UK Government HE changes

Many of you will be aware that the UK Government has this month made a series of proposals relating to the future of Higher Education in England and I thought it might be useful to give an update on how we anticipate that they will affect students at the OU.

I am sharing as much information as we currently have.

The change which might have the most immediate impact fellow students is the rise in the earnings threshold. The announcement means that from next April students will only become liable to repay your loan (four years after you have taken it out) if they earn over £25,000, instead of the current threshold of £21,000.

The other significant announcement, a freeze on tuition fees, will not affect OU students. The UK Government confirmed that the maximum tuition fees for part-time education will remain at £6,935 for 2018-19, which is already some way higher than fees at the OU.

You may also have heard the Prime Minister announce, in her speech to the UK Conservative Party Conference, what she called a “major review” of the student finances and university funding in England. The status of this review remains
unclear. We don’t know whether it will be externally led or an internal Government initiative. Whatever it ends up being, we at the OU will be pushing hard for part-time education to be a central feature.

Peter Horrocks

To find out more about the Vice-Chancellors work, watch this video.

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### Latest news

#### Students First Transformation: keeping you up-to-date with our progress

Back in June, we announced we were undertaking a radical redesign of the University. The redesign of the University will put the OU in a better financial setting as we will achieve savings, and will be reinvesting in improvements to the student experience.

Our mission of offering higher education to all remains the same and as we approach our 50th anniversary, we want to be revolutionary in our use of technology.

For you, our current students, there is no immediate impact and your studies will continue as normal.

In line with the Student Charter, we are ensuring that students have a voice in the governing process and we are working with the OU Students Association on ways to get students involved.

So far we’ve asked for student input in the following ways:

- We’ve gained opinions via the Student Consultative forum on the digital services we currently offer as well as the student experience at the OU.
- We’ve held a number of workshops where we’ve had student representatives providing feedback on the student journey.
- We’ve asked a number of students to sign up to three face-to-face consultation events across the UK in November, to provide feedback on the flexibility of OU study and on digital learning.

No-one understands the student experience better than you, our current students, and we want give every student the opportunity to have a say about our future.

We’ll be keeping you up-to-date on our progress and sharing how to get involved here in OpenNews, in StudentHome, on our social media channels and the recently launched StudentIdeas, which enables you to share ideas on a range of topics.
We look forward to hearing your views.

Age is no barrier to OU success as new graduates prove

From age 18 to 81, this year hundreds of our students - at all stages of life - have celebrated achieving their degrees. The wide range of ages shows the OU welcomes everyone to study, at any age and time of life. If you would like to find out more, here are some of our case studies.

The real casualty of the 2012 tuition fees shake-up? Mature and part-time learners

"We are at a rare moment in politics where the concerns of students have been thrust to the forefront of national debate.

I welcome the prime minister's review of university funding because, amid the sound and fury of party politics, the real casualty of the 2012 higher education shake-up has gone largely unnoticed - the impact on the economy and society of the decline in mature and part-time learners.

It is no exaggeration to say that "earning while learning" is in crisis in England. The roots lie in Labour's reforms but the accelerator was the UK coalition government's decision to slash grants and treble student tuition fees. In the past six years numbers of new part-time students in England have fallen by an extraordinary 56 per cent." This blog was authored by Vice-Chancellor, Peter Horrocks, and originally published on Universities UK.

Five vital things you can't do properly when you're on your phone

"In a recent RAC survey, 26% of UK 1,700 motorists reported using a handheld mobile phone while driving, despite it being illegal. In response, road safety charity Brake, argued that society's phone “addiction” can have very serious consequences.

A quick online search throws up many articles suggesting that people are “glued” to their smartphones and therefore miss important and enriching experiences and
interactions going on around them." Article originally published on The Conversation by Gemma Briggs, Lecturer in psychology, the OU and Graham Hole, Senior Lecturer in Psychology, University of Sussex.

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**Events**

**Why school is bad for us – lessons we need to learn - Professor Jonathan Rix’s inaugural lecture**

Jonathan Rix, Professor of Participation and Learning Support in the Faculty of Wellbeing, Education & Language Studies at the OU, will deliver his inaugural lecture on *Why school is bad for us – lessons we need to learn*, on Thursday 16 November, when he will explore this obsession and ask if there are some simple ways to release teachers from these shackles.

To find out more and attend the event, please click [here](#).

**Am I normal? Professor Blaine Price’s inaugural lecture**

The risks and benefits of novel health technologies that automatically gather data about individuals and their lifestyles, will be addressed by OU Professor Blaine Price in his inaugural lecture, *Am I normal?* on Tuesday 28 November 2017.

To find out more and attend the event, please click [here](#).

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**What's on**

**Blue Planet II**

Sir David Attenborough is to present *Blue Planet II*, the brand new seven part OU/BBC landmark series.

Twenty years ago, a team of wildlife film makers from the BBC’s natural history unit set out to make ‘Blue Planet’, a series on the world’s oceans, the breadth and scale of which had never been seen before. Now, a generation on, Blue Planet has returned to these underwater worlds for ‘Blue Planet
II’, with even more ambitious filming and a fresh cast of extraordinary aquatic animals, spending some four years filming off every continent, and in all of the earth’s oceans, to immerse the audience in some of the most expansive but least known parts of our planet.

Blue Planet II will be broadcast on BBC One on Sunday 29 October at 8pm..

Get involved

A Support Net: Can you help someone in need?

All of us will experience personal challenges, but could you make a positive impact on someone's life?

Try our wellbeing interactive 'A Support Net' to see if you can help four people. This interactive, with immersive point of view videos, was developed by Dr Mathijs Lucassen, a Lecturer in Mental Health in the Faculty of Wellbeing, Education and Language Studies and Open Media and Informal Learning.

Student consultative meetings

Would you like to have your say on issues affecting students?

Student consultative meetings (face-to-face and online) are taking place in November 2017. This is an opportunity to discuss the OUs plans for transformation over the coming years, and within that key topics which relate to the student experience.

For more information and to register your interest, visit the OUs Student Consultation website. It's really important to us that your views translate into improvements to your experience of studying at the OU. You may be interested to see how we responded to the views you gave us at meetings earlier this year.

#Iwas success - thank you for
sharing your stories

A huge thank you to all students who shared their stories with us as part of the #Iwas campaign, which ran on all of our social media channels back in June. Because of all of your amazing stories, the #Iwas campaign won an award at the UK Social Media Communications Awards on Wednesday 18 October.

You can find out more about the campaign [here](#).

We loved reading all of your messages of inspiration and stories that showed education has no age limit. We were privileged to have had the opportunity to share them as part of this campaign.

We’re planning what we do next with #Iwas, as we know there are lots more of you with amazing stories to tell. Some of the wonderful #Iwas stories can be found on our [Twitter moments](#) and on our [Instagram](#) pages.

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Learning

OU works with BBC on Distance Learning toolkit series

Monday 9 October saw the start of a 10-week OU/BBC co-production with BBC World Service Learning English, called *Go The Distance*. This online series is all about how to be a distance learner, broken down into 5 categories (one a day, each week) to provide site visitors with an idea of what life is like on a distance learning course and the skills/knowledge required to participate successfully as a distance learning student.

The course will be hosted on bbclearningenglish.com with new material posted every weekday and supported with additional OU interviews and content at [OpenLearn](#).

Lead OU Academic Consultants for the series David Hann, Lecturer in Applied Linguistics, and Anne Wesemann, Lecturer in Law, said: “With nearly 50 years’ experience at the forefront of distance learning, The Open University is delighted to be sharing its knowledge with the BBC’s global audience. Education should be accessible to all, and this collaborative course is a great start in helping people
make the first step into distance learning. It offers such a diverse range of guidance and advice that it will be useful and inspiring to both new and experienced distance learners.”

Catherine Chapman, BBC Learning English series producer, says: “It's been great to build on our successful cooperation with The Open University to create this course. Go the Distance provides existing and would-be distance learning students anywhere in the world with a comprehensive toolkit of information, skills and strategies, as well as language knowledge, to help them succeed at all stages of their learning - from choosing a course to sitting their final exams.”

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**Student Hub Live**

SHL offers precious information and advice to students through regular free, online and interactive events. Anyone can attend, dip in and out or watch again on catch up.

For more information on this and other events, please visit the [SHL website](#).

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**Careers and Employability Service**

**Upcoming webinars and forums**

Careers and Employability Services will be running a number of webinars and forums over the coming weeks, designed to get you thinking about your career choices, explore the options available to you, and ask questions of our Careers Advisors and participating employers. These include:

- Careers Quick Query Forum: Monday 30 October - 10th November
- Networking and Social Media: Thursday 2 November
- Webinars featuring NGDP, Fujitsu and Capgemini: dates tbc

You can find further information on these events, and view any webinars that you may have missed, on our [careers workspace](#). In addition, you can find a wealth of information on careers and employability on our [website](#).

For the latest careers news and information, follow us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [LinkedIn](#).