging, the legal interception of emails and letters and phone calls, the introduction of police powers to detain suspects for 28 days without charge, an expansion of stop and search powers, enhancements to DNA database measures, and severe limits to the right to peaceful protest, Henry Porter, one of the organizers of the Convention on Modern Liberty, said there was now 'a crisis of civil liberty in Britain'.

For example, under Section 76 of the 2008 Counter-Terrorism Act a person could be imprisoned for up to 10 years for taking a photograph of a policeman or any other individual or object 'likely to be useful to a person committing or preparing an act of terrorism'. In practice, it seems anyone can be put in prison for taking pictures of anyone or anything of a public nature. The Convention maintains that such over-zealous legislation is open to malpractice and misinterpretation.

The Convention list has been drawn up by the University College Law School Human Rights Programme. It challenges a government that has resulted in the UK being the 'most spied upon country in the developed world' to draw back from further impositions and re-instate rights and pledges set out in the Human Rights Act and Magna Carta.



Beyond the boundaries: introducing the new daring and thought-provoking DD301 *Crime and Justice*

Louise Westmarland, DD301 course chair, and team member Reece Walters outline our exciting replacement course for D315 that takes the teaching of criminology to a new and exciting level. The course will be presented in the autumn of 2009

Cybercrime, human trafficking, corporate fraud and injury, eco-crime and genocide are just some of the topics on offer in *Crime and Justice* (DD301), a new third-level course located in the Social Policy and Criminology Department.

The course is a daring and innovative attempt to deliver criminological material often not presented in undergraduate courses. Using the core themes of power, harm and violence, it explores criminality through both a local and global lens. The course replaces the popular criminology course (D315).

Crime and justice are issues of local and often personal significance, but they are also global in their reach. For us, it was important to not only explore issues such as street violence, drugs and robbery, but also to examine how the discipline of criminology can engage with issues of global concern such as war, terrorism, climate change, asylum, conservation and food security.

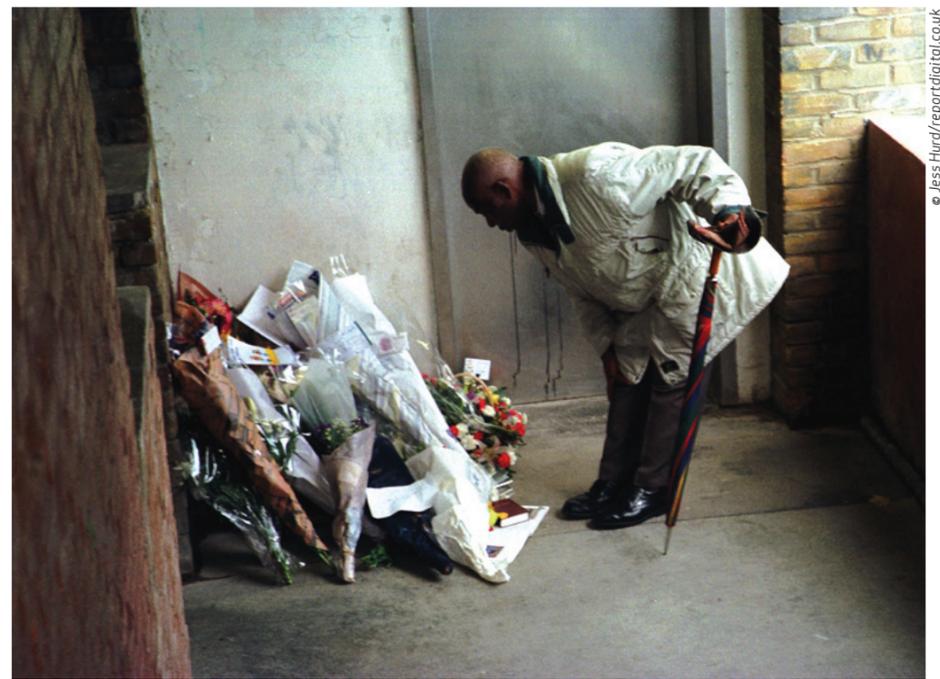
In this sense, DD301 is taking the teaching of criminology to a new and exciting level. Its content pushes the boundaries of the discipline and forges new horizons with the inclusion of original and cutting-edge research and teaching. Students wishing to take DD301 will see it as a follow-on to one of the department's other new and successful courses, the second-level DD208 *Welfare, Crime and Society* launched last year.

The links between the two courses were an issue that focused the shaping of DD301, with continuity of global justice and governance a defining feature. As always, the team were confronted with the important question of what will remain relevant throughout the next decade. Answering this question is no easy task, given the way criminal justice policy changes so frequently in the UK and throughout the industrialized world.

We have moved away from traditional conceptions of crime and justice located in any one particular place. Rather than beginning in a UK centric way and trying to 'translate' these ideas into other countries or jurisdictions, it was decided to take a 'beyond borders' approach. This meant that course contents pivot on notions of the 'local and global' to reflect the idea that every criminal action or 'local' event can be traced or related to an effect more globally.

This point is best illustrated with the course DVD on opiates and their abuse. DD301 commences with an exciting DVD that utilizes opiates as a trigger topic to explore various harm, power and violence perspectives. It challenges existing notions of opiate abuse by introducing students to worlds of politics, power and corruption created by opiate-based substances. The image of the 'street user' is examined but placed within contexts of government deviance and transnational corporate corruption. The DVD provides original footage from Tajikistan, North America, and the UK with a wide range of interviewees including poppy farmers, enforcement officers, pharmaceutical representatives, UN policy personnel and other leading international experts in the field of opiate control and enforcement.

The above themes are also delivered in the course textbooks to be co-published with Willan. Book 1 includes a number of topics that reflect the 'worldwide' approach. These include the city, the internet, the corporation, the human body, the environment and the state as sites and entities of violence and harm. The book uses these dimensions to try to answer key questions facing local and global populations in resolving problems. For example, to what extent has the expansion of cities created new and growing contexts of crime and transgression? How has the exploitation of the human body become an international marketable commodity? What counter-measures can be used to prevent human suffering? Why do corporations contaminate the environment with little government oversight or impunity? How has the internet created new forms of criminality and new types of victims? How do we prosecute cybercriminals when their actions can occur simultaneously across different jurisdictions? Book 1 disentangles existing notions of crime and constructs new understandings based on the complex dynamics of globalization and transnational criminal networks.



Flowers are laid in the stairwell on the North Peckham Estate, South London where Damiola Taylor, aged 10 died

Book 2 asks questions surrounding criminal justice, and uses issues such as risk, security, surveillance, mass incarceration, restorative justice and human rights to explore the ways in which 'international' justice exists. The book explores whether or not it is possible to have a legal system of rules or statutes or governance that go beyond the boundaries of the state. Are the national governments of the world still responsible for policing their own borders, or have super- or inter-national bodies taken this over? If so, what forms do they take? For example, what mechanisms of transnational policing exist; are they working? If not, why not?

Professor Reece Walters, a team member of DD301, stated that producing the course was an enriching and gratifying experience. He is confident that the course will be embraced by students, academics and the broader public alike. He remarked, 'It is quite a privilege to have academics from other universities contacting me with such enthusiasm about the forthcoming publication of our course texts. To be part of a vehicle that disseminates criminological knowledge so widely and with such positive receptivity is very special.'

DD301 *Crime and Justice* will be available for its first presentation in autumn 2009. If early student interest is an indication of its likely popularity, it will be another successful OU course in the Social Sciences.

DD309 *Doing Economics: people, markets and policy*

Roberto Simonetti, Senior Lecturer in Economics, and Course Chair of the new third-level course DD309 *Doing Economics: people, markets and policy*, explains the relevance of DD309 to all our futures, and how the course offers students a hands-on approach to understanding the discipline

These are interesting times to study economics. The recent financial crisis and ensuing worldwide recession have undermined the status of the dominant approach in the discipline, neoclassical theory, and revived the interest in alternative approaches that can provide richer explanations of the behaviour of people, organizations such as firms and governments.

The new level three economics course, *DD309 Doing Economics*, takes students through the study of diverse approaches to microeconomic analysis by introducing the dominant neoclassical theory and comparing it to other approaches that bring insights into economic issues from other disciplines, such as psychology, social theory, business and biology. The course is first presented in January 2010.

While economists are traditionally famous for disagreeing, the strong economic performance of Western countries in the last three decades has lent support to theories that put the extreme rationality of economic agents and the efficiency of market at the forefront. The liberal market-based model of industrial capitalism appeared to be enjoying a golden age of success until the advent of the global financial crisis and ensuing recession.

One result of this crisis has been a public and heated debate about the role of markets and governments in capitalist economies. A model of capitalism with liberalized financial markets and limited government interference in the economy is often characterized as 'Anglo-Saxon', rooted in the policies of the Reagan and Thatcher eras in the UK and the USA. Ronald Reagan captured this ideology well when he said, 'The nine most terrifying words in the English language are: "I'm from the government and I'm here to help."'

The crisis in free market ideology has also reduced the ambition of neoclassical economics by undermining its bid to become an economic theory of everything, and by placing more emphasis on alternative approaches that were already becoming popular in the discipline. Behavioural economists are increasingly drawing on psychological insights to inform economic policy. Evolutionary theories have become the core framework for understanding scientific and technological policies. Game theory has been used successfully to raise record funds for the British government in auctions and is widely used in many disciplines, from politics to biology.

The first half of the course introduces the main features of the theoretical approaches and provides students with core skills and techniques in the field of economic analysis. Research from the Office of National Statistics suggests that applied economics skills are relevant to the job market and valued by employers. The theories covered are applied to a variety of topics, such as consumption, debt, household decision making, business behaviour and strategy, competition policy, market and well being, inequality and how government works.



Man eating a bag of chips on a mobility scooter outside a closed down 99p store, Redcar, Teesside

The second half of the course goes a step further and asks students to actively explore the process of 'doing economics' through a research project, which counts as the examinable component of the course. Students specialize in an area of interest and research in depth a topic using economic research techniques.

There are four broad areas of specialization: environmental economics, finance, business and the social sciences. Specialization will appeal to students taking different awards. DD309 is a compulsory or core option in a variety of degrees, such as Social Sciences with Economics, Business Studies with Economics, PPE (Politics, Philosophy and Economics), Economics and Mathematical Sciences, and Environmental Studies. The course is also one of the top-up courses available to students who take the new Foundation Degree in Financial Services and who go on to decide to proceed towards a full honours degree.

If you want to help others, our new Foundation Degree in Counselling is ideal

More and more people are calling upon the support of professional counsellors for support when family and friends can no longer help. Dr Darren Langdridge, Award Director, Foundation Degree Counselling, outlines our exciting new counselling award that begins in May 2010

Many of us will be affected by mental illness during our lifetime. We may experience periods of profound depression or anxiety during our own lives or amongst our family and friends. In addition, we will all inevitably have to face 'problems in living' such as separation, divorce, death or loss at some point in our lives. Thankfully, human beings are resilient and most of the time we face these challenges with courage and in time overcome them or, at the very least, learn to live with them.

However, there are times when the fear or sadness may become overwhelming, and this is when we may turn to others for support. This support is often provided by family and friends who may be all we need to help us through the tough times. Sometimes though, this support is either not available, not appropriate or not enough, and increasing numbers of people are calling upon the support of a professional counsellor or psychotherapist.

The counselling profession is increasingly recognized for the value it adds in helping people to live with the problems they face during their lives. We have responded to the growth in interest in counselling by producing a new award – the Foundation Degree in Counselling – designed specifically for people wanting to become professional counsellors.

Counselling is an inherently rewarding profession and one that brings tremendous satisfaction, as well as an income! However, it is not for everyone. For those who confront their own feelings about fear and sadness in order to be able to work with others facing difficulties, it can be a personal and professional challenge.

Counselling is more than simply listening, though that is valuable in itself, and it is not a case of offering advice on 'how to fix the problem'. Considerable training and experience is required to offer the required professionalism needed to help people at some of the most difficult times in their lives.

Our new award reflects this and therefore requires a serious commitment of time and effort. The course provides the best possible training, designed to equip you with all the knowledge and skills you will need to work to the highest professional standards.

Because counselling is a profession centred on two people being in direct contact with each other, this award is unlike many others the OU provides. It is not delivered in its entirety through the OU's supported distance learning system but involves collaboration with the Central Psychotherapy and Counselling Awarding Body (CPCAB). The CPCAB has a nationwide network of learning providers (such as your local FE College) that offer a mix of learning experiences, ranging from the usual OU supported distance learning to small groups in local learning outlets and through supported practice and supervision.

The CPCAB is the largest specialist awarding body for counselling in the country and has an established reputation in the field. It validates awards delivered in a variety of learning outlets throughout the country, which students on the Foundation Degree will need to access to gain this qualification. This means that while there will be some inevitable gaps in provision up and down the UK, we are working hard to ensure that as many students as possible are able to find a local learning outlet to provide those elements that develop the work-based component of the award.

There are minimal entry requirements to ensure that all students fully understand what they are about to undertake. All students applying for the award will need to have completed an introductory counselling theory course (such as D171 *An Introduction to Counselling* or equivalent) and an introductory counselling skills course (such as the CPCAB Level 2 Certificate *Introduction to Counselling Skills*, delivered in a large number of outlets throughout the country). Details of the award, and what it entails, are provided on the Study at the OU website (<http://www3.open.ac.uk/courses/bin/p12.dll?Q01G14>). We shall shortly be launching our dedicated Foundation Degree Counselling website to further support students who may be interested in, or completing, the award.

A particularly interesting element in the new award is the new course, D240 *Counselling: exploring fear and sadness*, which will be available to all with an interest in the subject as well as those students on the Foundation Degree itself. This level 2 30-point course is a required course in the award and serves to bring the work-based learning components (the CPCAB courses) together with the OU knowledge-based components. Through a specially produced book with contributions from some of the leading figures in the field and further written and audio-visual materials delivered through the VLE, we look critically at fear and sadness from a variety of different perspectives.

Students will learn more about the ways in which fear and sadness have relatively recently been medicalized in the West as anxiety disorders and depression and the consequences this has for treatment. While this course is not delivered for the first time until May 2010, the Study at the OU website already provides information about this new course, which many students will find an exciting addition whether they wish to become counsellors or not.

The media – what's up?

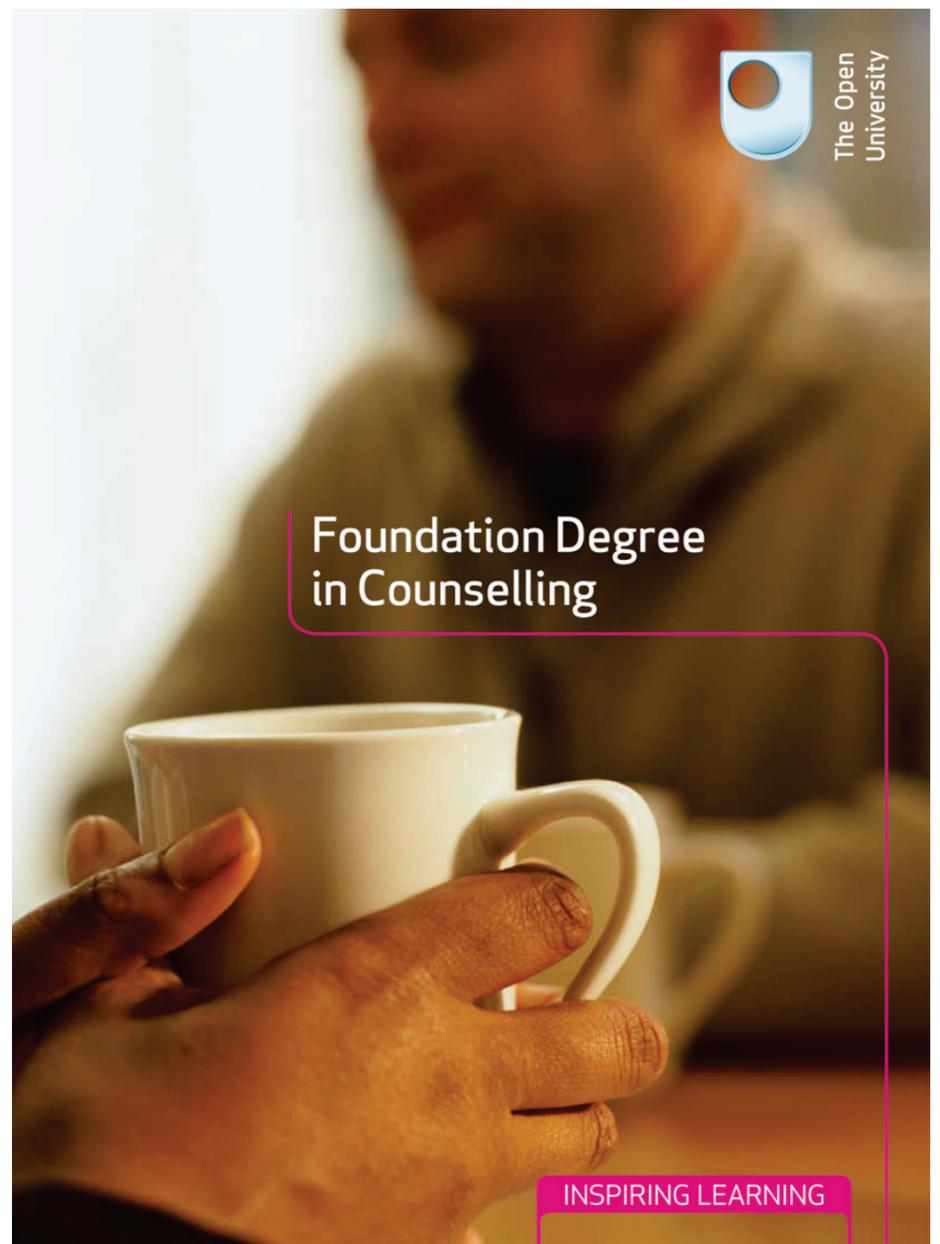
Jason Toynbee, course team member of DA204
Understanding Media, reflects on the power of the media

The MPs' expenses scandal that has been rocking Britain since May is a media creation. According to a Conservative member for mid-Bedfordshire, Nadine Dorries, the series of stories on the subject run by the *Daily Telegraph* newspaper is nothing less than 'a McCarthy style witch-hunt'. As a result, MPs have been walking around the Palace of Westminster with 'terror in their eyes'. Still, we can rest assured that they are looking out for each other. Every one is asking, 'have you seen so and so?' and 'are they in their office?' says the MP (*Today*, BBC Radio 4, 22 May 2009).

As a blatant example of self-serving spin, the Dorries interview is surely important in its own right. It is a symptom of desperate times in British mainstream politics. But I think there's something else very interesting at stake here. We are seeing just how resilient the modern myth is which portrays the media as all-powerful. In DA204 *Understanding Media*, one of three major themes running through the course is concerned with this issue.

How powerful are the media? Perhaps inevitably the answer is in some ways very, in other ways hardly at all. It depends what you mean by power, and in particular whether you locate the media in the larger field of society. If you do that, then rather than seeing the media as a pack of witch-hunters, you begin to appreciate how the media respond to powerful interests. In particular, the interests of big business, including giant media companies themselves, may strongly impinge on what can be said about whom and when. Voices are often gagged or shot down by what Noam Chomsky calls the 'flak' of conservative, corporate media.

Against this tendency, though, audiences can and do exert some power of their own. Not reading the *Daily Telegraph*, switching off *Britain's Got Talent*, or going to see one film rather than another are all examples of the power of media consumers in the market. You can argue about how much real power this represents, and there are some fierce arguments in the DA204 course materials, but the fact



Foundation Degree
in Counselling

INSPIRING LEARNING

The Foundation Degree in Counselling is an exciting new development for the OU and one that we feel meets a real need in terms of our education provision. For large numbers of people these are difficult times. Many people are losing their jobs and suffering considerable financial difficulties. It is at times such as these that people may think of re-training and/or need professional support themselves. By providing a high quality education in counselling that will equip people to enter the counselling profession and work effectively and be recognised as appropriately qualified professionals, this award will continue to reflect the ethos of the OU and our desire to be a positive and valuable contributor to the social good in the UK and beyond.



Sign of the times: damaged logo on the side of the Financial Times building

remains that the media market, and the consumers who choose their media within it, are a potential countervailing force to corporate control.

Studying big issues such as power is an important part of media studies, and that is certainly true of DA204. However, for many people in the OU community, I guess the question must be where will it get me? How can media studies help me get a job, or move on to another qualification. In the past, media studies has come in for some flak of its own. It has been described as a 'non-subject', as 'flaky' – often by journalists interestingly.

However, a three-year study led by Sunderland University, called the Media Employability Project (2003), 'found that media studies graduates are enterprising self-starters who gain a wide range of jobs inside and outside the media'. In addition, year after year, annual surveys by the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services have shown that an unusually high percentage of media studies graduates get jobs. The truth of the matter is that people with media studies qualifications are attractive to employers.

So there it is. If you do media studies, you can have your cake and eat it. Why not have a look at the Understanding Media website now and see if there is anything there to tickle your critical fancy?

www3.open.ac.uk/courses/bin/p12.dll?C01DA204

Creating opportunities

The Open University has championed widening participation throughout its first 40 years and, in 2009, revised its widening participation strategy. Margaret Hart, Assistant Director, Head of Widening Participation, outlines our hopes for the future

In 2004 the government set a target, that by 2010 50% of young people aged between 18 and 30 years should be participating in higher education. The importance of this was reinforced in 2006 by Lord Leitch who, in his influential review of skills, argued persuasively that a step change in the attainment of higher level skills amongst the British population was essential to enable Britain to maintain its place in the global economy.

Underlying all of this is an issue that is arguably of even greater importance: that of social justice. According to the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), of the 42% of young people currently participating in higher education – a figure that is significantly adrift from the 50% target – those who live in the most advantaged 20% of areas are five to six times more likely to enter higher education than those living in the least advantaged 20% of areas. Moreover, HEFCE research shows that participation in higher education is determined very early in life: ‘age, gender, family background and initial schooling predict later lifelong learning trajectories with 90 per cent accuracy’.

Forty years ago the OU was set up to ‘promote educational opportunity and social justice by providing high-quality university education to all who wish to realise their ambitions and fulfil their potential’. Our revolutionary open access policy was seen by many as an aim that was certain to contribute to the failure of the University. Instead it heralded the establishment of one of the largest and most successful universities in the UK.

The open access policy did, and does, create opportunity. Over 40% of our current new undergraduate population has less than two ‘A’ Levels, the threshold for entry into most other universities. However, this is no longer enough. Only 13% of young people participated in higher education when the University was founded. In 2009 this figure has increased three fold, to over 40%. Moreover, those from advantaged backgrounds have benefited most from this growth. The fundamental challenge now is to erode social inequality. The University must target its activity and shape it to meet the needs of those who need it most.

In January 2009, the Open University Senate warmly received and approved in full our Widening Participation Strategy Review, 2009–12 (<http://intranet.open.ac.uk/ism/central-secretariat/cm-s.htm>) for England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. This sets out clearly defined target areas for recruitment, retention and progression.

Fundamental to these targets is a focus on low socio-economic groups, defined as those who live in the most disadvantaged communities and who have no previous higher education qualification – currently 15.7% of our new undergraduate population. For retention and attainment we also have targets for black and minority ethnic groups whose outcomes, along with students from low socio-economic groups, are significantly lower than those of other students.

This reinvigoration of our widening participation agenda allows us to exploit a narrow window of opportunity within the context created



‘What next?’ graffiti

by the much criticized government policy to phase out funding for the majority of students in England and Northern Ireland who are studying for a qualification that is equivalent to, or lower than, a qualification that they already hold (ELQ students).

Our new targets are in line with policy and funding drivers and their achievement will require input from units across the University. Key actions have been defined for Student Services, Marketing, and the Centre for Widening Participation.

The critical role of Central Academic Units has been highlighted and they will play an important role in delivering change. Every Faculty will develop its own widening participation action plan, setting out the contribution that it will make to the achievement of targets.

At a time when much of the talk in the University is about cutbacks, it is heartening that widening participation is recognized as an area in which there should be further development. The University currently receives £32 million per annum from HEFCE as a widening participation premium, together with additional sums from Welsh HEFC and the Scottish Funding Council. This premium is related to the number of students in our low socio-economic target groups who register as students.

To help increase the number of students from these groups, and to help us better understand their needs, over the past five years we have piloted a programme of highly targeted community-based activity, undertaken in partnership with local organizations such as extended schools, children’s centres, community and voluntary sector groups and regeneration agencies. These partner organizations benefit from working with us because they have complementary objectives – to provide educational opportunities and to enhance employability in their communities. The partnerships enable us to ‘take the university to the student’ and build trust and credibility for the OU in local communities that have little tradition of higher education.

Our delivery model enables us to provide courses in ways that

overcome the barriers which higher education so often presents. Many, but not all, students begin with Openings courses, and standard tuition models are complemented by locally provided, face-to-face study skills support, which is appropriate for students in a local area who may be studying a range of different courses. Partner agencies contribute in a multitude of ways, including leading on the recruitment of students, providing premises for tutorials and assisting with fees and childcare.

There is one further aspect of all this that defines the distinctiveness of the OU’s contribution – a focus on working with parents. *Aspirations and attainment in deprived communities* (Cabinet Office, 2009), states that ‘parents’ interest in their children’s education has been shown to have four times more influence on attainment by age 16 than socio-economic background’. Our focus on mature students, matched with increasing expectations that schools will deliver outcomes for parents and communities as well as for young people, brings together widening participation policy in higher education and the government’s wider social exclusion policy, as demonstrated particularly through the *Every Child Matters* agenda. The OU’s policy of widening participation has attracted cross-party attention, highlighted by the Secretary of State for Higher Education, John Denham, in his visit to the university in 2007 as ‘innovation at the heart of government policy in widening participation’ and by John Hayes, the Shadow Minister for Vocational Education, as an area he wishes to explore with us.

Widening participation is at the heart of the OU’s mission. Its manifestation has changed since the University was founded, but it remains every bit as vital now as it was then. It is important to the University, but even more important to all those students, families and communities whose lives are being transformed by this activity.

During February I was invited to present certificates to a group of students who had studied through a partnership with extended junior schools in the Great Horton area of Bradford. It was an inspiring evening, attended by parents, children and grandparents, different generations who had become participants in a true community of learning. Their enthusiasm and support for each other was palpable.

One of these students is featured in our marketing campaigns and has appeared in advertisements in the national press, including *The Express* and *The Mirror*. Zaynab Mansoor is a psychology student, who wanted to know what was going through her son’s head when he drew pictures of her with green hair and huge feet. Zaynab says ‘being a single mum, I wasn’t sure I’d be able to afford to study or have the time, but with the Open University my course is free and flexible. It means I can look after my family and learn at the same time – which is perfect for me and my kids. I was nervous at first, but now studying is simply part of my day, and because my kids see my commitment I feel I’m inspiring them to learn too’. What better demonstration is there of the University’s role in promoting educational opportunity and social justice.

The City’s glass ceiling exposed

The City is failing miserably to shed its macho reputation and impenetrable glass ceiling. Women earn up to 60% less than men in the finance sector, according to the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC). At a time of economic recession, the Commission warns the situation may get worse before it gets better.

In April 2009 the EHRC revealed that the pay gap in the financial sector between men and women was more than twice the national average. They found a 79% gender gap for annual incentive pay for full-time workers.

Women working in the fund management, stock-broking and future trading areas suffered the largest pay gap. Seventy per cent of men in the financial sector as a whole earned more than £29,400 in 2007/8, while 70% of women earned less.

The report also found that 28% of those working in professional occupations in the sector are women, compared with 42% in the economy as a whole. Eleven per cent of senior managers are women, compared to 28% in the economy as a whole. The report is the first stage of the Commission’s inquiry into pay rates in the finance sector.

The UK still lags behind many other European countries when comparing men and women’s average gross hourly earnings. The country with the smallest gender pay gap is Italy with 4.4% difference. Luxembourg, Belgium, Slovenia, Portugal and Malta all have a gender pay gap of 10% or under while Finland, the UK, Germany, Holland, and Austria have a gender pay disparity of between 20% and 30%.



An effigy of an aspiring female graduate is hung from Cambridge’s Senate House, 1897

Note: This image was used in *Society Matters 1*, published in 1998!

We do better when we are equal

Two new studies investigating the social impacts of income inequality have found that it has a profound effect on the mental and the social well-being of individuals and society. The recession in the UK is expected to lead to substantial increases in mental ill health. The cost of economic growth in the past has been a social recession, with resulting increases in mental ill health. Boom and bust have negative downsides for individuals and families.

The UK is slowly climbing up the income gap league table. The UK income gap ratio of 7.2:1 is one of the highest in the world and places us third in the developed world income gap league table. The USA has the highest income gap at 8.5:1. Ireland’s income gap is 6.1:1. Finland and Japan are lowest, at 3.9:1 and 3.4:1, respectively. Japan and Finland have under half as much inequality as the UK and the USA.

The Mental Health Foundation (MHF) and World Health Organisation (WHO) analysed mental ill health in Europe and found that it is most pronounced in nations with high levels of income inequality. The study concluded that as countries became richer, mental ill-health rates increased, and that mental ill health increases as a response to growing inequality and deprivation, the kind expected during an economic downturn.

The joint MHF and WHO study argues that a tipping point has been reached in how much funding and resource governments allocate to mental well-being. There is a danger that in a recession, political attention and resource will move away from reducing child poverty, encouraging family-friendly working.

The second study, by Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, found that inequality can explain most of our social ills (see www.equalitytrust.org.uk; and <http://image.guardian.co.uk/sys-files/Guardian/documents/2009/03/13/inequality.pdf>).

The societal rates for ill health, drug abuse, educational failure, teenage pregnancy, obesity, violence, imprisonment, illiteracy, infant mortality, and death rates were found to be higher in more unequal societies. Mental ill health was five times more common than in the most equal societies. Wilkinson and Pickett conclude that governments who invest in policies that considerably reduce income differentials will bring about more just and equal societies.

The Spirit Level: why more equal societies almost always do better, R. Wilkinson and Kate Pickett (Allen Lane, 2009).

Government will fail child poverty target



A family at home in their rented house, Gloucester. The property is in very bad condition

According to a Joseph Rowntree Foundation report, published in February 2009, the number of children living in poverty by 2010 will exceed 2.3 million, 600,000 over the target set by New Labour. The Foundation called for radical action, especially with the worst of the recession still to impact on household incomes.

The majority of children living in poverty have at least one parent in work, as compared to no parent employed five years ago. However, most of them earn so little they are unable to raise their children out of poverty. Low paid and casual work is set to increase during the recession while short-term contracts mean that many families fall back on benefits.

Poverty in Britain is measured relatively, not in absolute terms. Any household with children where the parents have a joint income of less than 60% of the British median income is classified as poor. In February 2009, this was calculated to be £283 a week.

Open University Offender Learning

Prison students need access to the technologies that will provide them with employable skills and enable them to resettle satisfactorily into the community. Anne Pike, COLMSCT Teaching Fellow, Associate Lecturer and ex-Offender Learning Coordinator, outlines how the Open University is expanding its provision for prisoners

The Open University, almost since its inception, has provided courses to students in prison. Currently the OU has approximately 1,500 students on more than 200 courses across all faculties in approximately 150 prisons (covering all security categories) in the UK and Ireland. Many students continue their studies when released into the community.

The OU's Offender Learning scheme facilitates access to higher education for those prisoners who have not usually had the opportunity to study at this level and who have demonstrated their potential and motivation. It is enabled by a set of partnerships involving the OU, the Prison Services across all nations, the Prisoners Education Trust and government departments, particularly the Business Innovations and Skills department (BIS, formally DIUS).

There are many reasons why prisoners decide to study with the OU; many have completed all the standard classroom education there is to offer and it is the next logical step; and most need to use their time usefully, away from the 'bad' elements of prison. They often identify one or two 'special' people who have encouraged them to take the first steps or provided the motivation and the confidence to continue. Often it is the first time in a prisoner's life that someone has shown faith in his or her ability to achieve academically. These 'special' people are usually prison education staff or OU Associate Lecturers (tutors).

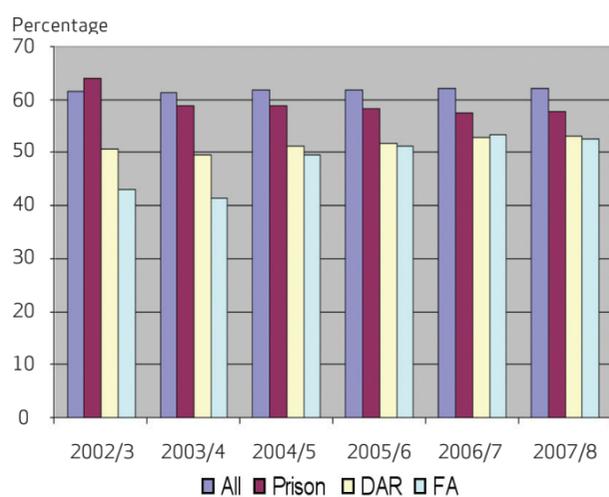
A Social Science student states why he would like his prison education coordinator from 7 years previous to attend his graduation ceremony:

He said I had the potential ... he was like a father to me. I still remember him ... There's no-one on the outside so I would like him to come.

The OU's students in prison are usually extremely committed. Despite having significantly lower entry qualifications than non-prison students (only 11% of prison students in 2006-07 had previous HE qualifications), their retention rates are higher than average and their success rates (completion rate and pass rate) are comparable with the average non-prison student. Thirty per cent of prison students on Openings courses progressed onto higher level courses in 2006-07; that was 2% higher than non-prison students.

Figure 1 compares the success rates of prison students against other groups of disadvantaged students (DAR = students with disabilities, FA = students on financial assistance) over the last 6 years. The success rate, which measures the pass rates as a percentage of those who registered, is only just below non-prison students and well above the two comparison groups.

Figure 1: Success rates 2002-2008



However, there is a downward trend for students in prison compared to an upward trend for other disadvantaged students. This downward trend was highlighted by recent research in the Centre for Open Learning in Maths, Science, Computing and Technology (COLMSCT), one of the OU's Centres of Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL). It suggested that the trend could be related to the introduction of online courses and the growing digital divide for students in prison. See website link at the end of this article.

There are many barriers to learning in a secure environment. The security regime itself hinders movement and reduces access to study space, material and support; crowded conditions necessitate sudden transfers and disruption. OU tutors provide face-to-face tutorials or telephone tutorials where possible. Requirements for security clearance are often extraordinarily difficult and lengthy – it can sometimes take up to 6 months before the tutor can gain access, by which time the course is almost complete.

However, one of the biggest challenges for students in prison is the lack of access to computers, storage media and the internet. The amount and type of technology available to students in prison varies greatly and this is not necessarily connected to prison security category.

An increase in the use of the VLE has led to a steady decline in the number of OU courses available in prison, and there are now only a small number of named degrees available. There are pockets of good practice where course teams or tutors have provided alternatives, enabling access to courses, such as the tutor support pack of B120 *An Introduction to Business Studies* and an EDO (essential, desirable or optional) framework for M150 *Data, Computing and Information*, enabling tutors and faculty to identify the alternatives required.

However, alternatives are not the long-term solution. Prison students need access to the technologies that will provide them with employable skills and enable them to resettle satisfactorily into the community. As an OU prisoner close to release explained: 'what's the point in rehabilitation if you don't know modern technology?'

As technology in prisons begins to be used for reform and rehabilitation rather than for control and punishment, platforms are being developed which can provide prisoners' safe access to online education, but progress has been slow. The OU is currently involved in two trials in England that are enabling better access to some courses and Openlearn material.

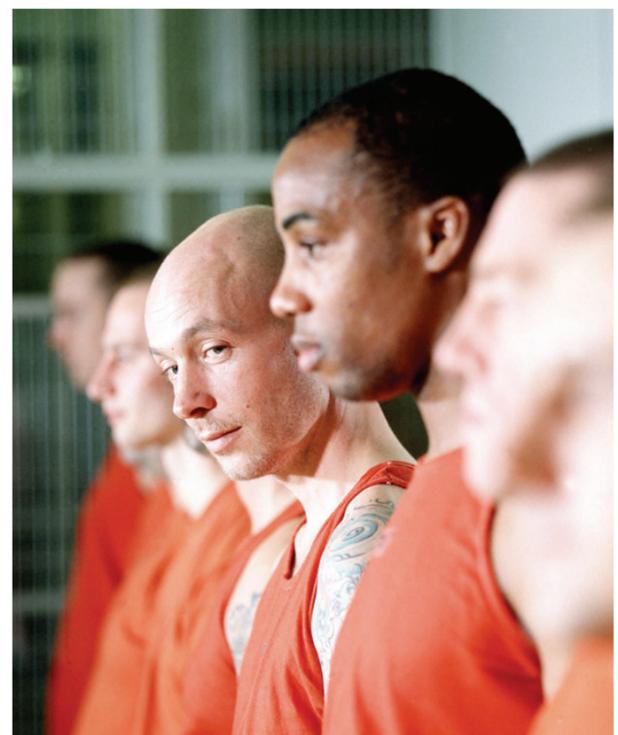
Firstly, the Virtual Campus provides secure web access using existing systems. It is being trialed in prisons in two English regions. The OU is testing components of courses with the aim of going live with a course in October 2009. Secure e-messaging, via a guardian, is anticipated and should allow students to access their tutors and the OU's e-assessment system – a huge step forward.

Secondly, an intranet has been developed in a high security prison in England. The OU course modules sit on the third-party Moodle platform and the trial has consisted of a few students who are able to access the course material but no other internet-based tools. Although the system is not attached to the internet, students found that accessing web-pages 'online' rather than on paper was more like a real internet search. Other nations are investigating similar trials.

A report outlining the University new Offender Learning Strategy was presented to the Learning, Teaching and Student Support Committee (LTSSC) in May 2008. A new OU-wide Coordinator post, a Learning Development Group (OLDG) and Steering Group were created in October 2008.

A new post has also been created in Learning and Teaching Solutions (LTS), which will provide technical support to implement the changes necessary for OU involvement in the trials to provide secure web access. An IT development group has also been created, which involves many technical units across the OU.

The OLDG, which is an extension of the original Prisons Liaison



© BBC/OU Identity, ethnicity and social relations in prison

Group, includes members from all regions and nations as well as central academic and support staff. They have formed into working groups to tackle some of the issues facing Offender Learning. Their work includes developing policy and procedures for students in Secure Units or Released on Temporary Licence (ROTL), development of a prisons prospectus, tackling e-assessment and library access issues, as well as staff and student support issues. The staff provide excellent support for Offender Learning – this work is in addition to their normal work in regions and nations.

Awareness of Offender Learning is increasing across the OU and while there has been increased faculty involvement in the OLDG there is still a long way to go and several faculties are yet to give their support. Three Offender Learning conferences have been hosted by the CETL over the last three years; the third conference was held on 16 June 2009 and formed part of the 40th Anniversary celebrations. These conferences have not only raised awareness of the problems across the OU but have successfully brought together academics, technical experts, external stakeholders and practitioners to discuss the issues and move Offender Learning forward.

New websites are also raising awareness. The original Prisons Scheme website in Student Registration Services (SRS), which provides important information for practitioners, is being refurbished and a new Offender Learning intranet website has been developed to provide general information to OU staff. There are plans for an external website to provide information to the public and more detailed, protected, information to external partners.

Externally, the OU has good relationships with all key stakeholders, and a new Prisons Scheme for prisons in England has been re-negotiated with the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) and the Department of Business Innovations and Skills (BIS). This has resulted in an improved financial arrangement with BIS, which pays fees for Openings and the first level-one course of prison students (via the Prisoners Education Trust), and for the additional work involved in supporting our students in prison. The new Prison Service Order, which more clearly defines the registration procedures and support arrangement for OU students in prisons in England, is now nearing completion. Re-negotiated schemes for other nations should follow.

The OU's Corporate Marketing department is investigating the possibility of providing courses and qualifications for prison staff – both officers and management. There have been visits to Ministers and the House of Lords in a bid to improve awareness of the huge benefits of Higher Education in prison (though research in this field is still lacking).

So, the building blocks are in place. The OU now needs to build the bridges which enable full access to its courses in prison.

Investigating the digital divide ... www.open.ac.uk/colmsct/activities/details/detail.php?itemId=4612674ad4bc3&themeId=48a972bfb625

Winston Churchill summed up the essence of a decent and humane Criminal Justice System in a remarkable speech that he gave on 20 July 1910, when winding up a debate on the prison estimates. In it he reminded everyone that all those working with offenders, and therefore helping with their rehabilitation into society, must remember that 'there is a treasure in the heart of every man, if only you can find it' and went on to imply that it was their job to find it. That treasure, once identified, must be developed and harnessed, so that it can be put to best use.

The great thing about OU courses is that their *modus operandum* overcomes all the problems put in the way of education in prisons by overcrowding, shortage of staff, lack of classrooms etc., and encourages people to improve themselves, helped, on paper if not in person, by people dedicated to that purpose. What is more, they can survive all the problems posed by frequent moves around the prison system. Therefore, while not pretending that they were tailor made for the task, I thank God for them, and hope that the powers that are realize what an enormous contribution they have made to the protection of the public by the successful rehabilitation of so many over the past 40 years.

Lord Ramsbotham, formerly the Chief Inspector, Her Majesty's Prisons, Wales, from 1995 to 2001, in a speech to open the Offender Learning Conference at the OU, 16 June 2009.

Lord Ramsbotham is President of UNLOCK, The National Association of Ex-Offenders, and is an Ambassador for the charity, the Prison Advice and Care Trust. He now sits on the cross benches of the House of Lords.



OU offender learners: facts and figures

Offender learners have significantly lower entry qualifications than non-prison students and the Openings (Access) courses are very popular as introductions to higher education.

The largest barrier for OU offender learners is the digital divide. Access to computers and storage media varies widely and is prison dependent. Access to in-cell laptops for education is rare. Libraries in the participating 150 prisons (covering all security categories) are seriously under-equipped and have very little funding. Higher education students cannot work effectively without modern technologies. Over the last few years the lack of internet access for offender learners has also meant a reduction in the number of courses available. Only a fraction of the diploma and degree pathways are now available. There are obviously questions about the safe use of technologies in a secure environment but safe platforms do now exist.

Approximately 1.8% of the female prison population and 1.5%

of the male prison population are studying OU courses. Prisoner retention rates are higher than the norm. Until recently the success rates of new prison students was particularly good. However, there was a significant drop in 2006–7, which could be due to an accumulation of the increased problems for offender learners and, in particular, the digital divide.

The OU have conducted a complete review of Offender Learning which resulted in the development of the Offender Learning Steering Group and a review of the University Offender Learning Strategy. Since October 2008, a new Offender Learning Coordinator post, an Offender Learning Steering group (OLSG), an OU-wide Offender Learning Development Group (OLDG) and a Technical Development Group have been established. An OU-wide audit has been completed and the recommendations are being taken forward to provide more consistent support for students in prison and the community.

Prisoner education is not about filling a bucket but lighting a fire

Since 2000, the Prisoners Education Trust has handled over 4,200 OU applications from prisoners. Pat Jones, its Director, explores the OU prisoner experience and the challenges that lie ahead

I want to start with the voices of the prisoners themselves. A letter we received in June 2009 from a prisoner currently studying and enjoying U216 *Environment* said simply

I came into prison without a qualification to my name; now I have letters after it.

Study at this level changes people's self-perception through the sense of achievement they gain from completing courses, often with high marks. A prisoner who had completed DD100 *An Introduction to the Social Sciences* wrote recently and said

Taking this course has revived my sense of pride which was somewhat dented by my incarceration and shown me there is still hope for me when I am released. It is very rare for convicts to receive the support you offer.

The note of hope mentioned here is very important; fresh hope motivates prisoners in crucial ways. It changes aspirations too.

A woman who left school without any qualifications, had a child at 18 and thought of herself as not intelligent enough to further her education, found herself learning when she came to prison. She found to her surprise that she enjoyed education and could do a lot more than she thought.

The education department has opened my eyes to a whole new future. I now know it is never too late to learn. I want to get qualifications so that on my release I can gain full-time employment or start my own business, a dream I have always had but never thought I'd be able to do.

Studying also enables purposeful use of time inside and changes attitudes to prison. One of the letters I have carried round for some time describes this very well. The writer is in his third year of OU study and aiming at a career in the healthcare sector, having just finished a course in death, dying and bereavement:

Being able to sit in my cell every night and take myself away from all the chaos of prison life, and concentrate on something that is so different from everything else available in the prison system makes me feel so good about myself. I have got a lot more out of studying with the OU than I could ever have imagined ... studying has given me a real calmness around all the things that used to cause me to react in a negative way.



In our research report, *Brain Cells: listening to prisoner learners*, 73% of the respondents said they got involved in education to occupy their time usefully (see www.prisonerseducation.org.uk).

OU study enables people to learn how to learn, and uncovers – or creates – a real hunger for learning. It connects that hunger to personal change. A prisoner from a therapeutic prison who had just completed an Openings course and wanted to progress to a full level one module explained this vividly:

My life before prison was one fraught with tragedy and anger. From the age of 16 my whole life revolved around crime. I am now 25 years old and I have decided I no longer want to live a life of crime. I understand that I need to change my life around and I have chosen education as the way forward. My hunger for education has never been greater. This course will help me on my journey towards realising my dream of helping the misguided youth of today ...

Finally, higher learning stimulates and nourishes a desire to help others and to participate in society. An inmate at a long stay category C prison who had been a mechanic after leaving school with no qualifications said:

I desperately regret my actions and want to turn my life around with the aid of the best education I can give myself. I have chosen K101 as it deals with the area of my interest, which is chosen for people. It ties in with my long-term goal on release of being fully qualified in helping adults with learning difficulties.

OU study helps re-integrate people into society, even whilst inside prison. It communicates a message to prisoners that they can belong and participate in what others in society take for granted.

One of the documents that I've found most helpful recently is the report on the education of persons in detention from the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education, Vernor Munoz. He describes education in prison as a tool for change and as an imperative in its own right. He points out that investing in prisoner education is good for society, as it enables prisoners to change; if not helped, he notes, the chances are that they will be released as angry and frustrated as when they went in. It seems to me that the OU scheme in prisons has the happy capacity both to respond to our own government's current policy agenda and to this wider idea of the value of education.

However, I can't let this opportunity pass without mentioning the challenges we still face. They are very familiar.

Psychiatric admissions higher among minorities

The Healthcare Commission have reported that black and minority ethnic groups are at least three times more likely to be admitted as inpatients in NHS mental health wards in England. Following a national census in 2008, the Commission called for greater care in the community. The Commission also reported that 68% of mental health inpatients were accommodated on mixed-sex wards, making the government target of providing single-sex wards for all by 2012 far more difficult.



C K Purandare comes from India and lives in Britain. He is educated as a metallurgical engineer and a sociologist. He is a social commentator through his writings and paintings. He writes on contemporary global issues for a couple of Indian periodicals and is on the editorial board of a Scottish educational magazine – *Stride*. His paintings depict a wide range of subjects

The fruit that's out of reach; the courses that prisoners cannot access

My first plea would be for the new Openings course, exploring sport online, to be available offline. Many prisoners are passionate about sport and fitness, and this is a good route for engaging them in learning and qualifications. They need this course! My second plea would be for short courses in arts subjects, and particularly the 'Start writing' suite. Again, prisoners are amazingly committed to writing, poetry, fiction and other things. The science short courses work very well, and it is such a shame that no arts short courses are available to prisoners.

Understanding justice

I wonder if the OU would consider developing an Openings course called 'Understanding justice'. I am fascinated by prisoners' interest in criminology and conscious of the value of restorative justice programmes. However, any understanding of justice, combining bits of ethics, philosophy and criminology, could be very attractive and act, like Y165 *Learning to Change*, as an offending behaviour course, but self-chosen. If I had a second nomination for a new course, it would be 'Understanding education', in order to explore how prisoners can learn enough about learning and teaching roles to be able to help other prisoners.

Technical access and security

We need to solve the technical and security issues and persuade the Ministers that access is viable and highly desirable. This means we need the *Virtual Campus* now and I know the OU is working in partnership to deliver this as soon as possible.

Untapped reservoir of talent

We have to recognize two other realities, which may be slightly outside the scope of this celebration, but which exist nonetheless. Firstly, there is probably more potential for higher education study than we currently uncover and enable; and secondly, the subjects that some prisoners want to study are not covered by the OU, and so they become almost impossible, other than by finding funds from other charities.

I listened recently to an audio clip on the BBC website of Michael Young talking in 1983 about what made the OU different. He said that the OU has more fire in it than other institutions, more readiness to experiment. It reminded me of the W.B. Yeats quote about education; that education is not about filling a bucket but lighting a fire. I know that fires and prisoners do not mix, but perhaps this one can.

This is an edited version of a talk given by Pat Jones to the OU celebration of Offender Learning, 16 June 2009.

Useful websites

PET: www.prisonerseducation.org.uk/

UNLOCK: www.unlock.org.uk/main.aspx



Jailing women fails them, their families and society

Andy McSmith deplores the tough approach of New Labour, which has seen the population in women's prisons double

No recent British government has put as many offenders behind bars as New Labour. The most famous slogan that Tony Blair ever uttered in opposition – reputedly coined for him by Gordon Brown – was that Labour would be ‘tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime’. Only the first half of that dictum seems to be true. England and Wales boast the highest per capita prison population in Western Europe – 148 people per 100,000 of the prison population.

Between 1996 and 2005, the population in women's prisons rose from 2,300 to 4,600. It has stayed close to that peak ever since. This is not simply because more women are getting into trouble with the law but also because the courts are now less hesitant to hand out a prison sentence to a woman in the dock. In 1996, 10% of women convicted of indictable offences went to jail. Within 10 years, this figure had risen to 15%.

There are, of course, some very dangerous women behind bars. However, most inmates of Britain's 17 women's prisons are serving short sentences for petty, non-violent crimes. A disturbingly large number of these inmates are more of a danger to themselves than to anyone else.

The typical woman prisoner is a teenager or 20-something who has been caught shoplifting or dabbling in drugs, and will be out in a matter of weeks. More than a fifth of women prisoners – 21% – are in prison for theft or handling stolen goods, and nearly two-thirds are serving sentences of six months or less. However, this brief punishment can have traumatic consequences that last long after the prison term has been completed.

Approximately 120 babies are born in prison each year. There are mother-and-baby units in women's prisons for very young children, but it is very rare for a prison governor to permit a child over 18 months to be raised behind bars. If there is no close relative to look after the child, it will go into care, with little prospect of being reunited with its mother even when she is released.

‘It didn't matter whether they were prostitutes, thieves or drug dealers – they never stopped being mums,’ said one ex-convict, a mother, who asked not to be named. ‘Birthdays and Mother's Day were the worst. Uncontrollable sobs would echo through the corridors. No wonder so many women tried to kill themselves.’

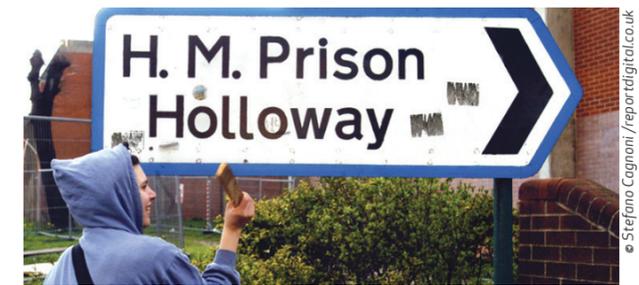
Lesley Butt, who has served three terms in adult prisons, is convinced that the constant turnover of young women is utterly wasteful. Her own experience brought her to the perhaps surprising conclusion that the most effective prison sentences are the long ones. It was her third sentence, of six years, that gave her the time to get off drugs.

‘If you're going in on a short sentence, you haven't got enough time and support to sort yourself out. Then you come out and go straight back into crime, because when they put a woman in prison they take her whole life away. It's usually the woman who keeps a family together, so she has no family to go back to, and soon she's back.’ She added, ‘Prison should be for sex offenders, murderers and people who are violent. The others should be sentenced to serve in the community.’

The statistics suggest that she is right. Almost two-thirds – 64% – of the women released from prison during 2004 were in trouble with the law again within two years. The figures also suggest that women offenders need an effective inducement to get off drugs. An Oxford University survey found that of the 500 women convicts they sampled, more than half had taken drugs every day in the six months before going to prison. The same team found that 78% were showing some sort of mental disturbance, a proportion that would be 15% in the female population as a whole.

Following six deaths in quick succession inside Styal Prison, near Wilmslow, Cheshire, a Home Office Commission, headed by Baroness Jean Corston, recommended that vulnerable offenders should be dealt with outside prison.

The findings of the Commission were welcomed by experts in the field, who then felt let down when little action followed. Juliet Lyon, director of the Prison Reform Trust, says that the government is aware of the wastefulness of keeping large numbers of women in prison, but that in the past ‘implementation has lagged woefully behind’ the good intentions of ministers like Maria Eagle. But, she added, ‘with cross-party support, public opinion on her side and over twenty of the largest charitable funders offering to help, we hope that the minister secures the resources needed to deliver this policy at last’.



Demonstration called on International Women's Day to protest at the growing number of women imprisoned in Britain

– daily life, philosophical issues, interpretations of classical literature and social pathology such as poverty, violence, and the marginalization of society. Images of his paintings are used widely by Indian and British publications. His work can be seen on his website www.art-non-deco.com

Per capita prison population per 100,000

England/ Wales	148	Belgium	91
Spain	144	France	85
Scotland	134	Switzerland	83
Netherlands	128	Sweden	82
Portugal	120	Northern Ireland	79
Austria	105	Finland	75
Italy	104	Norway	66
Germany	94		

Source: International Centre for Prison Studies, 2008.

Just stick to sewing mailbags

Prisoners who want to gain qualifications are not always given support. Eric Allison, prison correspondent of The Guardian reports

There was this joke doing the penal rounds in the 1970s. It is set in a pub, where two criminals are propping up the bar. One turns to the other with a question: ‘I believe Bodger's back on the streets?’

Two: ‘Yeah, he came out last month; copped for parole after getting a degree from the Open University, in criminal psychology I believe.’

One: ‘Good for Bodger, does that mean he's going straight?’

Two: ‘Nah, he's still robbing banks, difference being that now he knows why he does it.’

I pass on this old joke, not to take the mickey out of prisoners who gain educational qualifications while inside, but to stress the fond place held by the Open University (OU) in the penal estate.

Although prisoners have long formed productive relationships with prison educators, there have always been tensions between inmates in search of education (and the people who want to teach them) and the custodians of the country's jails. The difficulty is balancing security with the flexibility sought by those involved in education in prisons. There are many areas of tension, and clashes between the two sides are common.

In January 2009, a long-term prisoner, Keith Rose BA (Hons), wrote to *Inside Time*, the highly regarded monthly newspaper that goes into all prisons. Rose, a lifer, is currently held in Long Lartin, a maximum-security jail, near Evesham. He said that, as the OU had offered programmes in prisons since the 1970s, prison managers ought to be familiar with the rules governing the compulsory three-hour final exams. However, according to Rose, some prisons fail to provide even the most basic exam facilities and he cites Long Lartin as an example.

Last October, he writes, the prison failed to provide any higher-level OU student the minimum three-hour time period for their finals despite ‘repeated requests and warnings that the exams were impending’.

The OU confirms Rose's account of the problems at Long Lartin, saying that ‘special circumstances affected the exam arrangements for seven students at Long Lartin in October. Of those, five passed and two will be allowed to resit’. Both the Prison Service and the

Staff refused to allow students more than an average two and a half hours in their finals, often with frequent interruptions and/or arguments between prison staff and exam invigilators.

jail's governor acknowledge that the examination process was beset with problems.

Mike Rookes, the OU regional director, West Midlands, says the relationship between the OU and the Prison Service and education staff works well most of the time, but occasionally the rigours of the prison regime clash with the educational needs of the students. ‘This happened in the case of prisoners at Long Lartin last year and the university very much regrets incidents like this,’ he says.

Ferdie Parker, governor of Long Lartin, says the incident was a one-off. In response to a query from the Prisoners' Education Trust (PET), he said that OU courses do assist in the prison's strategy for reducing the risk of reoffending. He admitted that during the last round of OU exams, in 2008, a ‘regime anomaly foreshortened some of the exam periods set’. He says protocols have now been implemented to ensure such a situation does not occur again. A spokesperson for PET described the OU scheme in prisons as extremely valuable and said it was crucial that prisons supported OU students and education staff.

Although many jail staff recognize the importance of education in the prison system, there is little doubt that some – especially those from the old school of prison officers – see it as a soft option. A senior prison governor recently told me that some staff would prefer to see their charges sewing mailbags, rather than furthering their education. Moreover, the system itself often seems geared to obstruct rather than assist prisoner-students. Overcrowding in jails means that prisoners who are studying may be forced to move jails, often at short notice, and can end up in a prison that does not run the course they were taking in their previous establishment.



The results of a survey, conducted by *Inside Time* and published in March 2009, show that 41% of prisoners blamed such moves for their failing to complete educational courses. A further 24% cited frustration, through lack of materials and/or support. In addition, those who have managed to achieve academic success in prison often say the system was not always on their side. One life-sentence prisoner is now entitled to call himself Dr Ben Gunn, BSc, MA, PhD – all qualifications gained inside. He says, ‘By and large, the Prison Service has benignly neglected my efforts.’

The *Guardian's* own Erwin James is on record as saying his success in journalism happened ‘in spite of the prison system, not because of it’.

During the years I spent in prison, I recall many occasions when a prison was short of staff (the Prison Service has one of the highest absenteeism rates in the public sector) and educational classes were, invariably, the first casualty of the daily regime.

For those prisoners who gain qualifications, the achievement often marks a huge turning point in their lives. Like so many of the prison population, David (not his real name), 35, missed out on normal schooling. A product of a broken home, he was in and out of care in his adolescence and ‘kicked out of school and children's homes’ before treading the familiar path of youth offending and custody. A series of jail sentences culminated in him falling foul of the ‘two strikes and you're out’ system and he received a life sentence for wounding. Following his release last year, he is on the verge of graduating after completing the OU social science course he started in prison.

David now has a full-time, well-paid job in the drug and alcohol field, ‘helping others avoid my mistakes’, plus a company car and phone. He cannot speak highly enough of the opportunity he was given to change his life. ‘It's amazing that the OU is there – in prison – and free. I used to think I was not good enough to be a normal person, with a normal job. That was part of another world and somehow it wasn't for me. Now it is.’

A spokesperson for the Prison Service said the purpose of prison is to punish but also to reform, and that the service is committed to rehabilitating those in its custody.

This article was originally published in *The Guardian*, 24 February 2009.

The last time I saw Richard

Associate Lecturer John O'Donoghue reflects on his prison experience

With the closure of the large Victorian asylums in the early 1990s, many who had enjoyed their sanctuary were suddenly thrust out into a world that was strange and unfamiliar to them.

I remember my friend Richard, a patient I worked with on the gardens at Friern Hospital, suddenly looming towards me one warm weekday down the Holloway Road. The traffic rushed by in a cloud of petrol, the shoppers were busy about their business, the sun glinted off windows, cars, motorbikes – and there we were – two mates who had enjoyed a brief respite from the mad crowds, suddenly face to face after several months away.

Shortly after seeing Richard I was charged with theft and remanded for reports to Pentonville Prison. A few days into my remand and I was on the hospital wing.

The prison officer passes a small plastic beaker of *Largactyl* through the bars of the window. I swallow it all down and hand the empty beaker back to the officer. He has a kinder face than most of the prison officers I've met. He reminds me of some of the male nurses I knew in Friern. I watch him walk back down the narrow corridor. There are cells either side, about twenty altogether, and each cell holds just one prisoner. He passes out of my eye line and I hear his footsteps as he goes back to the office and then silence.

I have a cell all to myself, a welcome break from the landings, with their hard nuts and harder discipline. I turn back to the big bed and lie down on top of the pale blue counterpane. The hours drag by. I count the bricks in the wall and wonder what I'm going to do.

Pentonville is all straight lines and hard surfaces. A thousand doors bang shut when we're locked up, a noise like thunder from the landings that echoes down to the hospital wing. My own cell door bangs with equal fury every time we're slopped out, or had a brief walk around the yard for exercise in the afternoon or after we've collected our meals. The hours drag by.

The prison officer with the kind face opens the door of the cell one morning and takes me down to the office. A middle-aged Indian doctor in a dark suit, grey shirt and blue tie is waiting for me behind a desk. The prison officer stands outside.

'Have you ever suffered from mental health problems?' the doctor



asks me. I tell him about Friern. He makes a few notes and asks me how I am at the moment, whether I know who the Prime Minister is, if I'm depressed, and asks me if I have suicidal thoughts. The interview ends. I leave the office and the prison officer takes me back to my cell.

'Hello, Mr O'Donoghue. I'm a Probation Officer. I'm here to make a social report on you.' She's tall with long mousy blonde hair and glasses, in her early thirties, dressed conservatively in a beige jacket and matching skirt. She's the first woman I've seen in

two weeks. She invites me to sit down and asks me questions about where I was living before I was remanded, what my address is, what I'd been up to.

I'm growing more withdrawn. I can barely speak to her. The delusional fog is getting thicker again with every day I spend inside. I'm becoming a cabbage.

One day I'm let out. I go back to the Patchwork House. My housemates try to make me welcome. But after being in prison it takes some adjusting. My job on the Community Programme has come to an end and I am having trouble with the dole. However, compared to Richard I've had it easy. When I see him, he has a startled, frightened look on his face. He still has on the dark checked sports jacket he was given by the WRVS, and the grey slacks, a little too short in the leg. He has the dried lips of the medicated and the lost look of someone who doesn't know what has hit him. After the grounds of the hospital, the Holloway Road is more of a shock to him than it is to me. At least I've adjusted, had work on the outside, seen a few friends now and again. Richard looks dazed. Perhaps he's on his way to Archway Tower – perhaps his money hasn't come through.

It took me a long time to get over my experiences. I was fortunate; I went to university and married a lovely woman. But that day on the Holloway Road, Richard running scared through the crowd, me too shocked to say anything – I wonder about him, and hope the next time we meet we'll say hello and reminisce about the past.

Upon his release from Pentonville Prison in 1987, John found work at Sadler's Wells Theatre. He then gained a place at the University of East Anglia with the help of Martin Lunn, a worker at the Sunnyside Road Hostel run by Islington Council. John married in 1991, a year before his graduation. He studied for his MA in English Literature at the University of London and his Cert. Ed. at the University of Greenwich. He moved to St John Rigby Catholic College where he took his Graduate Teaching Practice. John has been an Associate Lecturer since February 2006. He now lives in Brighton with his wife and four children.

When a child commits a crime, we are all responsible

England and Wales now boasts the highest juvenile prison population in Western Europe. Camila Batmanghelidjh, founder and director of Kids Company, laments the poor treatment for child offenders and places the blame with adults

Society is keen to hold children accountable for crime. In the name of justice, force and chemicals are used to achieve compliance: prisons, ASBOS and some 460,000 prescriptions of Ritalin a year, some of it for children who suffer attention disorders, but most of it for those who feel uncontained and legitimately chaotic in the face of unbearable life challenges. Criminal children are costing £280,000,000 in custody. At any given time, 3,000 children are in custody – 80% of them reoffend.

The question is, when children do harm, whose crime is it? The child who committed the offence will stand in court, but a more catastrophic injustice remains unaddressed. This is the crime of those who allow childhood in Britain to be so destroyed that vulnerable children are left to simply survive it.

I anticipate the indignant response of those who believe progress has been made. However, what is it worth when complacency allows 552,000 children a year to be referred to Child Protection, with the capacity to register only 30,700 of them for often inconsistent help?

An abused child wants to kill herself because she can't get the right help. The civil servant did not intervene. The minister shifted the blame. It goes on. The biggest killer of all is the 'vanilla moment' when professionals stay quiet for fear of humiliating colleagues. Neutrality is killing aspiration to protect children and, as politicians jostle for position, young people look on and see no point in pro-social allegiance.

If we want the level of violence to diminish, first we have to communicate the importance of human life. It's not a lesson of morality; preciousness of life has to be emotionally experienced and practically realized. In writing off one person, we facilitate violence as a repercussion. The crime begins with adults who fail to be passionate about quality care. Thirty thousand children on a waiting list for mental health intervention is a travesty. However, adults get away with it because ultimately the child carries the punishment.

The injustice is infuriating and, even if we don't want to admit it, it is making killers of us all.

Young offenders: speech, language and communication needs

Magistrate and Research Fellow of the University's Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, Judith Jeffcoate explains how important words, or the lack of them, are in securing justice for young offenders



A specific aspect of offender learning that is attracting increased attention is that of speech, language and communication needs (SLCN). Those of us who attend the local Magistrates' Courts on a regular basis, in a variety of roles, are familiar with the problems that many defendants have with legal jargon. Consider the warning given to disqualified drivers: 'You must not drive any motor vehicle on a road or other public place.' What is a motor vehicle? The answer, according to the Road Traffic Act 1988, is 'a mechanically propelled vehicle intended or adapted for use on roads'. Clear enough, provided you understand what is meant by 'mechanically propelled vehicle'. Certainly one teenage boy arrested recently protested that the moped he was riding didn't count! Then again, what is a public place? Is a private car park a public place? The answer is 'Yes, if it is accessible from a public road', a point that came as a surprise to one adult driver the other day.

Another example is the common condition of bail: 'You must have no contact, direct or indirect, with the named individuals X, Y and Z.' In an attempt to clarify this, most Magistrate Chairs have developed their own, ever-lengthening list of means of communication to be avoided: no verbal messages, no written notes, no phone calls, no text messages, no emails, and (most recent of all) no messages on Facebook!

However, some young offenders have more serious problems with communication that could put them at serious risk of reoffending. Magistrates on the Milton Keynes Youth Court panel recently heard about a pilot project carried out by Rachel Lanz for the local Youth Offending Team (YOT), which examined the SLCN of young people accessing the YOT. The results indicated that a high number of those surveyed had SLCN when compared with their age peers. Of the 20 males in the study, 12 were assessed as having severe difficulties. Yet all but one person in the survey reported that they had no difficulties at all with spoken language.

In fact, the study showed that many had a very poor understanding of words – an area of difficulty that would be likely to cause them significant problems in formal settings such as police interviews or court proceedings. Moreover, these young people are often unaware that they have a difficulty, and unaware how to repair a breakdown in communication, for example, by asking for clarification. In recent years, youth court chairmen have been encouraged to engage with young people in court. In many cases this is useful in establishing communication. However, all Magistrate Chairs are familiar with the defendant who is unresponsive, who replies 'don't know' to questions about their offending and who will say 'yes' when asked if they have understood the requirements of a Court Order. The results of this study indicate that it is precisely these young people who are most in need of intervention to improve their communication skills.

Over 3,000 children imprisoned in England & Wales

Despite the Youth Justice Board (YJB) seeking a cut of 10% between 2005 and 2008, the numbers of juvenile offenders in custody in England and Wales increased by 8%.

Over 80% of the children given custodial sentences are sent to youth offender institutions. The rest are held in privately run units aimed at rehabilitation, secure training centres, or in secure children's homes. Three-quarters of imprisoned young offenders go on to reoffend.

Frances Crook, Director of the Howard League for Penal Reform, accused the YJB of failing to grapple with youth crime issues, beyond managing the movement of offenders within the juvenile system. The increase in young offenders is partly the result of an increase in police 'criminalization' procedures, especially in the ASBO process.

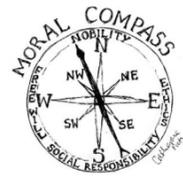
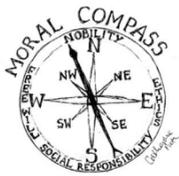
England and Wales imprison twice as many children as

Germany, which has a larger population, and four times the rate in France. In Belgium, only 33 children were given custodial sentences in 2008, out of a total population of 10.4 million people.

One explanation for the higher imprisonment rate is that the age of criminal responsibility – 10 years – is lower in England and Wales than anywhere else in Europe, apart from Scotland where it is 8 years.

In 2005 the UN condemned the children imprisonment rate in England and Wales. It has increased since then due in part to the adoption of new targets for police forces, and youth courts not using community sentences as an alternative to custody.





Duck Soup

Editor and local councillor Richard Skellington takes a sideways look at the expense claim furore

Two millennia ago the great Roman historian and senator, Tacitus, advised the world that in a state where corruption abounds, laws must be very numerous indeed. In the 17th century William Shakespeare's Cardinal Wolsey told us that 'corruption wins not more than honesty'. A century later Edward Gibbons decreed that corruption was the most 'infallible symptom of constitutional liberty'. And in the last century Mahatma Gandhi declared that corruption 'need not be an inevitable product of democracy', while former Prime Minister Anthony Eden thought corruption had 'never been compulsory'. To Eden there was always another way. All these wise and sagacious words over the centuries, and yet, pardon me for observing, isn't the jaw-dropping scandal over politician expenses rather too predictable? We should have seen it coming.

With increasing sleaze enveloping the Brown government during 2009 at the peak of the recession, it is worth reminding ourselves of the findings of the corruption league table for nations, produced each year by Transparency International. Their latest report was published before the scandal broke over the Prime Minister's advisor's email crisis in April 2009, before the controversy around MP second home allowances and before the fall-out from the politician expenses furore in May.

Britain is perceived as becoming more and more corrupt according to the anti-corruption group. As examples, Transparency International referred to Britain's 'wretched and woeful record' in prosecuting business executives for paying bribes to foreign politicians and officials to win contracts, the plethora of political scandals about 'cash for honours' and the government's decision to drop the investigation into allegations that BAE paid bribes to Saudi royals. These events contributed to a significant increase in the perceived level of corruption in Britain, with a corresponding fall from twelfth to sixteenth place in the world corruption rankings between 2007 and 2008. This is the UK's worst performance since 1995 when the records began (see www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi/2008).

The survey, which focused upon how we are perceived by people in other countries, revealed that Denmark, New Zealand and Sweden shared top spot, followed by Singapore, Finland and Switzerland, with Afghanistan, Haiti, Iraq, Burma and Somalia in the bottom five of 180 nations.

Remarkably, since Britain signed an Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development global anti-corruption treaty in 1997, we have prosecuted only one person for bribing an official from another government. The Department of Business defended the government's record in February this year, explaining that twenty bribery cases were currently being investigated following the only solitary successful prosecution in September 2008.

Is it therefore surprising that a government so reluctant to prosecute corruption turns a blind eye to failures of its own, even though, as MPs painfully keep repeating, they were only following guidelines? Of course, they themselves established the guidelines, but what seems now transparently clear is the extent to which many MPs stretched and manipulated them to their own self-interest.

The last man nearly ruined this place
He didn't know what to do with it
If you think this country's bad off now
Just wait till I get through with it

Rufus T. Firefly

From the film *Duck Soup*, starring the Marx Brothers, 1933



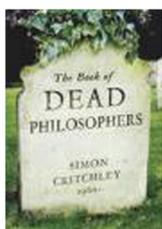
A Stockholm duck house like the one owned by Gosport MP, Sir Peter Viggers

The scale of the exposed expense racket is appalling. You have to go back to the days before the 1832 reform act, to the 'old corruption' with its vote-buying, electoral intimidation and rotten boroughs, to find an era in which the British way of politics was so widely discredited. Today, faced with an alarmingly comparable collapse of esteem for politics under the democratic system, the answer to the new corruption is the same as it was to the old – systemic political reform.

Whether it be to claim for second homes close to their first home (in one case a mere 100 yards from the second property), to conveniently change the status of homes to suit their financial best interests, to make claims for repairs and maintenance on properties owned outright by a third party, MPs have badly exceeded the spirit of the guidelines. They have endorsed Gibbons but taken no notice of Eden's warning. Since when have moats and duck houses in any way facilitated the political process? Parliament has slipped deeply into a culture of indolence, greed and complacency. Many would call it fraud at the taxpayers' expense. I am a town councillor in Milton Keynes. If I use tax payer's money in this way I would be prosecuted and thrown out of office.

The Book of Dead Philosophers

There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in philosophy.
Andy Martin on the thoughts of dead philosophers



Wittgenstein (died of cancer) said that, if you wanted to become a philosopher, you should become a car mechanic, not read books about philosophy. Derrida (also cancer) said that, of all the books in his library, he had only read three or four, but he had really read those.

Simon Critchley (not dead yet) follows a third way in *The Book of Dead Philosophers*, closer to Bertrand Russell's *History of Western Philosophy* (Routledge, 1946; 2004), in trying to read everything but fashioning the vastness of what he has read into snappy sound bites – or, in a darker vein, vampire bites.

This is a philosophers' graveyard, where lovers of wisdom return to deliver not just their thoughts on death but to re-live their last moments. The emphasis is less on the philosopher's stone than the tombstone. Maybe Critchley should have included Spike Milligan's classic epitaph, 'I told you I was ill.' It would have summed up a lot of what philosophers have to say.

It is possible that philosophy began as a form of mourning ritual. From before Plato (lice infestation), it tended to argue that death was a gateway to transcendence and the contemplation of the Good, the True, and the Beautiful. Therefore, to philosophize (as Montaigne

– hit by a horse – said) was to learn how to die. Some time around Nietzsche (syphilis or possibly kissing a horse), the stairway-to-heaven theory gave way to a focus on the absurdities of existence.

Hell is already here, in the shape of other people (Sartre: alcohol, tobacco, drugs). Critchley is a post-existentialist. He thinks that we suffer from a crippling fear of death and that contemplating the deaths of philosophers is one way to fix it.

You don't have to be a philosopher to die, but it probably helps. When the tormented Wittgenstein was offered an electric blanket for his birthday with the cheerful message, 'Many happy returns', he replied bluntly, 'There are no returns.' But the ultimate consolation of this book is that philosophy does not come up with any magic solutions. As Simone de Beauvoir observed, even saints have died howling and writhing.

Here, everybody dies in a fast-forward philosophical holocaust. It sounds grim, but Critchley has a lightness of touch, a nimbleness of thought, and a mocking graveyard humour that puts you in mind of Hamlet with a skull. There is a modesty here that reminds you that there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in philosophy.

Simon Critchley, *The Book of Dead Philosophers*, Granta, 2008.

Web overtakes newspapers in the USA

Barack Obama's victory in the 2008 US election has been attributed largely to how he used new information technologies, particularly social networking websites such as Facebook, so it will come as no surprise that research has shown that, for the first time, more Americans are reading their news online rather than traditional newspapers and printed media.

According to the Washington-based Pew Research Centre, the percentage of Americans using the internet as a primary news source

soared from 24% in 2008 to 40% in 2009, overtaking the 35% who relied on printed sources. During these 12 months, television-accessed news also declined, from 74% to 70%. Sales of US newspapers fell nearly 5% in the six months prior to the US election. And the most popular US news story of the year? No, not the Presidential election – that came fourth – the credit crunch and the banking crisis.



Claiming for a carrier bag from a supermarket, Christmas tree decorations, light bulbs, bin liners, lavatory seats, chandeliers, Remembrance Day wreaths, lawnmowers, porno films, swimming pool cleaning, dog food, an ironing board, slotted spoons, comics, nappies, the removal of moles from a lawn, pipe repairs under a tennis court, Sky sport subscriptions, a pram, hanging baskets, an IKEA bathrobe, mock Tudor beams, food when the Commons is no longer sitting, council tax discounts, coat hangers, sachets of mulled wine, a mousetrap, a lemon, a wooden spoon, a plug and copious quantities of horse manure, demonstrates that nothing was too small or trivial enough for some MPs.

Meanwhile pensioners struggle on benefits, unemployment reaches levels not experienced in decades, and the gap between rich and poor, already reported in this issue of *Society Matters*, widens further. It has been a risible experience watching MPs offer to pay back what they claimed, oblivious in some cases to both the extent of public wrath or the recognition that many of us, struggling to cope with the impact of a recession, actually pay for these 'honourable' members largesse.

What seems clear is that the rising scandal over expenses damages the integrity of our political system. As Transparency International reminded us, we have already begun to slip down the corruption credibility league. We may sink without trace once this lot is sorted out. Check the Transparency International website next February and see where Britain has come in 2009. Out of the top thirty is my bet. For a government obsessed with league tables this CPI league table is one the government will want to hide from view.

By then of course we might have an 'independent' panel assessing all MP claims or a different system to fund second homes, but something in what Ghandi told us persuades me that the next generation of MPs may find a way round even the most zealous of watchdogs. If they were given a moral compass, they would still want to claim for it.

It gives me no pleasure to reflect that, while many of these MPs may indeed lose their seats in the General Election of 2010 because of excessive expense claims, a few will get to keep those lavatory seats we have paid for.

The expenses scandal has rocked the political system to its foundations. The malaise is systemic. Members of Parliament have resigned and a few have been barred from standing again. The government have promised swift and effective curbs on excesses. While the fabric of our democracy may not have sustained a fatal blow there are many who now call for a new reform agenda, especially in the context of the increase in right and centre right votes at the June European elections.

Our forthcoming General Election may not bring about a solution but it might lead us out of this morass. In the end we need a new politics before we need a new government, but first, like the financial services industry, we must put an end to self-regulation.

You must be Jo King

With a name like Skellington I have had to take a lot of stick over the years, writes the editor. At primary school I was not alone and indeed was reassured somewhat by the presence on my form register of Roland Butter and Otto Tott, which took away some of the guffaws when the teacher got to my surname. But imagine being saddled with some of the names discovered by a survey for the parenting group TheBabyWebsite.com. The survey trawled online telephone records and came up with a class register to make any pupil whoop until lunchtime. I give you, dear reader, from the UK: Tim Burr, Rose Bush, Pearl Button, Barry Cade, Justin Case, Mary Christmas, Barb Dwyer, Doug Hole, Jo King, Priti Manek, Hazel Nutt, Carrie Oakley, Bob Sleigh, Stan Still, Paige Turner, and, most wonderful of all, Anna Sasin. While in the USA, always a rich source for the amusing moniker, the survey found: Dr Leslie Doctor, Dr Thoulton Surgeon, and San Francisco dentist Les Plack.



Dependency time-bomb

Recession-hit Britain must urgently take steps to prepare for the seismic impact of a rapidly ageing population, argues George Magnus, author of The Age of Aging

The Spanish filmmaker Luis Buñuel reportedly once quipped that age is not important unless you're a cheese. Quite right, and who would not see longer and healthier life expectancy as something to celebrate? But beyond this, a darker side to the issue of a rapidly ageing population also looms.

For the first time, Britain's over-65s outnumber people aged under 16. By 2035, these two age groups will have grown by 4 million (or nearly 50%), and 500,000, respectively. The working age group in between will be a little smaller. These developments capture the economic essence of ageing populations, namely the sharp rise in economic dependency of older citizens on those of working age. For the UK, this means that while there are now four people of working age supporting each pensioner, by 2035 it will be just two and a half, and by 2050 only two. The financial and economic crisis is accentuating the urgency of addressing these demographic trends, not least because several hundred million baby boomers (17 million in the UK, 78 million in the USA) played a critical part in the economic boom of the last 20 years – and are now spearheading the march towards an ageing society.

The UK, note, is one of the better-positioned advanced nations when it comes to rapid ageing. Japan, Germany, Italy, Spain, Russia and all of Eastern Europe are in a far worse situation. Even China is ageing more rapidly than almost anywhere else. Its working-age population will start to decline next year – at about the same time as in Germany. This is a global phenomenon. It may lack the drama of the current economic crisis, and the visual imagery of the risks in climate change, but it is no less important or urgent.

The unique shifts in age structure have enormous implications for people, society and the economy. For individuals, the key question concerns the inadequacy of retirement savings, which are being destroyed by the financial crisis as equity and house values plummet, and by the collapse in interest rates.

For society, the main issues concern the provision of health and



Elderly woman walks past an advertisement for retirement homes that are under construction in Warwickshire

social care services, the nature of work and the workplace, and the investment made in human capital, or education and lifetime skill formation. These all require more funding, whether from the tax system, other public expenditure savings, public-private initiatives, or economic growth. The prospects for the next few years are not propitious, comprising anaemic growth and tough public spending in 2010–11.

For the economy, the challenge is to generate the growth and financial resources needed to meet age-related spending needs. Because of the measures needed to prevent the banking system from collapsing, public borrowing and public debt are already rising steeply. By 2010, UK public debt as a share of national income may have doubled to about 70%. While cause for worry, this is by no means unprecedented or irreversible, but how will we be able to afford to pay the bill for age-related spending?

Serious thought should be given to ageing society policies. This

must include higher participation rates of women and people aged over 64 in the labour force; realistic ways in which immigration might help to boost the labour force; the rigorous pursuit of better educational attainment standards and lifetime learning facilities; a long-term programme designed to assure adequate financing for pensions and other age-related spending; and public education about the rapidly ageing population.

None of this is to suggest that the government and local authorities in the UK, for example, have been idle. In the last two years there have been new programmes in the form of Putting People First, the establishment of the Care Quality Commission, and the Carers' Strategy. The LinkAge Plus initiative, designed to deliver integrated goods and services to older citizens, has been underway in eight pilot areas since 2006. The government has introduced age-discrimination legislation, sought to encourage local authorities to use new technologies to strengthen health and social care, introduced housing programmes for the elderly, and emphasized the need for engagement with older people that gives them a voice in the delivery of care.

These initiatives address mainly quality of life issues. However, they do not constitute a coherent strategy that addresses the adverse economic and social effects of a rapidly ageing population, or the policies that can be put into place to avert them. The economic crisis has come at an especially bad time. It is having a shocking impact on older citizens who depend on their own meagre resources. In addition, it risks deferring still further a comprehensive approach to the management of our ageing societies.

For an excellent series of features exploring the social impact of ageing see: guardian.co.uk/ageingbritain

George Magnus is senior economic adviser for UBS investment bank and author of *The Age of Aging* (John Wiley, 2008). We are grateful to George and *The Guardian* for permissions to print this article.

The long game

More people in the UK are living to an older age than ever before, and more and more of us are set to join them. But before you celebrate, consider the implications, says Guy Brown

Something seems to be happening to 'old' people. When I was young, the old seemed like a rare, delicate and almost invisible species – here one day, gone the next. Now they seem to be everywhere, hanging around much longer and making a lot more noise. Sir Mick Jagger is 65, and still strutting his stuff.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) recently announced that in the UK there are now more pensioners (over 60/65 years) than children (under 16). They constitute nearly 20% of the population, and are increasing, so we may no longer be able to regard the old as marginal, invisible and non-functional, or even as one category. The nature of being old has changed so dramatically, that our concept of 'old' is out of date. It is time for a rethink.

What is new is the number and age of the old. Consider the following: in the USA, the percentage of the population aged over 85 was 0.1% in 1900, 1.5% in 2000, and is projected to be 5% in 2050. Thus, there are 15 times more very old people than there were in 1900, as a proportion of the US population, and by 2050 there are expected to be 50 times as many. Similar figures can be found throughout the developed world, and the developing world is fast catching up.

But who are the old? According to current concepts, there are four ages of humankind: childhood, roughly 0–20 years; young adulthood, 20–40 years; middle age, 40–60 years; and old age, 60–80 years. However, more than 5% of the UK population is now over the age of 80, and this population is rapidly increasing. In fact, there are 10,000 people in the UK over the age of 100, and this population is predicted to increase to 250,000 in 2051.

So the future is not just old, but very old indeed. Some scientists believe that ageing slows above 100 years and may even reverse beyond 120 years, holding out the prospect of some Shangri-La in the thin air of extreme ageing. We are voyaging into a new realm of human life that has hardly existed before, and about which we know very little.

The 'old' are no longer a homogenous population. We need to revise our concept of the ages to include the young old (60–80), the middle old (80–100), and the oldest old (100–120). These are radically different phases of life, as different as youth from middle age, or middle age from old age. At 63, Dame Helen Mirren shares little or nothing with a centenarian in the dementia unit of a care home.

The old are diverse in other ways. It was once believed that humans had a fixed maximum lifespan at the end of an invariant genetic programme of ageing, but we now know this is false. Ageing and lifespan are not programmed into our genes; they result from accumulating damage to our cells and bodies due to random events in our environment and cells. The result is that ageing itself is heterogeneous: different people lose different functions in different ways at different rates. However, our attitudes and policies fail to account for this vast diversity of the 'old'. Policies that are helpful for the young old may be harmful for the middle old. Strategies that work for the healthy old may be useless for the ill old.



The pensioners' playground in Blackley, north Manchester, has been specifically designed for older people

Loss of function has always been a defining feature of old age – after all, that is why older people retire. However, medical and technological advances mean that many age-related losses of functions can be overcome, delayed or bypassed. Glasses, hearing aids, motorized wheelchairs, hip replacements and Viagra are just the obvious examples of this denial of ageing. For these and other health and economic reasons, the quality of life of the young old has improved over the last 100 years. However, the functional problems of the middle old and oldest old are not being addressed, resulting in a starkly poor quality of life.

We now tend to regard the age of retirement as the watershed between adulthood and old age. However, the state age of retirement is a relatively recent invention, located at an arbitrary age. Up until the industrial revolution, retirement at a particular age was an option open only to a relatively few, rich Europeans. Everyone else worked until they dropped.

The magic retirement age of 65 has been attributed to Germany's first chancellor, Otto von Bismarck who, in the 1880s, when pressed to pay pensions to war veterans, reluctantly agreed. When further pressed to set an age at which these veterans might receive their pensions, Bismarck is reputed to have demanded, 'How old are they when they die?' His officials replied, 'Around 65.' And Bismarck retorted, 'Then they get their pensions at 65.'

Now a woman who retires at 60, having worked for 30 years, would be expected to live another 25 years. This creates obvious economic problems, both for the individual and the state. Increased lifespan leads to increased healthcare costs, with a reduced fraction of the population working. Inevitably, more old people will have to work, or work longer: retirement may no longer be an option for many healthy old.

However, many already work as voluntary carers for aged spouses and, in the future, this will also include aged parents and aged strangers. Some healthy old people are happy to do voluntary work when they retire, but more will have to be done to empower the young old to help the older old. Old age seems natural, but is the

exact opposite. Death from old age is very rare in wild animals, and was rare in humans up until a century ago. Only in the unnatural conditions of modern society and medicine can the exotic diseases and disabilities of old age bloom. Old age was created by our past and present culture. During the 20th century, the relentless battle with mortality slashed death rates from infections, heart attack and stroke, resulting in a doubling of life expectancy in the world. However, there was no comparable battle with ageing and the chronic ailments of ageing. The result is a massive expansion of disease, disability and dementia at the end of life.

Currently, 30% of the UK old get dementia before dying, and this is likely to increase to 50% within a few decades. The reason for this expansion is that the prevalence of dementia increases exponentially with age; as average lifespan increases many more live to an age where they get dementia. And dementia is just one of many such ailments of ageing that include loss of health, sight, hearing, mobility and memory, with associated depression, social isolation and confinement to care homes.

According to the ONS, life expectancy in the UK increased by 2.2 years during the last decade, but healthy-life expectancy increased by only 0.6 years, so years of ill-health increased by 1.6 years. Death is currently preceded by about 10 years of chronic disease or disability, and this is increasing.

Government health targets are contributing to this disaster by insistently targeting causes of death instead of chronic disease. Moreover, the recent proposals from the Conservatives on health targets repeat the same mistake.

This problem is one of the largest of the 21st century. If we do nothing about it, it will swallow up our health service, then our economy, and eventually ourselves. We must do something urgently to help the older old – before we join them.

Guy Brown is a senior lecturer at the University of Cambridge, and research scientist on cell life, death and degenerative disease. His book *The Living End: The Future of Death, Aging and Immortality* is published by Palgrave Macmillan (2007).

This is an edited version of an article that first appeared in *The Guardian*, 10 September 2008, and is adapted with the author's permission.

Britain's ageing population

- Life expectancy rises by 16 minutes every hour.
- The percentage of the population over state pensionable age – over 11 million – now exceeds the percentage of population aged under 16.
- The fastest growing age group are those over 80 years of age – 2,749,507 of them – or 4.7% of the population.
- The over 90s age group rose by 1.1 million between 1981 and 2007.
- The mortality rate for the over 75s has fallen to an all-time low of 83 deaths per thousand in 2006–2007.
- There are over 9,000 centenarians still alive in Britain in 2008 compared with 100 in 1911.
- By 2031 Britain could have 40,000 centenarians.

Medicine, health and poverty in the developing world

Maureen Mackintosh, Professor of Economics, asks if access to safe and essential medicines in Africa and India can be improved by NGO action

Markets for medicines are dangerous places. When you put that little pill in your mouth you are quite unable to judge personally its safety and efficacy. In rich countries, therefore, regulation of production and sale is quite tight, and prescribing of medicines is monopolized by medically trained personnel. Unless you buy medicines over the internet, you should be moderately safe. There are also high levels of subsidy so, although some people do struggle to pay, access to safe medicines is very widespread.

This is not the case in low income countries in Africa, in much of India and elsewhere. There, medicines' markets are much more dangerous and exclusionary. There are failures of regulation all along the 'supply chain' that links the low cost producers of medicines – in India, in African countries and elsewhere – to those who need them.

The Indian pharmaceutical companies have done the developing world a favour by selling essential medicines on a large scale at dramatically cheaper prices than those produced in the West. But effective Indian government regulation of the production and sale of medicines is lacking; there is only very limited inspection by outside bodies such as the World Health Organisation (WHO), and only limited regulation by importing governments. And not all producers and importers are reputable: there is a serious problem of substandard and fake medicines across low income Africa and also in India itself.

Furthermore, many low income people cannot afford the medicines they need, and when they can, they often find them unavailable. The WHO estimates that in Africa as a whole, almost half of the population do not have access to a minimum list of 20 essential medicines, continuously available and affordable within one hour's walk from their home; in many individual countries the situation is worse. There has recently been a huge and well-publicized increase in aid funding for medicines for Africa. The Global Fund for HIV/AIDS, TB and Malaria and other major funders spent over US\$1.5 billion between 2003 and 2008 on medicines for Africa (see www.theglobalfund.org). Access to medicines for HIV and TB has risen as a result, and malaria cases in children are falling in some countries; however access to other essential medicines, such as antibiotics, basic medicines for chronic illnesses, and medicines required for dealing with complications of childbirth, remains very poor.

A recent study by researchers from the OU, India, Tanzania and Finland, supported by the UK Economic and Social Research Council, analyzed the production and sale of basic medicines along the 'supply chain' from Indian and African manufacturers to the local users, examining how the markets operate at export and import, wholesale and retail levels all the way to remote rural areas. We were particularly interested to test the claims that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are alleviating the situation for poor consumers of medicines in Africa (see *Non-governmental Action to*



Improve Access by the Poor to Good Quality, Low Cost Drugs at the OU website www.open.ac.uk/ikd/projects_lowcostdrugs.shtml.

Most people in Tanzania, one of the poorest countries in the world with a Gross National Income per head of about \$400 a year in 2007, have to find cash to buy medicines if they become ill. Many buy from effectively unregulated local shops. There are some NGO dispensaries – mainly run by churches in the rural markets we studied – and some government facilities too. The government facilities and NGOs buy drugs from more reliable sources than the private shops and generally store them better. But low income patients shop around for the cheapest source, which is often the local store. The result is unlicensed prescribing and poor information: only 30 per cent of the medicine buyers we interviewed could state the name of the medicine they had bought, and a third did not know for how long they should take it. Even worse, many had bought less than a full course of the medicine. This is a highly dangerous practice,

since it contributes strongly to resistance to standard treatments, but selling part-treatments is now regarded as normal by all the shops we interviewed and even by a majority of NGO dispensers.

In general, the NGOs in the rural areas improved access to medicines in comparison to the private shops. But their behaviour was strongly influenced and constrained by having to compete on price with the private shops, and this will not change while access to medicines is through a market transaction. There is also a big gap in local NGO activism: our Tanzanian research colleague is strongly committed to building up activist movements to address consumer protection and consumer rights in markets for medicines; at the moment such rights are missing in law and fact.

Where NGOs make a large difference is at the wholesale level. In Tanzania, non-profit wholesalers help to hold down prices and improve quality. They buy efficiently on the international market; supply more reliable medicines at lower prices than private wholesalers; and contribute to safe, low cost medicine availability. The NGOs, like the government wholesaler, provide quality control and buy from local Tanzanian firms. Indeed, one of the surprises of the research was to discover how important Tanzanian pharmaceutical manufacturing is for access to medicines within the country. The majority of the basic medicines widely purchased in rural areas were locally made. Reputable Indian manufacturers are now retreating from supplying basic generic medicines to African markets, and turning to supply rich country markets: we argue for NGO support for active Tanzanian industrial policy to develop local production of basic medicines linked to health needs.

In the international market, international non-profit wholesalers such as the International Dispensary Association have played a major role in replacing missing regulation of medicines markets serving low income countries. These social enterprises were set up by faith-based organizations and also by political and social movement activists. They helped to create the concept of essential medicines lists, undermining efforts by large pharmaceutical firms to sell expensive branded drugs instead of cheaper generics to low income countries; they developed a reputation for reliable quality control; and set price benchmarks commercial firms had to meet.

International NGOs have also been highly active in campaigning around access to medicines. They have had immense achievements, especially in promoting access to HIV/AIDS treatment, but we argue for a broader campaigning vision. Treating access to medicines as primarily a development aid problem has had a downside: it has diverted attention from the extent to which people across the globe face shared public health problems such as safety, and threats to sustainable availability of effective products including vaccines. Dangerous, very unequal and exclusionary market-driven access to medicines is not only ethically intolerable – it also threatens the health of us all.

A message from Africa

Protecting the world's poorest people, who will be worst hit by the economic crisis, should benefit all of us. In these hard times we should not ignore the developing world argues Kofi Annan

One might assume, with the barrage of bad news on jobs, and announcements of gigantic bailouts, that the brunt of the global financial meltdown is being borne by developed countries like Japan, the UK and the USA. In fact, people in the poorest countries may end up paying the highest price.

World Bank forecasts indicate that declines in economic activity and jobs could result in more than 50 million people being added to those already living on less than \$2 a day. Hard-won gains in poverty alleviation, health, education and food security are being reversed.

As western politicians rush to protect their economies, the potential impact of the crisis on the least developed countries has received little attention. Failure to support them could have disastrous consequences; success in doing so could contribute to global recovery.

It is not hard to understand why African leaders feel aggrieved and anxious. It is deeply unfair that the world's least advantaged may be the biggest casualties of an emergency they had no part in generating. Moreover, it comes when many African countries have achieved progress in growth, human development and governance, despite many examples of authoritarian and corrupt rule. The last decade has seen inflation and debt decrease, while trade and financial reserves have increased. African economic growth rates have outpaced Europe's, and the numbers living in poverty have decreased.

There is astonishment at the colossal sums assigned by industrialized countries to mitigate the impact of the crisis. Bump starting their economies will be good news for Africa, but the trillions of dollars used dwarf the \$100bn a year assigned by OECD nations for development assistance. Honouring aid commitments is a litmus test of the global solidarity being demanded by G20 leaders.

Ignoring the needs of the developing world is grossly unfair and shortsighted. As revenues plummet, governments will struggle to maintain basic services such as healthcare and education. The risk of social unrest and political instability is growing. If action is not



Child drinks some water in Kibera - the largest slum in Africa, Nairobi, Kenya

taken, the consequences will be disastrous for those affected and costly in the long term.

Investing in Africa's infrastructure and clean energy potential would create jobs, address deficits that constrain growth, provide a basis for food security, and boost regional trade. It would also create business and markets for the world.

At a meeting in Dar es Salaam to discuss the crisis, leaders described how large-scale projects are being put on hold or cancelled as investors fail to mobilize funds. Africa needs – and deserves – its own massive financial intervention. Including it in a coordinated global stimulus plan makes sense. The alternative is the prospect of national plans, with the risk of beggar-thy-neighbour fiscal policies and a drift to protectionism.

International financial institutions can be vehicles for stimulus. However, an enhanced role for the IMF and World Bank must go hand in hand with reform – in lending practices and in becoming representative and legitimate. Emerging economies such as Brazil and China need governance rights commensurate with their economic weight. In addition, the least developed countries should have a stronger voice at the table.

Kofi Annan was Secretary-General of the United Nations from 1997 to 2006 and chairs the Africa Progress Panel, www.africanprogresspanel.org

This is an edited version of an article that appeared in *The Guardian*, 16 March 2009.

Childbirth death toll increasing worldwide

Women in the world's least developed countries are 300 times more likely to die in childbirth than in developed countries. More than half a million children die each year, according to UNICEF's annual report published in 2009. The United Nations Children's Emergency Fund estimated that over 70,000 of the deaths are young girls aged between 15 and 19. Despite reducing childbirth deaths being one of the millennium development goals, the death rate is increasing.

Autism and me

The Autism Bill 2009 is progressing through the Parliamentary process. The Bill seeks to make it a statutory duty for local authorities to recognize the needs of autistic people and improve services. Debbie Gregory, an adult education volunteer who began her OU studies in 2005, explains why the Bill is so important to families everywhere

It was March 2008 when my 9-year-old son was eventually diagnosed with an autistic spectrum disorder (ASD). From babyhood onwards he started to accumulate odd traits including communication problems, hyperactivity, sensitivities to touch and noise, and clumsiness.

Health visitors did not take my concerns seriously and at school nursery his problems were blamed on me. When he started school he appeared to settle at first but after a while school life started to have a traumatic effect.

My son had regular violent outbursts at home, which accumulated in a wrecked house and attempts to run away. As his peers matured, his explosions continued, his academic difficulties became pronounced and his self-esteem plummeted. At the same time, my relationship with the school became tense.

At meetings to assess his academic progress, I was pressured by teachers to get him to do homework. I tried to explain my son's behaviour and his refusal to do homework but they did not listen, blaming me for my poor attitude to education.

Convinced there was a problem, we approached our GP who admitted he knew little about these sorts of things. He referred us to a paediatrician who had little idea either. It was only when I mentioned dyspraxia that we were offered a referral to a specialist centre. We grabbed it. After a long wait our son started a barrage of tests after which we received the diagnosis of ASD and a folder of information. No other support was offered. Nevertheless, I was relieved that I was not to blame for my son's behaviour although resentful that for nine years no one had listened to me. The psychologist's report helped us build a positive understanding of our son and to develop strategies to manage his difficulties.



Autistic child at an indoor play centre

However, our progress was shattered in February 2009 when our son (now in year 6) refused to attend school, a refusal that still stands. It is not clear what triggered this but it is likely that he just couldn't cope any more, unsupported as he was, within the school environment.

We were left with a child who was frightened of leaving the house and barely able to cope with people visiting us, even his grandparents. After a while, we got support from a child psychiatrist and he is now slowly improving, though he remains resistant to school.

The school finally realize that the 'normal' image projected by my son at school masked a complex disorder. Consequently they

are helping us apply for a statement of educational needs so that he can get extra support at school. It is the only resource available to us for there is no provision for autistics in my area. However, I have been warned that it is unlikely that my son will be given a statement, in which case, like countless others across the country, I will have to fight my LEA for my son's right to an appropriate education. As stressful as this will be, I am equally troubled by those people in a similar position to myself who are unable to fight for support – what happens to them?

The Autism Bill, if it became law, would end the inequality between those who can fight and those who can't by compelling local authorities to acknowledge this disability and provide the necessary services.

There remains no provision for autistics in my area. We've recently been informed that the LEA will not be assessing my son for a statement, even though they admit that our son has complex needs! Like countless others across the country, I will now have to fight my LEA for my son's right to an appropriate education.

Useful websites on autism

The National Autistic Society (www.nas.org.uk) – an extensive website that provides information, support and services, details of campaigns and progress of the Autism Bill. It also has a helpline.

Local Parent Partnership Services (www.parentpartnership.org.uk) – a statutory service that provides information, advice and support to parents/carers of children with special educational needs (SEN).



Even Stuart Hall does it!

Associate Lecturer Tom Hulley tells us 'we' should be more careful with how we use the word 'we'

My concern is about the first person plural, 'we'. This word together with its derivatives 'us' and 'our' fall like confetti in academic writing. Never one for censorship, I would like to see them banished by smarter usage. While the courses I teach indulge in occasional academic laziness, students copy the error and fill their essays with assertions about 'we this'... and 'we that ...'.

Look at Stuart's words again. Are 'we' a group of academics or representatives of government or voters or what? It is more than ironic when talking about integration that he has excluded many of 'us'. That is, if 'us' refers to people in the Open University or in the UK or whatever. Quite simply, how can 'we' fail to know nothing about open Islam if many of 'us' are Muslims?

That is just one of the problems with 'we' and 'us' – they exclude. Having excluded, they can then be used to suggest that everyone thinks in the same way. They become normative. 'We know nothing about it' overlooks how a number of people engage with open Islam through dialogue, reading, visiting websites and so on. Somehow difference becomes insignificant or even deviant. After all, if 'we' know nothing about it then only odd people will bother finding it.

Yes, yes – I am reading into the words, but I hope the spirit of my complaint makes sense. Those teaching and studying social science may have noticed that exclusion and norm setting are issues usually seen as problematic, hence my accusation of 'academic laziness'. The courses I teach claim to encourage questioning and critical awareness as learning outcomes.

... there is a whole gradient of Islam that has been open to dialogue for many years and we have failed to respond to it. We know nothing about it. We stereotype it. We never had the tough argument that leads to better integration.

Stuart Hall quoted in *Society Matters* 11, page 6

There are more charges against little friendly 'we'. Its use is undemocratic. By writing, 'we know nothing', the writer is pretending to be able to speak for everyone. However qualified and trusted, I doubt if any academic could even speak for their own discipline, without any reservations, let alone their institution or the wider society.

Am I being pedantic? As mentioned above, 'we' is a friendly word. That is, perhaps, its biggest danger. Possibly, the use of 'we' originates in a more co-operative, shared approach to understanding. It has some feminist provenance in the sense that it is holistic and non-hierarchical – at first sight. Unfortunately, second-wave feminism has been accused of not including various women who were not the prevailing 'we' – white, middle class and western.

Before the trolls start jumping with delight, can I say that this (mis)usage may be the only mistake academic feminism ever made; at least insights gained in social science from feminism far outweigh any shortcomings. Team teaching and collaboration also have feminist influence, so the use of 'we' can be precise. There is a degree of co-operation in 'we' likely to reduce rivalries between academics and distance between tutors and students.

Despite this, the term causes further confusion. Lone authors, and students writing essays, put things like, 'We are going to look at ...' rather than the dry 'this essay will look at ...'. Some academics dislike 'I' but it is honest and accurate. After all, how can an essay look at anything? It is an inanimate object or an abstraction (I am a fusspot not a linguist). How do tutors know that a student writing 'we' is fulfilling the signed declaration (Section 1 of TMA form PT3) that 'the work presented here is my own'.

Finally, I must offer my apologies to Stuart Hall, partly because he is not the worst offender but mainly because his contribution is more important than my gripe. Also, he was in conversation and not writing a paper. I suspect he is big enough not to mind being targeted in order to make others feel better about their slips. Stuart's new initiative deserves respect, as does his conclusion, 'the least we can do is acknowledge our difference'. This is a correct use of 'we' that other usages fail to reach. It means everyone, but differentiated.

Acknowledging differences also makes similarities more meaningful, so long as people are not judged only on their difference. I have a hunch that there are always more similarities among, than differences between, people. Words are important. That way we can write less mistakes and make more amounts of tutors happy. (No doubt *Society Matters* will not be offering a prize for a correct version of the previous sentence.) Now, does anyone want to reconsider 'Society thinks'?

Words that damage effective communication

In 2009, to mark National Plain English Day, the Local Government Association (LGA) published a list of 100 words that public bodies should not use if they want to communicate effectively. Unless councils talk to residents in a language they can understand, the work they do can become inaccessible.

Here is a sample of words or phrases that should be banned: agencies, stakeholder, best practice, bottom up, can do culture, capacity building, champion, empowerment, consensual, core value, customer, evidence base, external challenge, fast-track, governance, revenue stream, incentivizing, fulcrum, guidelines, improvement levers, joined up, level playing field, localities, multi-agency, preventative services, process driven, signpost, slippage, step change, sustainable, transparency, value-added, and vision.

I am not sure the message has reached the Open University. Perhaps they should have a look at the plain English website (www.plainenglish.co.uk).



Are you honest online?

US researchers have found that people are more likely to lie in emails than in handwritten documents. In tests 48 students were given \$89 and told to split it with a person they did not know and who had little idea of how much money was available. A total of 92% of the students lied when dividing the money over email, compared to only two-thirds of the students in written formats. More students using email did not disclose the full total available and pocketed the rest. The psychologists concluded that people appear to act in self-serving ways when typing as opposed to writing by hand.

The research, *Being Honest Online*, published at the Academy of Management annual meeting in California in the summer of 2008, warns businesses to be very wary over workplace email communications when it comes to trust.

Alan Woodley, Senior Research Fellow in the Institute of Educational Technology, takes a sideways look at the first 40 years of the Open University

Inevitably there have been highs and lows during the Open University's first 40 years. With true British spirit we modestly accepted the former and gritted our teeth through the latter. I arrived in 1970, too late to be issued with the anti-building-site-mud-kit, namely carpet slippers. However, here are my personal favourites since then.

Mail

- Disaster hits in the first month of the OU when Britain experiences the first national postal strike.
- Delight and consternation among philosophy students when they receive real sheep brains by mistake.

Buildings

- The 'RAF hut', a relic from Bletchley Park (allegedly), continues to function as offices at Walton Hall and so far has given 40 years' service.
- Mike Pentz, the first Dean of Science, persuades St Paul's Cathedral to let him hang a Foucault's pendulum from the dome.
- A campus building is named after Philip Sully in 2006 because he had successfully completed 61 OU courses.
- The Cellar Bar underneath Walton Hall, created with money from the Aneurin Bevan fund, is saved from closure in 2006 following a staff petition.

Fashion

- The OU becomes endearingly associated with big lapels and kipper ties when the original black and white TV maths programmes are repeated seemingly forever.
- Michael Drake, the man who put the 'D' in social science courses, wears a boiler suit for a year in order to meet his alimony payments.

Honorary degrees

- Édith Cresson, a European Commissioner, is awarded an honorary doctorate then gets caught up in fraud allegations. She does not turn up to collect the degree.
- Christine Young, a clerk in my Institute, receives an Honorary Masters Degree for services to the University.

Offices

- My first office in 1970 is in a 17th-century manor house that was formerly a stud farm. It is oak-panelled and has an en-suite bathroom.
- Staff are now herded into sepulchral hangars known as 'open plan'.

Outer Space

- Sadness on Christmas Day 2003 when Professor Colin Pillinger's Beagle 2 apparently forgets to slow down before landing on Mars.
- Joy in 2004 when Professor John Zarnecki announces that the surface of Saturn's moon Titan is like crème brûlée.

Disability

- The OU has offered educational opportunities to thousands of students with a variety of physical and mental disabilities.
- When I was 'Acting Job-sharing Equal Opportunities Officer' we visited the OU warehouse to congratulate them on the number of employees they had engaged who had disabilities. We were told that most of them had acquired these disabilities from working in the warehouse.

Awareness

- Public awareness of the OU is over 90 per cent. (Apparently you can never get to 100 per cent even with something like the Royal family.)
- Knowledge is taken for granted in *The Guardian* cryptic crossword. e.g. 'A author's grasping heavyweight clue in place of OU (6, 6)'.
- The film *Educating Rita* has become a classic. The UK premiere was at Walton Hall – not many people know that! Julie Walters attends and brings the house down.
- The 1995–96 Queen of the South away shirt is now a collector's item because it displayed OU sponsorship.



Computers

- The OU did not own a computer when it began. Punch cards were driven to Cranfield University for overnight runs.
- Somebody managed to email all OU staff warning them that IET's fridge was about to be defrosted. A recipient from Scotland said he had not visited for seven years so, if it was his yoghurt, it was definitely out of date.
- People in the Computing Department continue to work on key issues such as 'the computer generation of cryptic crossword clues using a semantically-backed unchunking grammar'.

Star staff

- In 1991 Jocelyn Bell Burnell is appointed as the first female Professor of Physics in the UK. As a postgraduate student she discovered radio pulsars with her thesis supervisor. Many felt she should have shared his Nobel prize.
- Some people are disappointed when Stuart Hall turns up as Professor of Sociology. They were expecting the compere from *It's a Knockout*. I am delighted because Professor Hall last taught me during a student sit-in at Birmingham University.

Acts of God

- The River Ouzel floods the ring road on a regular basis. Canoes have been seen on the football pitch.
- Fires are rare. Once a computer fire burned down the Children's Centre (guinea pigs were the only victims). Another fire was caused by somebody trying to heat mince pies on a photocopier.
- Walton Hall was cut off by snow in 2007. One member of staff skied to work.

Food

- In 2006 Greenfeast, the supplier of wholesome organic food on campus, is banished on 'elfnsafety' grounds.
- In 2009 the Refectory is demolished on taste grounds.

Logos

- The blue and yellow original logo was replaced. The new corporate logo, which some critics thought looked like a toilet seat, was deemed to be more symbolic of a true seat of learning.

The future

I trust that these highs and lows will continue. The worst that could happen to the OU would be for it to be seen as adrift in a sea of mediocrity.

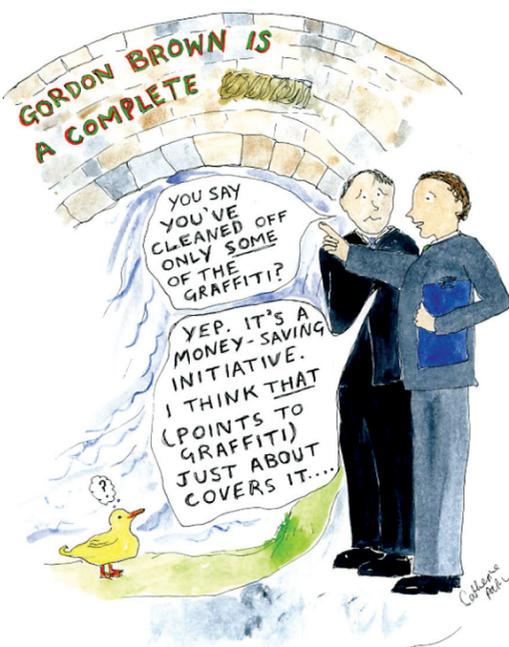
If you want to get a 2:1 have more sex

If you want to get a 2:1 at Oxford University, it seems you have to have more sex, according to a survey in 2009 by the student newspaper Cherwell. You are also much more likely to achieve a first if you are homosexual.

The survey of 850 students also found a correlation between sexual activity (between three and five times a week) and degree subject, with students taking degrees in politics, economics, philosophy, English literature and history reporting the most sexual activity.

Students who have sex less than once a month or abstain were found to achieve either a first class honours degree or a fail. One in seven surveyed claimed they had still to lose their virginity. Older students were found to be getting far more bedroom action: 27 per cent of graduates claimed to be having intercourse three to four times per week, in comparison to only 21 per cent of undergraduates.

The Open University have no plans to introduce questions about sexual engagement on their end of course surveys!



Graffiti moment

A hard-up government body sent a team to clean a graffiti-strewn bridge. The team was ordered to wash off only the most offensive words because of 'budget constraints'. British waterways told staff to select the strongest swear words and ignore the rest – leaving the bridge covered in expletives despite a heavy cost to taxpayers. They washed off terms such as f*** but left gang tags and less strong words including 'bitch' and 'whore'.



For spam think Egham

Egham has been named the spam capital of Britain. Workers in the Surrey town find their inboxes receive an average of 189 junk messages a day, a higher average per person than anywhere else in the country, new figures reveal. Fareham on the south coast is the spammers' least favourite target, with business users receiving on average just two junk emails a week, according to a survey by the internet security company MessageLabs. The next worst hit towns are Sutton Coldfield in the Midlands, Sutton in south London, and Macclesfield in Cheshire. None of the UK's biggest cities appeared inside the top 25, with London ranked 28th, Manchester 81st, Leeds 91st, Liverpool 99th, Newcastle 166th and Bristol 167th.



Happy like Vanuatu

Andrew Simms, policy director of the New Economics Foundation, believes the experience of small islands can teach us a lot about living good lives at low environmental cost

'A man who falls from a 100-storey building will survive the first 99 storeys unscathed,' wrote the economist E.J. Mishan in response to critics of his attack on the costs of economic growth. It was the 1960s and then, as now, it was heresy to question growth. The cry went up: 'But natural resources haven't actually run out yet, and what about the costs of not growing?' Mishan returned to his falling man: 'Were he as sanguine as our technocrats, his confidence would grow with the number of storeys he passed on his downward flight and would be at a maximum just before his free-fall abruptly halted.'

The environmental movement was labeled alarmist and wrong in reaction to the subsequent *Limits to Growth* report, written by scientists at MIT, which projected the natural resource constraints of trying to grow indefinitely in a finite space. When, last year, a detailed study compared the original report with 30 years of data and trends, it found a solid correlation between projections and reality. Among environmentalists there was less a sense of final triumph than sadness at a critical opportunity lost.

Now, with the UK's ecological debt still rising, and perhaps about 90 months to go before the world enters a more perilous phase of warming, we cannot afford another lost month. We must look for new models of economy that can operate in dynamic equilibrium with the biosphere on which we depend. In getting out of this mess, our creativity needs help. How can we begin to imagine what it looks like to live within our environmental means?

Britain is an island nation, and we could start by looking at the experience of other islands, especially small ones. Try to grow indefinitely on a small island, and you will come a cropper. It is not so different on a small island planet. When societies get it wrong on small islands, the consequences are clear. Think of the Pacific



island of Nauru, mined to virtual destruction for its rich phosphate. However, when islands get it right, they show how it is possible to lead good lives at much lower environmental cost.

The Happy Planet Index is a measure that assesses the relative efficiency with which natural resources are converted into meaningful human outcomes. It compares peoples' ecological footprints with life expectancy and life satisfaction. On average, island nations score better than other states on all three indicators. Within different global regions, islands come top. Malta was ranked highest in the western world; the top five nations in Africa are all islands, and two of the top four are in Asia. Sitting on top of the index was the island of Vanuatu.

Several reasons might explain why. Isolation and relative vulnerability have probably encouraged more adaptive and supportive ways of organizing island societies and economies. Traditional Pacific agriculture is, for example, highly resilient to extreme climatic conditions. Island economies like that of Tuvalu developed around sharing and gift giving, helping to create highly co-operative and mutually supportive communities.

In Karl Polanyi's classic work, *The Great Transformation*, he presents various types of social and economic organization on islands as evidence against some of Adam Smith's more sweeping assumptions on the central role of markets. Complex forms of 'gift exchange', in which people partly meet their needs not through markets mediated with cash, but through the giving and receiving of gifts, operated over vast areas, revealing a system that met people's needs in a challenging environment, and bonded society together.

In their book *The Spirit Level* – on the comprehensive importance of equality – Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett point out that economies more based on sharing and reciprocity equalize access to resources and create more equal, resilient communities. Conversely, unlimited growth, fed by individualistic, beggar-thy-neighbour competition, is no recipe for survival on an ecologically stressed and finite planet.

The next reason is deceptively simple: on islands you have to respect environmental limits. Close contact with nature may also help develop deeper cultural respect for ecosystems and ingrain notions of environmental stewardship. However, we are challenged at the global level to learn – in a few short years – lessons that such small communities often took millennia to learn. We can bail out the banks, but if we bankrupt the biosphere there is nowhere else to go.

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Do you want fries with that professor?

Tom Paine asks 'are we on the road to Hamburger University?'

Here are three newspaper headlines from recent times. Nothing significant you might think. But look again! Something important connects them.

London Metropolitan University confers honorary degree on Dalai Lama
Academic research paper on McDonald's
New Hall, Cambridge to be re-named Murray Edwards College

After the Dalai Lama's conferment, London Metropolitan University issued an official apology to the Chinese government for 'any unhappiness' it had caused. The university has a student recruitment office in Beijing. The academic research paper claimed 'Ronald (McDonald that is) performs an important transformational leadership function'. One of its authors holds a Bank of America professorship. And the proposal to change the name of New Hall came after two American millionaires donated £30 million to the college. Murray Edwards was their deceased son.

Far from being insignificant, these stories say much about current trends in higher education – the desire not to offend authoritarian states if there's money to be had, an eagerness to confer legitimacy on banal commercial business 'research', and the increasing reliance on private donations.

Despite its financial unravelling, neo-liberalism is going from strength to strength in higher education, prodding universities to 'serve markets' as their primary purpose. That can mean serving totalitarian regimes, fast food chains and millionaires. The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) has so far this year spent £150 million on 'knowledge transfer': 'Translating academic research', as it proudly puts it, 'into commercial product'.

In fact the state has devoted years to this process. Top-up fees, audit culture, dissecting teaching into often meaningless 'learning outcomes', and the deadening emphasis on skills to meet employer needs.

This 'marketization' process is being stepped up, ironically because of global market failure. But government has an answer, a theory to shape future universities – The Magnet Economy.

The workshop of the world once produced goods that gave it a 'comparative advantage', but UK manufacturing has shrunk. The 'magnet economy' is the alternative – selling expertise, not goods. It will bring demand from other countries to our door, just as a magnet attracts iron filings.

However, the theory is deeply flawed. Other economies aren't playing. Brazil, Russia, India and China have grown using their own expertise. As one analyst puts it, 'China's industrialization – the largest in history – has been achieved indigenously'. Furthermore, it has involved 'rejection of western advice'. The magnet is not attracting the world's fastest rising economic powers.

Within the UK, the fault line in the theory stems from the nature of labour demand. Expertise is an abstraction, requiring opportunities to be applied and practised. By 2000, Britain had only three high-skill sectors by world standards – financial services, pharmaceuticals and

arms manufacture. One of those is now dependent on bail-outs.

A recent report from the Commission for Employment and Skills concludes that 'the UK has too few high performance workplaces, too few employers producing high quality goods and services, too few businesses in high value added sectors'. And the country has managers who 'are not well qualified and do not apply accepted management practices'. They get low levels of training and 'without improving UK leadership and management, we will struggle to improve economic performance'.

The attempt to marketize universities into high-level skill providers is therefore mis-matched by labour demand, serving only to fuel over-skilling and under-employment. One study estimated, even before the economic recession, that a third of graduates could not find graduate-level jobs.

The prospect that faces UK universities is a difficult one. High-quality suppliers who cannot sell 'product' are tempted to go down-market. Universities face increasing demands for low skill, not high skill, training from UK employers. Dumbing-down becomes a market system outcome.

Alternatively, universities seek new international markets they hope will purchase high-skill 'expertise'. New technology may facilitate this, but it is available to all. This includes institutions within countries that have fewer difficulties addressing the geographic, administrative, economic and cultural differences our semi-globalized world encompasses. Successful international higher education requires strategies that address these 'global differences' rather than assume they no longer exist.

However, the real pre-requisite for a magnet economy exists outside the universities' control and beyond current political will. Research indicates that egalitarian income distribution has profoundly beneficial effects, including higher educational achievement and subsequent productivity. In less egalitarian countries, educational attainment is poorer, with higher drop-out rates. More egalitarian wealth distribution creates stronger consumer demand for higher quality goods and services, in turn calling for more high-skill labour.

Marketizing universities will not resolve the weaknesses of the UK economy without a government committed to a programme of egalitarian change. Without it, the chances of creating the magnet economy are slim. In its absence, expect more donor-pleasing institutional name changes, apologies to unsavoury regimes and commercial advertisements disguised as research. Oh ... and fewer universities.

There is more to life than GDP

According to the New Economics Foundation (NEF), there are strong correlations between happiness and a country's GDP, but not necessarily in the direction you would expect.

NEF found that sometimes the higher a country's HPI (its Happy Planet Index – an index that measures the quality of life and environmental factors), the lower was that country's GDP. At the top of the HPI index are Indonesia with 57.9, China with 56 and India with a GDP of 48.7 – under \$3,000 (the lowest GDP). Other countries with a high HPI and a relatively low GDP were Mexico, Argentina and Brazil.

At the bottom of the HPI index, countries with GDPs in the \$40,000 range had relatively lower HPIs than many with low GDP. The UK's HPI was 40.3 with a relatively high GDP of \$44,720.

At the bottom of the HPI index were the USA with an HPI of 28.8 and a GDP of \$47,335, South Africa with an HPI of 27.8 and a GDP of \$6,648, and Russia with an HPI of 22.8 and a GDP of \$14,688.

See: www.happyplanetindex.org/

A Social Science geography seminar publicity blurb

The Professor's work looks at intimate publics and the affective practices that bind strangers to each other via triangulated relations to something that seems stable, like national, racial, sexual, gendered, and class identity. Some of these orientations toward identity's distinguishing marks emerge from biopolitical historical distinctions – the more identified with bodiliness an American seems, the more likely that he/she belongs to a historically (formally and informally) subordinated population defined by its relation to normativity.

Did you know?

- 1 in 5 people marry a co-worker
- Half of all workplace romances finish within 3 months
- More people are killed each year by donkeys than are killed in plane crashes
- More people are killed by champagne corks than by poisonous spiders
- More people are killed due to the negligence of doctors than are killed by firearms
- More people are killed each year by coconuts than by sharks



From ethical consumption to ethical production

Philosophy student Ken Peel calls for a shift in the debate on environmental responsibility. Ethical production requires political action. We need to tackle producers and top-level distributors head-on

Have you noticed when you shop how we are increasingly encouraged to make ethical decisions? We are asked to decline plastic bags, consider food miles, favour organic produce and reject intensive farming. We are required by our councils to separate household waste, and there are punitive measures if we don't conform, ranging from refusal to remove refuse to, in some cases, fines.

Increasingly, the public is being persuaded to be ethical consumers and responsible recyclers. The reason for this is to reduce the impact on our environment, to save the planet.

I believe we need to do more than this. I think the reasoning behind the ethical consumer and responsible recycler position is at best incomplete and at worst ineffective in achieving its aims. We need a shift of emphasis in the public debate on environmental responsibility; we need to focus not on solving problems that already exist, but on using our knowledge and experience to prevent them occurring. We need to move the debate on from how to encourage ethical consumerism to how to encourage ethical production.

Let's take plastic bags as an example. As ethical consumers we should decline plastic bags when we are offered them and, when we have no choice but to take one, we should recycle them or reuse them, perhaps by using them as a bin liner. However, worrying about plastic bags seems a bit moot. Planet Earth is on its knees, polar ice caps are melting, and we're stressing about how to ethically co-exist with a plastic bag. And there's the problem – existence. The problem is not what to do with a plastic bag but that the plastic bag exists. If we think plastic bags are bad for the environment then we need to tackle how to stop plastic bags existing in the first place.

It is possible that if 'we', and I mean all of us, refused a plastic

bag and insisted on a paper bag at the checkout, then supermarkets would capitulate, but I fail to see how sufficient collective actions could be organized and sustained. Another way to eliminate plastic bags from our supermarkets is legislation. Plastic bags are only one example and an easy way in to the debate. Plastic packaging can be considered in the same way.

I wrote to my MP in 2008 suggesting that Gordon Brown invite the Chief Executives from the four largest supermarkets round to No.10 for a packed lunch of supermarket sandwiches, pork pies and cakes. I requested that after they'd eaten he toss the packaging on the table saying, 'right, that was just about edible, but I'm sick of this plastic packaging – if you don't get rid of it I'm going to brutally fine you until you find a sustainable alternative, and no more plastic bags either'. My MP did raise concerns, not over my advocacy of state intervention in the running of private companies, but by arguing that such an approach would disadvantage the poor – the poor being compelled to buy cheap food, which is cheap because, along with other reasons, it is in cheap packaging.

Economies of scale are certainly achieved by selling most food in plastic, but the same economies would be realized by selling the same amount of food in, for example, paper. Surely it would be easier to change the behaviour of four Chief Executives than 40 million consumers.

What I am proposing is moving, or at least extending, the focus of criticism up the supply chain, from consumer to producer, instead of encouraging ethical consumption through advocacy, and enforcing responsible recycling through local council services and facilities. I believe more impact could be made by tackling producers and top-

level distributors head-on, arming ourselves with legislation. Make it illegal to sell goods in plastic packaging. Make it a condition of building a new supermarket that recycling facilities for all packaging are built and easily accessed.

Central to the argument for ethical consumerism is the belief that, if we all behave in the required fashion, rudimentary laws of supply and demand will deliver the required changes. We cannot wait for that to happen.

Whilst environmental externalities may be unintended, in the sense of not being in the business plan, they are, largely, not unpredictable. Industrialists cannot claim ignorance when it comes to environmental damage. This is why we need an agenda of screening industry against principles of ethical production. Could one of these principles be that ethical production is a commercial activity with a neutral or positive environmental impact? Could raw materials be turned into goods, at a fair profit, without permanently damaging eco systems?

A framework for understanding ethical production is required, and it needs to be as simple as the framework for understanding ethical consumption. We cannot wait for every consumer to become an ethical consumer, and we cannot expect commercial interests to voluntarily adopt new principles of ethical production. Ethical production requires political action.

Ken Peel is a business change and technology consultant and, from time to time, a musician and composer. Ken has his own website: www.kenpeel.com

TD866 Environmental Responsibility: ethics, policy and action

Environmental responsibility is intimately connected to questions of social justice. Mark Smith, Senior Lecturer in Politics and International Studies, outlines how our new course on the environment puts responsibility at the centre of all we do

While environmental justice without social justice is ecotopian, social justice without environmental justice is barren and self-defeating.

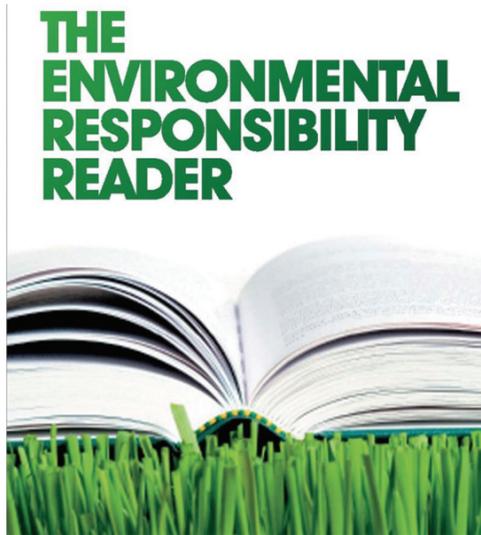
TD866 *Environmental Responsibility: ethics, policy and action* is a timely and exciting cross-Faculty course addressing some of the fundamental issues of our times. OU academics in technology, development and social science have found a new way to address one of the vexing issues in contemporary society and politics. While we are used to hearing about rights and entitlements, debates about responsibility, until recently, have received short shrift. Responsibility is now one of the key buzzwords of the early 21st century. Barack Obama has called for: 'A new era of responsibility – a recognition that we have duties to ourselves, our nation, and the world, duties that we do not grudgingly accept but rather seize gladly'.

Responsibilities, obligations and duties are commitments that we are now more willing to embrace rather than reluctantly accept. Similarly, the idea of responsibility infuses media discussions of the credit crunch, the regulation of banks and the investigation of the Iraq War. At a personal level, citizens are increasingly seen as having personal or private responsibilities to recycle their household waste, maintain a healthy lifestyle and avoid behaviour that is harmful or annoying for their neighbours.

This is different from how personal responsibility was understood in the Thatcher and Reagan era when neo-liberal ideas framed policy. In the 1980s and 1990s personal responsibility for housing, finding a job or educational success was seen as a private issue rather than a matter for government intervention. As a result, 'social problems' such as homelessness, squalor, educational failure and poverty were no longer matters that politicians were obliged to automatically address (in short they were privatized as personal difficulties). However, the new responsibilities for citizens, such as sifting and sorting waste, buying fair trade products, limiting carbon use or contributing to conservation through local voluntary work, involve activities that contribute to society rather than suggest society does not exist. There are still dangers that states will try to pass responsibilities to their citizens but it is widely accepted that the most effective outcomes are delivered by partnerships between political authorities and local communities, citizens, NGOs (Non-

Governmental Organizations), environmental movements and private corporations. All of these actors are explored in TD866.

These kinds of partnerships serve as the focus of TD866 *Environmental Responsibility* and explore how we cannot only care for the environment but also be accountable for the effects of our decisions as politicians, company executives, campaigners and citizens. In TD866 you will explore how leaders in politics or business encourage responsibility in an effective way and how individual citizens can make a contribution. While the course provides a working knowledge of the main ethical traditions – utilitarianism, deontology and virtue ethics – these are explored through their implications rather than an armchair exercise in environmental philosophy. As a result, you will develop the tools to identify these kinds of ethical approaches in policy documents and media debates as well as academic sources. The course provides opportunities to explore a range of practical issues such as corporate responsibility, the global supply chain, ecotourism and urban sustainability. TD866 also links environmental and social justice concerns in both developed and undeveloped societies.



The course is divided into four parts. Part 1: Understanding Environmental Responsibility outlines the meanings of responsibility and relationship between rights and entitlements on the one hand and duties and obligations on the other. Using ethical traditions, it considers who we have obligations to (such as future generations) and what those obligations could entail. Part 2: Nature Matters focuses on caring for nature and our accountability for our activities as well as considering policies such as carbon trading, green consumerism and citizens participation. Using analytic tools from systems approaches and linguistics, Part 2 also explores how our conversation with the environment is framed, with a focus on climate change policies.

Part 3: Individual and Collective Responsibility explores the knowledge conditions for environmental responsibility and how they are connected to the concepts of rights and autonomy, with examples such as carbon allowances and community initiatives such as transition towns. It explores how citizens can cooperate and examines whether contracts can provide a solution before applying these ideas to multi-level governance and corporate responsibility.

Part 4: Environment and Justice considers whether responsibility can be promoted through different forms of civic engagement and emerging new ideas of citizenship. Using local movements as case studies (such as the Modbury plastic bag campaign and what really happened at Love Canal), this part of the course builds on previous parts to explore the debate on environmental and ecological citizenship. There is also a focus on social inequalities and gender differences. Evidence is explored in developing and developed societies to show how it is possible to find a balance between social justice and environmental protection with positive benefits for all concerned (i.e. 'just sustainabilities'). In addition, this part considers how responsibility can lead to citizenship in business and politics through stake-holding processes.

The course materials include a Course Reader, study guides, audio-visual and internet resources. The whole course is packed with concrete examples, supported by multi-media resources, and focuses on practical solutions for pressing environmental problems. There is no examination. The course concludes with a project on ecotourism where you can demonstrate your skills in analysis, evaluation, advocacy, and make recommendations for stakeholders.

Rich countries' climate change pledges are failing the poorest nations

In the past 7 years, the world's richest countries pledged over £12.5bn to developing countries to help them tackle climate change. However, these pledges are not being realized, with only 5–10% of the promised money being accessed by developing countries. In 2009, research has revealed that Africa has received less than 12% of all the climate pledges made in the past 4 years. Britain pledged nearly £1.5bn, but so far has deposited a mere £300 million with developing countries. Worse, it often takes 3 years or more for the

developing countries to access pledged resources.

The United Nations has called for rich countries to donate £50bn–£70bn each year to developing countries to fight and tackle the impacts of climate change. Rich countries did accept responsibility as part of the Kyoto Protocol (an international agreement between signed-up countries to reduce their collective emissions of greenhouse gases), but there has been minimal action. Twelve countries, including Britain, Germany, Japan and the USA,

pledged £6.1bn to two climate investment funds administered by the World Bank, but so far no money has been deposited, and the money that will be donated will be in the form of a loan, not a grant.

The Department for International Development, commenting on the findings, said, 'It is the world's poorest who suffer most and we expect the UK's first contribution to global climate change funds to take place imminently.' Watch this space.

Is this the best we can do?

Last year Ian Henley sat down and worked out how much pension he would get in 2025. At 31% of average working pay, Britain has the lowest basic state pension in all Europe. He found a system not fit for its purpose

AGE Concern

A hundred years ago next month, half a million elderly people popped in to their local post office and collected, for the very first time, a state pension.

It wasn't a lot – five bob a week, about £20 now – and there were strings attached: you had to be one of the 5% then aged over 70, and enjoy a weekly income of less than 12 shillings. You had also, this being 1909, to show you were not a habitual drunk, had stayed out of jail for 10 years and were of 'good character'.

Nevertheless, that day marked the first time a British government had formally recognized that the state might actually bear a degree of responsibility in providing for those of its citizens who managed to struggle through to old age. Sadly, since then, pretty much ...

Hold it, though. How old are you? Twenty, thirty-something? I imagine you have probably stopped reading already. You are an intelligent, well-educated and sensible person, but 'Please,' you're thinking, 'Pensions! Boring. Next.'

Over 40? You're feeling the first faint stirrings of alarm about what life might be like in your golden years. But you've stopped reading, too. 'Ugh,' you're saying to yourself. 'Pensions. Scary. Don't understand. Go away!'

If you're over 55 you might still be with me. However, your interest, I fear, will be essentially morbid. 'I'm stuffed anyway,' you're thinking.

Pensions have this effect on people, which is no small part of the problem. They did on me. For years, I believed that showing the slightest interest in one's future retirement income was the mark of a very sad person. I then went through an equally long period recognizing that it wasn't, but knowing it was too difficult to do anything about. Finally, a few months ago, I bit the bullet. I sat down and worked out what I would be living on in 17 years' time, when, with a bit of luck, I'll retire.

It is, I think, difficult to conceive of a single area of government policy that is at once so important for each of us, so catastrophically complicated, so insanely unjust, so obscenely ineffective, and has been quite so comprehensively cocked up by successive administrations as the British pension system.

Just how bad is it? Among a sea of horrifying statistics, try these:

- Only pensioners in Latvia, Spain and Cyprus are more likely to fall into poverty than those in the UK
- In the UK, 2.5 million older people now live on less than 60% of the average national income
- Up to 9 million people working today have no other pension provision than the means-tested £124-odd a week they will, if they're lucky, get from the state
- The average pot a UK employee builds up in the most common kind of private-sector pension scheme is £25,000, which will give a single man of 65 an annual income of – wait for it – £1,960
- Even if you save up a whole lot more, say £100,000, it will currently buy you, at 65, an annual pension of £4,500.

To understand how we got into this state, we need to look at history. We have had pensions in Britain since the late middle ages: Henry VIII was not slow to realize that offering a guaranteed future income to recalcitrant monks and abbesses was the easiest way



Elderly woman is pushed in a wheelchair with a Union Jack blanket. London to dissolve the Catholic monasteries. In the industrial revolution, enlightened employers of the kind who built streets and indeed whole towns to house their workers also saw a pension as part of the deal.

So even before the introduction of the basic state pension, British employers were already playing a major role in the provision of social welfare for older people – a role that in most of Europe was, and still is, carried out by the state. In the years after the Second World War, as key industries were nationalized and an acute manpower shortage left companies desperate to attract and retain employees, a pension became a valued part of almost all British workers' benefit packages.

In 1948, the state pension became a contributory, pay-as-you-go part of the National Insurance system. It was not terribly generous, but not a national disgrace because privately funded company pension schemes were actually quite generous. These were the fabled 'final-salary' retirement schemes from which our parents benefited, with pension payouts guaranteed according to pay and length of service.

Today, the majority of public-sector workers, but only 15% – and falling fast – of employees in the private sector, are still in such schemes. The rest, if we're in anything at all, are in so-called 'defined contribution' or money-purchase schemes, in which companies only guarantee what contributions they will pay in, not

the final payout, leaving the employee to shoulder the risk.

It wasn't a perfect system and wasn't very fair, but it more or less worked. So no one kicked up much of a fuss when, in 1979, Margaret Thatcher cut the link between the basic state pension and wages, pegging it to inflation instead. And that's where it all started to go horribly wrong. Over the last 30-odd years, because wages are always slightly ahead of inflation, the value of Britain's basic state pension has plunged by about 50%. Also, since we are all now living much longer (7.2 million are aged over 70, compared with 1.2 million in 1909), most companies have closed down their final-salary schemes. So we now find ourselves in an enviable position: at 31% of average working pay, Britain has the lowest basic state pension in all Europe.

'It's a fair reflection of the inequalities in our society, that's what it is,' says Prem Sikka, Professor of Accounting at Essex University. 'In Britain, the wealthiest 20% earn 17 times as much as the poorest 20%.'

In fact, the system discourages the lowest-paid from saving towards a pension at all: pension credit, which you might be entitled to above the basic £90-odd a week, is means-tested. Save too much, and your state benefits will be docked. However, perhaps the most insane thing about the whole system is that beyond the basic state payout, it relies almost entirely on what Sikka calls 'the greatest casino of all time': the stock market. In the 12 months since October 2007, we paid a total of £6.7bn into our pension pots – but they are worth £157bn less than they were before. What happened? The stock market crashed.

Our retirement savings are commercially managed. Fund managers, bankers, financiers, stockbrokers and insurers have all made fortunes out of our pensions, earning commissions every time an investment is bought or sold, charging hefty management fees and awarding themselves nice fat bonuses for short-term gains.

This means that there are an awful lot of people in the pensions industry with a big vested interest in making sure the system does not change. Not to mention the out-and-out crooks: nearly 5 million ordinary people lost £13bn in the private pensions mis-selling scandal, another 6 million lost £50bn on endowment mortgages when Equitable Life collapsed. Why should we trust these people with our retirement savings?

Dr Ros Altmann, an investment expert, investment banker and economist and an adviser to the pensions industry, thinks it's time to change our whole conception of what a pension is. 'We're going to have to, in any case,' she says. 'Have you seen the graph of the number of people over 65 in Britain from about 2012? It explodes. The whole system needs to be completely, radically changed. If it isn't, the only possible outcome is long-term economic decline.'

Altmann has a radical idea. She'd like to see pension tax relief for higher-rate taxpayers scrapped, and the proceeds used to pay a decent state pension – say, £140 or £150 a week – to everybody, as of right, regardless of means. But, she says, state pension should kick in only later, at 70 or even 75.

You may disapprove of Altmann's model. However, it's hard not to agree with her view that the history of our pension system, over the past century, is one of shifting responsibility: from state to company, then company to individual. We're gambling our future welfare on the stock market. The simple fact is that today, for most people, a private pension fund is not a suitable investment for their retirement. And that's a devastating indictment.

UK fathers richer after divorce

Divorce makes men richer, particularly fathers, and women poorer regardless of whether they have children, according to research published by the Institute for Social and Economic Research in January 2009. The Institute found that on average a father's available income increased by a third after divorce, while his partner's income fell by more than a fifth.

For the first time researchers tracked the changing wealth levels in Britain following divorces registered between 1991 and 2004. The researchers found that the key differences were found not just between men and women but also between fathers and mothers, with children staying with their mothers at a distinct disadvantage.

Stark differences were discovered in the incomes of 'separating husbands' in childless marriages whose incomes increased immediately by 25% while the incomes of 'separating wives' declined. Separated women were found to experience a poverty rate of 27%, three times the rate for their former husbands.

The researchers identified only two factors that have an impact on women's situations post divorce. The percentage change is less if the women have worked beforehand, and there is a positive impact if they remarry. However, this was not as significant as people had hitherto thought. Between 1993 and 2002, the proportion of divorced women with children who remained in work rose from 66% to 74% and this is believed to have had a positive impact on the margin of difference between separated fathers and mothers.

In 2007, the divorce rate in England and Wales fell for the third year running to 11.9 divorces for every 1,000 married couples, the lowest rate since 1981. On average, half of marriages end in divorce, and at least one child is affected in 53% of cases.

Winter deaths a 'national disgrace'

Age Concern and Help the Aged described the latest figures for winter deaths in England and Wales as a 'national disgrace'. In the winter of 2006–7 a total of 25,300 people perished from illnesses brought on by the cold weather. The majority of the victims were people aged over 65. With high fuel costs in the winter of 2008–9 both charities believe the official figures will again increase, confirming England and Wales as having the highest number of winter deaths than any other European country with a cold climate.



More than 800 police officers in England and Wales were arrested on a range of serious offences including assault, drink-driving, rape, paedophilia, fraud, drug charges and child cruelty, during a two-year window investigated under the Freedom of Information Act. Between April 2006 and August 2008, 812 officers were arrested.

A later study which added forces in Scotland to England and Wales revealed that forces serving Durham, Surrey, Dorset, Greater Manchester, Lothian and Borders, and Grampian had a total of 132 serving officers with convictions, but none had been dismissed. Offences included a serious assault in Durham, four incidents of drug possession in Surrey and two incidents of misconduct in office in Manchester.

Overall the latest figures revealed 210 officers had been dismissed

Pension facts

- The average private pension pot will eventually give a single man of 65 an annual income of £1,960
- A pension pot of £100,000 will give you a yearly sum of £4,500
- 9 million people have no pension provision other than the state
- 2.5 million older people now live on less than 60% of the average national income
- The basic state pension in the UK is 31% of average working pay (the lowest in Europe)
- The UK has the fourth highest level of poverty among over 65s in Europe, behind countries like Romania. In 2007, according to European Union research, nearly one in three UK over-65s were living in poverty, the same proportion as in Lithuania (30%).
- The collective debt of UK final salary pension schemes rose to £195bn at the end of 2008
- In January 2009 a survey revealed that a quarter of major private sector firms expect to close their final salary pension schemes to existing members in the next few years

Police arrested for serious crimes

or required to resign in the past five years as a result of criminal convictions.

Of those with convictions for violent offences such as assault, battery and wounding, 77 had kept their jobs, while 45 had been dismissed in the last five years.

There were 96 serving police officers with convictions for offences of dishonesty, including theft, perverting the course of justice, fraud and forgery.

In December 2008 new misconduct regulations came into force which, according to the Association of Chief Police Officers, would improve the disciplinary system. The figures should be seen in context. There are over 159,000 police officers in England, Scotland and Wales.

Called to the Bars

In the USA a third of black men between the ages of 18 and 35 are in prison, on parole or on probation. Bryan Stevenson, a leading campaigner against injustice in the US prison system, tells Juliet Rix how Britain is in danger of imitating an American penal process that fuels crime and creates a sense of despair in poor communities

Bryan Stevenson has a stark warning for the UK government, 'Don't follow America down the road to over-incarceration.' The award-winning US human rights lawyer, who gave the Prison Reform Trust annual lecture last December, says that American society has been fundamentally altered by its criminal justice policies over the past 35 years. These are changes, he says, that 'no civilized society should want to replicate'. At a time when the prison population in the UK is at an all-time high of nearly 85,000, and rising steeply, the government is planning to build more and larger prisons. Stevenson's portent couldn't be more timely.

In 1972, the USA had 200,000 people in prison. Today, the figure has increased to 2.3 million, with one in 100 of the adult population in jail and over 5 million people on parole or probation. Even policy-makers whose decisions contributed to this dramatic rise are shocked by what has happened, claims Stevenson, adding, 'Nobody set out to multiply the number of people incarcerated in this way, but nor did they stop to think about what was happening, and now it is very hard to reverse.'

He fears that the UK may be following a similar path. The British government's official policy is that prison is a last resort for serious and violent offenders. However, the prison population in England and Wales has almost doubled from 44,700 in 1992 to over 83,000 today, while violent crime, having peaked in 1995, has dropped by 41% since then. The government recently announced a £2.3bn plan to build three vast 'Titan' jails, expanding the prison estate to 96,000 places. Stevenson wants us to look at America and see why we should take a sharp U-turn.

He points out that 'mass incarceration' has not lowered the US crime rate, but he believes it has increased injustice, which he spends his working life trying to ameliorate. As a black boy growing up in 1960s Delaware, it is a subject he learned about at a young age. Not allowed to go to the white school, he had to go to the school for 'coloureds' – the one with no playground and no resources.

His parents saw education as a way out. He found his way to Harvard Law School, where President Barack Obama also studied. Here he took a class that involved visiting a human rights programme in the Deep South. 'I met people on death row who were literally dying for legal assistance,' he recalls. He spent his law school summers working for the Southern Centre for Human Rights. When he graduated, he went to work there full-time, before, in 1989, founding the Equal Justice Initiative (EJI) in Alabama, which he still heads (see eji.org).

The EJI represents indigent defendants, death row prisoners, juveniles and anyone it believes has been denied fair treatment by the system, as well as campaigning for change. Stevenson and his staff recently overturned the conviction of Diane Tucker, a woman with learning difficulties imprisoned for a murder that never happened, and in 2008 won release for Phillip Shaw, sentenced to



Bryan Stevenson: 'Mass incarceration is affecting our capacity to fund education, health and other basic services.'

die in prison (life without parole), at the age of just 14. The EJI has been instrumental in more than 65 prisoners being released or removed from death row. For every eight death row inmates executed, Stevenson says, one is released after his conviction is overturned.

A rise in wrongful conviction, Stevenson believes, is just one of the many dire results of a system of mass incarceration. 'Mass incarceration has radical implications for society – economic and social,' he states. 'When a system is overloaded, it doesn't work well and the business of jailing people becomes normalized (so insufficient attention is given to each case). It is also phenomenally expensive: an inmate costs an average of \$30,000 (£20,000) a year, which leaves less money for other things. Defence lawyers for poor defendants – the equivalent of legal aid – is one area that misses out,' he says. 'You are better off wealthy and guilty than poor and innocent.'

The cost goes wider. 'Studies have shown that in some states, spending on education is being undermined by prison budgets,' Stevenson says. 'Mass incarceration is affecting our capacity to fund education, health and other basic services.' This has a direct impact on the poor, and fuels poverty, disaffection, social unrest and ultimately crime. Add to this millions of ex-offenders, their options in mainstream society limited by their branding as former prisoners, and a vast underclass is created.

In poor black communities, the problem is particularly acute. Non-whites are over-represented in the US prison population, as they are in the UK. Black men are more likely to commit some crimes, but this does not account for the numbers in US jails. Possession of illegal drugs is a crime that occurs almost equally across races, says Stevenson, with about 11% of illegal drug users being black. Yet black people make up 18% of those arrested for

possession, 35% of those convicted, and 75% of those imprisoned. In the USA today, a third of black men between the ages of 18 and 35 are in prison, on parole or on probation.

'There is a real feeling of hopelessness in poor communities, and communities of people of colour,' Stevenson says. A combination of under-resourced public services and a justice system that cannot be trusted – leading to greater fear of the police than of crime – is a recipe for social disaster. 'There is not a single American politician who has made a priority of reforming this system,' he says. 'Some US politicians now know they have made a mistake, but if they look soft on crime they won't get re-elected.'

Is he optimistic about the Obama administration? The two men met and worked together on a number of occasions before Obama went into national politics, and Stevenson says the President is 'very good, very bright, thoughtful and sincere', and 'certainly aware' of the problems. But Stevenson fears it will be hard for Obama to promise change in criminal justice.

How did the USA get into this mess, and how can Britain avoid it? First, Stevenson says, treat drugs as a health and social problem rather than criminalizing users. America's so-called war on drugs, which saw mandatory prison sentences for possession, Stevenson believes accounts for half of the rise in the prison population, 'and it hasn't worked!'. Drug courts that provide immediate treatment and support, combined with obligations to the court and regular appearances to assess progress, are the way to go, he believes. Such courts are now running in some US communities, and six are being piloted in Britain.

Second, he advises against mandatory sentencing. The US's 'three strikes and you're out' policy can leave judges obliged to lock up a child for life for stealing a bicycle, if it is his fourth offence. Stevenson warns against shifts in attitude. In the midst of the 'war on terror', he says, it is easy to become punitive and 'to tolerate conduct and abuse of power that would not otherwise be tolerated'.

He describes as misguided the recent emphasis by the justice secretary, Jack Straw, on prison as primarily for punishment. 'Some of the most victimized people in British society will be in the jails,' he warns. 'They are victims who didn't get the help they needed. The more you punish rather than reform, the more you create people with no place in society who will commit more crime. People should want governments to protect them from rape and murder, not to harshly punish the perpetrator after the event.'

Money would be more wisely spent on prevention than more prisons, he says, citing early intervention programmes, care for the mentally ill, education, and the reform and rehabilitation of offenders.

This is an edited version of an article that appeared in *The Guardian*, 10 December 2008.

UK defence spending

In 1967, the UK spent 6.5% of GDP on defence, more than it spent on education and the NHS. Over the next 30 years, defence took a smaller share of spending as the British government spent the Cold War dividend on other things.

In 1996, defence accounted for 3.2% of GDP. However, after Tony Blair came to power in 1997, new threats emerged. Britain engaged in conflicts in Sierra Leone, Kosovo, Iraq and Afghanistan, but it did so without a significant increase in the defence budget.

In 2009, the UK is planning to spend £42.1bn, approximately 3% of GDP, on defence. It is committed to spending 7.7% on health and 5.6% on education. An extra £1.6bn has been allocated to the forces in 2010 and, because the recession makes the economy smaller, defence will account for 3.1% of GDP next year, the highest since 1997. With cuts in public spending expected, defence spending may fall considerably as a proportion of GDP from 2011.

Surge in executions

According to Amnesty International, executions of prisoners in the world almost doubled in 2008 following a big rise in executions in China. Death sentences in China accounted for over 75% of the 2,390 executions in 2008, up from 1,252 in 2007.

In 2007, five countries worldwide accounted for 93% of all executions – China, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and the USA.

Other countries are also contributing to the rise. Iraq is expected to execute over 130 people during 2008, up from 34 in 2007, while Japan is currently executing more people each year than it has for over 30 years.

Between January and December 2008, at least 2,390 people were executed around the world with at least 8,864 sentenced to death in 52 countries.



UK soldier casualty rate exceeds Iraq War

Deaths of UK forces in Afghanistan are occurring at a faster rate than during the Iraq War, government figures revealed in June 2009. In June 2009 the death rate for UK soldiers in southern Helmand province had reached one every three days. UK soldier death rates have now reached 15 per 1,000 personnel years, a calculation that takes into account the numbers of soldiers deployed and the length of time of their deployment. At the time of the worst fighting in Iraq, the figure stood at 7.5 per 1,000. In July 2009 a further 22 soldiers perished in southern Helmand province, Afghanistan, the bloodiest month for the British military forces since the conflict began in 2001.

Costs of UK wars soar

The cost of Britain's wars in Iraq and Afghanistan soared in 2008 to over £4.5bn and are expected to rise further in 2009 and beyond, according to the Ministry of Defence. Afghanistan operations accounted for over half the £4.5bn war chest, and rose from £1.5bn in 2007 to £2.6bn in 2008. Despite Britain's withdrawal from Basra, the cost of Britain's military presence there increased to £2bn in 2008, from £1.5bn the previous year. The figures mean that the total cost of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars since 2001 – excluding billions of pounds of international aid money – is now over £14bn.

A separate report by the Afghan government estimates that £5bn, up to a third of all international aid, can not be accounted for. The Agency Coordination Body for Afghan Relief (ACBAR) alleged that profiteering, profligacy and bribery are hampering aid efforts. The overall effect has been a deepening of resentment towards foreign troops and a crippling of the redevelopment process structured under the Bush administration's insistence on an unregulated and profit-driven approach to reconstruction. ACBAR claim that over 40% of aid goes back to donor countries in corporate profits, while more is wasted on expatriate consultants.

It is estimated that the US military spends £100m each day on security in Afghanistan, but only £7m is invested in aid from all the donor countries combined.

History's top ten fiscal stimuli

We live in the year of fiscal stimuli, but have they ever worked? Leslie Budd, Reader in Social Enterprise in the Open University Business school, takes up Andrew Trigg's mantle. Without fiscal stimuli, he argues, the world, and us, would be more impoverished

Watching the BBC's *Politics Show* late last year, I was intrigued by the discussion between Andrew Neil and his guests about the proposed fiscal stimuli to combat the effects of the credit crunch and global economic crises. The discussion opined that fiscal stimuli never worked. The obvious conclusion they drew was that the fiscal programmes announced in 2009 by various governments around the world would have no lasting impact.

This would appear to be a commonly held view among many commentators who seem to belong to what I call the new Ignorance Economics. This branch of the dismal science appears to have evolved from Lady Bracknell's observations in Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*. She likened ignorance to a delicate exotic flower that should be nurtured to resist the modern trend of education in England.

What is more, there are a number of myths surrounding budget deficit, which include:

- government debt is analogous to household debt
- budget deficits lead to inflation
- deficits are a burden on future generations.

With this in mind, I thought it would be instructional to construct a top ten of fiscal stimuli packages. Their legacies are pertinent to 2009 developments and future prospects for global recovery.

1 New Deal, 1933–37

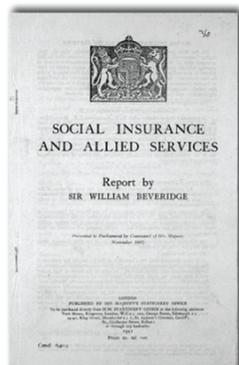
Perhaps the most famous fiscal package, the New Deal was introduced in the USA by President Franklin Roosevelt in response to the Great Crash. It seems to be the benchmark against which the Geithner/Summers Plan of the Obama Administration will be judged. The New Deal came in two phases. The first New Deal (1933–35) was characterized by the immediate problems of unemployment, the second New Deal (1935–37) by the reform of the financial system. Their legacy includes the Hoover Dam and the development of cost-benefit analysis as a technique of investment appraisal.

2 Second World War after 1941

The entry of the USA into the Second World War stimulated an economy that had started to decline in 1938, after the policies of the New Deal began to be reversed. The demands of the war opened up states such as California to new and different forms of economic activity, and paved the way for the USA to establish its global economic and financial hegemony in the post-war era.

3 The UK Beveridge Plan, 1942

The Plan was published under the chairmanship of William Beveridge on behalf of the UK government. It provided for a range of support measures for the unemployed and the poor. The Plan became the basis of the post-war welfare state and led to the formation of the National Health Service in the UK in 1946. In 1945, average life expectancy for a man was 60. On average, in Britain in 2009 men live to 77.2 and women to 81.5.



4 The Marshall Plan

In 1947 the US Secretary of State, George Marshall, delivered a speech in which he outlined the need for an economic aid plan to help the devastated nations of Europe and their citizens to recover from the ravages of the Second World War. The European Recovery Program was published soon after with recommendations for reconstruction through investment in infrastructure among other things. The legacy lives on in the form of economic development in what is now known as the European Union.



Cartoon by Talburt in the Pittsburgh Press

5 The Vietnam War, 1963–75

The USA's formal involvement lasted from 1963 to 1975. The commitment of 500,000 troops from 1968 demanded large public resources, which boosted demand in the domestic economy. The US boom came to an end around 1971 when the Bretton Woods system of fixed international rates effectively collapsed. The Smithsonian Agreement ushered in floating pegged rates and lifted the ceiling on the price of gold: still an important asset class to hedge against deflation and inflation.



6 Deng Xiaoping's reforms in the People's Republic of China, 1979



The 1979 reforms of the Chinese Premier paved the way for China's global economic development. By concentrating on export-led light industry and creating special economic zones in the coastal regions, based upon growth pole theory – the idea that economic development, or growth, is not uniform over an entire region, but instead takes place around a specific area or key industry – China's economy began to develop as a global contender.

7 German unification, 1990

On 3 October 1990, East and West Germany were reunited. Effectively, this was an *anschluss* of East Germany (a union to create a Greater Germany). The costs of reunification were large and created a significant stimulus to the former West German economy in the short term, but the longer term benefits have been variable, especially in the East. However, the key question is what would have happened without reunification? Did the reunification help Germany lead the EU economy after economic and monetary union?

8 Post-bubble Japanese economy in the 1990s

The bursting of the 1980s 'bubble economy' resulted in significant deflation and negative real interest rates. The failure of loose monetary policy to correct a stagnating economy led to a large stimulus package over a 10-year period. Without this stimulus, the Japanese economy would not have been able to sustain its leading position and an ageing population.

9 Ciudad de las Artes y las Ciencias (City of Arts and Sciences), Valencia, 1991–2001

Designed by the architect, Santiago Calatrava, this was conceived and constructed between 1991 and 2001. As a community asset it moves beyond the status of signature architecture by creating large public educational and cultural space sited on the old bed of the River Turia. This asset has, and continues to generate, a range of socio-economic activities which would have been boosted if the Socialist Party's plan for extending the City had been fulfilled.



10 Regional policy for London

In spite of the UK government's commitment to reduce the inequality of growth rates between English regions, regional policy has been skewed towards London. The Jubilee Line, the 2012 Olympics and Crossrail are all examples of the logic of supporting the 'golden goose' of financial and business services in the capital. The current crisis, however, has meant that gilded *foie gras* is no longer on the menu and the regions of the rest of England will no longer be expected to eat cake in compensation.

... and finally

The G20 package, which attempted to co-ordinate various national stimuli, was agreed on April Fool's Day 2009. It may have come in at number 11 but, like Chou en Lai's observation about the impact of the French Revolution, it's too early to tell. What is not too early to tell is that ignorance may be bliss but without a better education on economics and the role of fiscal stimuli, we are all impoverished.

Fiscal stimuli, 2008-9

The USA, China and Japan have blazed the trail in relation to the volume of capital they have invested in fiscal stimuli in the run up to the G20 summit in March 2009. The USA alone raised almost \$1 trillion from the US taxpayer. China donated \$800m from the Chinese state. Japan mustered \$700bn. Over the next two years these countries alone have committed over \$2.5 trillion. The UK has contributed only \$30bn, 1.1% of GDP.



... trillions lost in 'black hole'?

Society Matters

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We welcome your contributions and letters. If you would like to write for our thirteenth issue – deadline 1 April 2010 – please contact the editor, Richard Skellington, at the address above or email him at: r.s.skellington@open.ac.uk

Society Matters Extra

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