Letter from the Editor

Welcome to the Winter edition of OMEGA. This is my fourth edition as editor of your magazine, and I hope you're enjoying receiving and reading OMEGA as much as I enjoy being the editor. I especially take pleasure in reading through all your articles and poetry and learning about what the AOUG have been up to across the country.

This edition, as usual, is bursting at the seams with a great selection of work from our members, as well as our regular features such as the OU News and the Regional Reports. We also have another article from Regional Representative Matt Reville, in Ireland, giving us a taste of what we can expect at Spring AGM 2008 in Cork. It really will be an event not to be missed. For more information about Spring AGM 2008, and to find out more about what's going on in your region, make sure you visit the AOUG's website at www.aoug.org.uk. On the site you will also find out more information about the AOUG, you can view our merchandise and find all the local contacts for your area.

The AOUG is now starting to think about celebrations for the upcoming birthdays of the Open University and the AOUG. As you probably know, the AOUG will be 21 and the OU will be 40 in 2009. So now it's time to start thinking about how you will celebrate in your region. Make sure you let your regional representative know your ideas.

With Christmas just around the corner, followed closely by New Year, why not make a resolution to write something for your magazine, OMEGA. As I mentioned earlier, one of my favourite parts of the editing process is reading through your work. So once again, I make a plea for your academic articles, poetry and reports and pictures from your visits and events across the country. Send your submissions via email or post to the AOUG office. Details are below.

May I take this opportunity to wish you all a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Sarah Bailey
Editor

Copy date for next issue of OMEGA will be 15th February 2008 and Regional Report copy date 8th February 2008. Please send all contributions to:

OMEGA
AOUG, First Floor, South West Temporary Building, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes, MK7 6AA
or by e-mail to: AOUG@open.ac.uk

Articles sent by e-mail attachments should be as Rich Text, or Microsoft Word (version Word 97 or Word 6.0/95 or earlier). If in any doubt as to the compatibility of your word processing package, please e-mail the office for clarification. All files are scanned for viruses. Please also send a paper copy by post enclosing any photographs required. Photographs should be of sharp quality printed on photographic paper, sent with a life and the name and permission of the originator. We are also happy to accept photos in digital format.
Regional Representatives, who are essential to speak and act on behalf of the members, are the public face of the region but however enthusiastic a Regional Representative may be, they can never hope to do everything without the often unrecognised volunteers within each region. At the AOUG Foundation for Education National Award Ceremony, it was wonderful to have the opportunity to welcome and show appreciation to some of these loyal members. I was really pleased so many of you could attend. This ceremony was especially important this year as we were able to present our first AOUG Baroness Boothroyd Award for Law.

Lady Boothroyd for allowing us to use her name for University departments. We are very grateful to the presence of the Vice Chancellor and witnessed the AOUG Baroness Boothroyd Award for Law in the presence of the Vice Chancellor and witnessed by over sixty members and guests from many Open University departments. We are very grateful to Lady Boothroyd for allowing us to use her name for this new award.

Regional Representatives listen to the views of these active members but they also need to hear the views of as many other members as possible so they can "represent" the wider membership. Please remember that all opinions are valued so if you have anything to say, get in touch with your Regional Representative now. This is even more important at this time, as we have the great news that, due to reasons to celebrate. Plans are already underway for a large national event to be held in Milton Keynes in June 2009 and for one special event in each of the thirteen regions which will take place throughout the rest of the year. What is planned for your region?

Make sure you don’t miss out. All of these give many more chances for members to get involved. AOUG has so much ahead of it with more new developments being planned so this is the perfect opportunity for lapsed members to come back and renew their membership. Do you know of any past members? Maybe you even take them to events as your guest. If they enjoy attending, why aren’t they members again? Or maybe you know OU graduates who have never joined. Talk to them. Please spread the word and encourage them to contact the AOUG Office. The more members we have the more we can do.

From November onwards you will find a monthly letter from me on the website to keep you up to date with your comments. It is also intended that selections of these members’ letters, (minus your contact details), will also go on the website.

Well with the festive season rapidly approaching I close this OMEGA letter by wishing you all the very best the season can offer, and good health and happiness for the new Year.

Jean Hertzog

AOUG Executive Committee Elections - 2008

Nominations are now invited for Executive Committee members. Appointments as advertised on the enclosed nomination form are required for the roles of Vice-Chairman, Treasurer, Development Officer and Regional Representatives for Regions 01, 02, 03, 04, 06, 10, and 13. All complete forms must be received by the AOUG Office, on or before 4pm on Tuesday 15th January 2008.

Any member whose subscription is paid up to 31st December 2007 may apply for the officer positions and/or the post of Regional Representative in their own region.

All candidates must remain fully paid up members throughout the election period. Any person elected to an Executive Committee role must ensure that they are fully paid up members throughout their whole time of office.

The regions are the life blood of our Association so it is essential that all regions have a representative to keep the region alive. Do you care about the future of our organisation? If the answer is “Yes”, why not consider standing as representative for your region. You can be sure of a warm welcome and lots of support from other EC members. Contact the AOUG office for more details now!
Digest of EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING

held on 6th October 2007

- Jean Posthuma Memorial Lecture to be revived as an annual event.
- Many lapsed members rejoined in response to first batch of special letters.
- Formal complaints procedure now in progress against our bank.
- Still awaiting final receipts from AGM weekend. Deadline date set.
- Timetable for OMEGA production to be tightened. Website submission procedures to be clarified.
- AOGU to work alongside Alumni at ALL 2008 DEGREE CEREMONIES.
- Officers or previously trained members to be present at each ceremony.
- Way Forward - National and Regional perspective plans advanced. Standing Orders regulations under review.
- 2008 Spring/AGM bookings showing good early response.

Digest of OFFICERS MEETINGS

held on 5th 2007 (Not already covered above)

- Educational aspects of the Association to be developed.
- Framework for 2009 national celebration developed.
- Variety of services and opportunities for members to be extended.
- Monthly "Chairman’s Letter" for e-mail/website users.
- Trading leaflet to be discontinued - advertising through OMEGA and website.
- Trading to become more significant - Trading to go to all national events.
- Special version of badge being researched for 2009.

Notice of:-

The Annual General Meeting of the Association of Open University Graduates
The Annual General Meeting of AOUG Trading Ltd.
The Annual General Meeting of AOUG Foundation for Education

Notice is hereby given that the 2008 Annual General Meetings for the three AOUG companies will be held on Saturday 17th May 2008 beginning at 10.00am at the Oriel House Hotel, Co. Cork, Ireland.

All paid up members have the right to submit a nomination form for election and to vote by post for their favoured officer candidates and/or Regional Representative for their region.

All paid up members also have the right to submit resolutions to change the Memorandum and Articles of the Association, or motions affecting policy. Copies of the current Memorandum and Articles may be obtained on request from the office at a charge of £1.00 towards postage or downloaded from the website www.aoug.org.uk. Copies of Standing Orders are also available on the website or by post for a further £1.00 for postal costs (please quote your contact details and PI number). All paid up members may attend the AGMs or vote by proxy on business submitted.

Resolutions or motions for these must be submitted in writing to AOUG AGM BUSINESS, AOUG Office, First Floor, South West Temporary Building, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes, MK7 6AA, on or before 4pm on Tuesday 15th January 2008. Resolutions or motions received late or sent by fax or e-mail will be deemed invalid.

Resolutions, or motions, submitted should bear the name, address, daytime and evening telephone numbers and, where applicable, e-mail address of the proposer.

Any rationale that the proposer feels will help the debate should also be submitted. All submissions should be signed and dated by the proposer. Receipt of resolutions or motions will be acknowledged and proposers will be contacted if duplication arises or if any further clarification of intention is required.

Presentation of first Baroness Boothroyd Award - The AOUG Foundation for Education

This is a registered charity set up by the AOUG for the purpose of supporting the Open University by granting awards for students both nationally and in the regions. The Foundation aims to "Advance education by making grants to Open University graduates to assist them to undertake post graduate research projects and to publish the useful results of such research". The charity is funded by members donations, covenants, legacies, gift aid and finally interest from our savings. We are always looking for ways in which to continue to fund our charity. If you can help please contact us.

The AOUG National Awards

The annual ceremony of awards to research students of the Open University took place on Friday 5th of October 2007. The venue was the OMEGA WINTER 2007

Christodoulou meeting rooms at the Open University, Walton Hall. We were delighted to welcome in attendance our Vice Chancellor, Professor Brenda Gourley, together with many other guests from the Open University. More importantly however we welcomed five recipients of our awards along with their family and guests. The occasion was formal although very relaxed and enjoyable. The ceremony was opened by Mrs. Jean Hertzog, the AOUG
Chairman welcoming all guests and award recipients. It was also announced that a new award would be being presented in the name of Baroness Boothroyd to those working in the Law School. The master of Ceremonies was Mrs. Margaret Stobirski, the AOUG Publicity Officer. Each award winner was introduced by their supervisor and their work put on display for everyone to view. Mrs. Jean Hertzog presented the awards to individual recipients. This was followed by a buffet lunch. The awards were presented in the following order:

The Vice Chancellor Sir John Daniel Award 2007 for Education and Language went to Dr. Janet Davies, who was the 5th recipient of this award which was first awarded in 2002. Dr Lesley Anderson introduced Janet.

Janet was awarded a B.Ed Hons degree from Durham University in 1981. She completed her M.A. in Education with the Open University in 1989 and, then spent time expanding her professional practice in a range of primary schools in Suffolk. In 2001 she was appointed as a Primary National Strategy Advisor in Norfolk and she began her Ed.D study with the Open University, which led to registration for a PhD at the Open University completing a Biological Sciences Research Council funded position at the Open University, which led to registration for a PhD at the Open University investigating "oxidative stress resistance and lifespan in Drosophila melanogaster" (The fruit fly). She is due to complete this in 2008.

The Baroness Lee of Asheridge Award 2007 for Mathematics, Computing and Technology went to Mr Mark Dunsford, who was 10th recipient of this award.

Dr. John Newbury supported by Dr. Roger Jones introduced Mark. Mark began his studies with the Open University in 1995, graduating with first class honours in 2000. He is now working towards his PhD. The title of which is "Adaptive communications in mobile autonomous systems." Mobile autonomous systems are robotic devises. His initial plan to investigate 'rover' type vehicles operating in remote locations such as the ocean floor or another planet had to be trimmed to match the practical resources that were available. So he converged on to the area of robot football to provide the platform to develop his research interests.

The Baroness Boothroyd Award for Law 2007 was awarded to Ms. Vicki Scoble. She is the very first recipient of this award. Vicki was introduced to us by Professor Gary Slapper.

Vicki graduated with a First Class LL.B (hons) from the Open University in 2001. She was awarded the Open University London region award for outstanding achievement in 2002. She attended the College of Law at Guildford and passed the LPC with distinction in 2003. Vicki's research expertise is in the field of technical rules of civil procedure, and their role in facilitating civil litigation. She is also an expert in the funding of legal services and the regulation of the legal profession. These fields are very dynamic with change occurring often, and with change entailing multifarious impacts on the nature of the provision of legal services to the public. Vicki's work in identifying from the thousands of professional regulatory changes those whose impact on legal services are most significant and her setting them in a critical context has been excellent.

We would like to offer our sincere congratulations to all our award recipients from all the AOUG Executive Committee and all our members. May I also acknowledge and thank all the supervisors, and recipients for their submissions of information which has helped in the writing of this article.

Margaret Stobirski
Publicity Officer

OMEGA WINTER 2007
Government to Cut Student Funding - Vice Chancellor asks for AOU's help

On 7 September the Government announced that from 2008/09, it will no longer fund English and Northern Irish students taking any Higher Education qualification that is equivalent to or lower than one they already hold. These students are being referred to as ELO (Equivalent or Lower Qualification) students.

The Government's decision is intended to release money for new areas of spending as yet unspecified - but it cuts right across the Government's declared intention to promote lifelong learning and develop the skills of those in work.

Hardest hit will be part-time learners and the part-time sector. Many people who would be able to benefit from government grant funding under the present arrangements will probably have to foot the full fees for their course and some part-time teaching institutions will lose up to 40% of their teaching income. Altogether this saving will constitute only 0.1% of the Department for Universities, Innovation and Skills' budget for HE - but it will have a major impact on the way that universities are able to implement the Government's own agenda on skills and lifelong learning following the publication of the Leitch report.

There are some exemptions to the new policy including training for teachers, nurses and social workers, all foundation degrees and all courses co-funded by employers. HEFCE intends to phase in the Government's decision over 3 to 6 years and to provide some 'safety net' funding to help institutions adjust to the reduced income. The details of the exemptions and the implementation are subject to the ongoing negotiations between HEFCE and universities which will end on 7 December.

Professor Brenda Gourley, the University's Vice-Chancellor, has made a public response to the HEFCE models and the impact of the funding decision on the sector:

"The publication of data from the Higher Education Funding Council for England, which shows the financial impact of proposed funding changes for students who study for a second qualification at the same or lower level as their first, highlights the substantial and disproportionate impact that the changes will have on the part-time sector.

"We remain convinced that across the sector the higher fees that institutions may have to charge will deter many graduates from university-level professional development. We are resolute in our belief that discouraging students in this way runs counter to the Government's priority to re-skil the nation's workforce - and counter to the imperatives of a first-world knowledge economy.

"As part of our response to the proposals, we will also be urging that the range of subject areas that will be exempt from the funding changes is broadened to reflect our concerns, which we know are also shared by students. We will also be making clear the distinctive nature of part-time second degree students and will continue to make the case for the public interest in funding their studies."

The University's own experience makes it seem unlikely that employers will be willing to pay more towards the cost of study - at the moment only 17% of OU students studying 60 point undergraduate courses declare any financial help from employers.

Impact on the OU

Some 25% of OU students who are currently funded will become unfunded and are likely to become subject to higher fees. The people that this hits most are those in work or planning to return to work after parenting or illness who have the greatest burden of financial and family commitments. Many will be seeking to change careers so employers are unlikely to support them to exit a role. Many of our Graduates may want to study again but not necessarily at Postgraduate level.

We would like to hear from you if you would have been hit by this decision had it been in force when you were studying. We want to be able to show Government the real cost of this change and the casualties that it will produce.

The Open University stands to lose 23% of its teaching grant (£23m) as the decision is phased in with capital funding and widening participation grants being proportionally affected (at the moment estimated to be £7m). The transitional funding will offer some short-term protection but real term cuts are currently modelled as starting at £11m in 2008/09 and rising to £19m by 2010/11. This will greatly reduce our ability to reach and to help people to realise their ambitions.

What can I do?

The most important thing that you can do is be up-to-date and accurately informed about the situation so that you can be an ambassador for the University should you wish.

Questions that you could ask yourself and your colleagues include:

1. Would your employer fund or co-fund courses; would they have a view on this change?
2. Do you belong to any trade union or professional body which might have a view on this situation or which could be encouraged to develop a view?
3. Do you belong to any network whose members would be concerned about the withdrawal of adult education opportunities? If so, would you be able to brief them on the position?

You can also:

4. Make sure that you are informed and can pass on accurate information to colleagues, students, collaborators and other professional acquaintances.
5. You can sign the petition on the Number 10 website - http://petition.number10.gov.uk/HE-GRANT-CUTS/

It is important to emphasise that your University is not in crisis; this change is unwelcome in its effects on students and funding but there is scope for adjustments to be made. Please do not write to your MP at this stage - we may need your support in doing so at a later stage.

The Vice-Chancellor and her team are meeting with a wide range of key figures to discuss this announcement and its impacts. The University is using all official channels to ensure that as few students as possible are affected by the Government's decision and to ensure that the impact on the University and its mission is minimised.

For the immediate future, students enrolled on named or complete degree courses in 2007/08 are definitely exempt from any funding changes. A list of courses which are exempt from the decision is going to be negotiated late this Autumn and is likely to be announced this Winter.

We will keep you informed as the situation develops.

Please do e-mail us with your comments and experiences to communications@open.ac.uk

Derek Prior
OU Communication

OMEGA WINTER 2007

The Open University
Being the President of OUSA is never dull; at least that is my experience so far. My diary is rapidly filling up and I never know what is around the corner. I recently attended the House of Commons for the launch of the National Student Forum which will have a remit of reporting to government on issues affecting students in Higher Education. I am extremely pleased to report that OUSA has been included in this initiative and will have a seat on the new National Students Forum. This is an extremely important development giving OUSA and part time students a voice where it matters. This development is very timely, given that in early September we were hit with a bombshell when the Government announced the removal of funding for students studying for a qualification at an equivalent or lower level than previous study. This flies in the face of life long learning and the flexible nature of part time study which the Open University has embraced for the last 38 years. Although there are exemptions to the new policy the OU will be affected and I believe that there are key groups of students who will no longer be funded and will face considerably higher fees which will ultimately prevent them from studying. So I need your help.

OUSA is collecting evidence from students to help explain why this move would be detrimental to thousands of students. If you’ve studied for an OU qualification, particularly if you had an equivalent or higher qualification, we’d like to hear from you. Did your OU studies give you an opportunity to change track? Did the OU change your life? Would you have continued studying if your course costs were substantially higher? If you can spare us a couple of hundred words (no more than 300 please), and are happy for us to use your words (anonymously) in any campaign we run on this issue, then please do write to me at ousa@student.open.ac.uk with the subject ‘My story’ and remember to keep up to date on our campaign at www.ousa.org.uk

Lisa Carson
OUSA President

Senate News

The Chair reported strong student numbers in England, but concern in Wales, and the risk of clawback in Scotland, where it is anticipated that around £0.5m of the 2006/07 grant will ultimately be lost. Enhanced marketing and student support are being actioned in Scotland to address the problem. However, no man is an island, particularly in the OU, where differential policies across the nations all impact upon the whole, as demonstrated by Senate’s major concern of the day, a Government announcement of the phasing out, from 2008/09, of funding for the majority of students in England and Northern Ireland who are studying for qualifications that are equivalent to, or lower than, those that they already possess (ELQ students).

If we are unable to secure more varied income sources, this policy will inevitably lead to some downsizing in three to five years, as the OU’s funding losses (even by HEFCE’s conservative estimate) are expected to exceed £30 million. The action will have a particularly detrimental effect on Open and other universities that have worked hard to promote lifelong learning, and runs counter to the Leitch Report and other Government initiatives ostensibly supporting lifelong learning and skills development. The decision appears to have been based on some sweeping flawed notion that students re-entering higher education are generally less worthy or needful of support, and that employers might come to the rescue and offer more money for retraining. I just saw pigs fly past. Incidentally, the highest impact will be in vocational areas, particularly in the Business School.

The OU is responding with a drive at all levels to get the policy reversed, from the Chancellor and Vice-Chancellor meeting Ministers, to a media campaign and joint lobbying with other universities. It is also pursuing various ways of minimising the impact of the policy on the University. Alumni will be kept informed of developments, consulted, and hopefully get involved in the campaign, for example by canvassing MPs. I’m afraid that it will take some effort to sway hearts and minds among the general public on the issue — Paul Weaver’s related Downing Street e-petition, a few days from closure, has only attracted 2,658 signatures, while 216,386
Amaze Me!

Do you remember your degree ceremony? Of course you do. It was a really special day which you no doubt shared with your family and friends.

The culmination of many years of hard work, self-doubt and sacrifices to achieve the eventual success. A success that many do not fully believe has actually happened but a success that is realised with an overwhelming sense of pride when you put on that gown on degree day and looked around you and saw others with that same smile on their faces and the mutual knowledge of what you had all achieved.

Hundreds of other new graduates have all experienced that pride this year and AOUG members have that sense of - we have done that - we understand how you are feeling - we want to share in your fulfilment and congratulate each and every new graduate. We know that is never fully possible but our desire to support the work of the Open University in this way is so important to us so possible but our desire to support the work of the every new graduate. We know that is never fully achieved.

This was where we could truly be the ambassadors of the university again - been there, done that, got the T-shirt. Wearing our OU gowns to show our empathy, we mingled with the new graduates on an equal footing, giving genuine congratulations and sharing all the many, many stories of individual achievements. We once more were able to endorse that sense of pride of the new graduates and their families and to not only congratulate the graduates but also to thank their families for the support they had obviously given throughout the years. It was a wonderful opportunity.

The five venues that hosted this experiment were Portsmouth, Harrogate, Ely, Birmingham and Manchester and thanks to the hard work and professional image of our volunteers, the Vice Chancellor has given AUO permission to work at all ceremonies in 2008. Well done to all this year’s helpers. AOUG is really pleased of how you helped to raise our profile.

We have all achieved our Open University degrees but sometimes as time goes on we forget just what we are capable of. Lord Puttnam brought the meaning of life long learning and what the Open University stands for, flooding back to me in his inspiring address to new graduates. He recalled a time when early in his working career he had gained a job he desperately wanted to do but having been given the job was with some self doubt at his abilities. He was called into the boss' office and, fearing the sack felt very uneasy. However the boss it appears had more faith in him and why he had hired him in the first place and simply told him to go out and “Amaze me”. Through doing that, he said, you will go on to amaze yourself. Everyone of those graduates listening knew what Lord Puttnam meant as by achieving their degrees they had not only shown others what they could do but they had amazed themselves. However it must not stop with degree day. Are we, the Association of Open University Graduates, going to stop there and say again - been there, done that bought the T-shirt? - or are we going to go on and take new challenges and continue to amaze others and by doing so amaze ourselves. Do you remember our motto "In my end is my beginning" so the degree is not the end, it is the beginning!

Your beginning might mean further study with the Open University but life long learning can take many directions. The Association has many new opportunities ahead of it. Learning about yourself and what you are capable of in all walks of life must continue. Many times I hear in AOUG circles, "Oh I couldn't do that, I couldn't be a local contact, I couldn't be a Regional Representative". Why not? What is stopping you? And Regional Representative having been given the endorsement of their regional members often seem reluctant to try new things, why? The members had faith in you, so have faith in yourself. We can all continue to try new things whether they are big or small. AOUG supports the Open University but it also offers a great fellowship, like friends and family, to support each other. Next year we are looking for members to work congratulating new graduates at degree ceremonies again. Could you do that?

So whether it is offering to help at next year’s ceremonies, selling raffle tickets at local events, becoming a local contact or standing for election on the AOUG Executive Committee, don’t lose faith in what you are capable of - you got your OU degree and in doing so continue to amaze yourself!

Jean Hertzog
Chairman

2008 Degree Ceremony Dates

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Throughout the 2007 degree season, two AOUG members were officially invited to process on each occasion. Some members have been invited in recent years as individuals and we are very grateful to all those Regional Directors who allowed this to happen but this year it was nation-wide, in their official role as AOUG. Our thanks go to the Vice Chancellor who arranged for this to happen. Lord Puttnam brought the meaning of life long learning and what the Open University stands for, flooding back to me in his inspiring address to new graduates. He recalled a time when early in his working career he had gained a job he desperately wanted to do but having been given the job was with some self doubt at his abilities. He was called into the boss' office and, fearing the sack felt very uneasy. However the boss it appears had more faith in him and why he had hired him in the first place and simply told him to go out and “Amaze me”. Through doing that, he said, you will go on to amaze yourself. Everyone of those graduates listening knew what Lord Puttnam meant as by achieving their degrees they had not only shown others what they could do but they had amazed themselves. However it must not stop with degree day. Are we, the Association of Open University Graduates, going to stop there and say again - been there, done that bought the T-shirt? - or are we going to go on and take new challenges and continue to amaze others and by doing so amaze ourselves. Do you remember our motto "In my end is my beginning" so the degree is not the end, it is the beginning!

Your beginning might mean further study with
OU Alumni Team

Over the past few months, the Alumni team has held a series of successful talks around the UK called Open Insights. Aimed at alumni and their guests, each event has been a sell-out. Here are highlights from just two of them.

Milton Keynes
OU Honorary Graduate and author, Teresa Collard, was the speaker at the Open University’s Betty Boothroyd Library in Milton Keynes.

Although Teresa had planned to talk about one of her novels "Murder at Hampton Court", the focus switched to her life story. She kept the guests engrossed with a funny and entertaining account of her life, including how she was instrumental in bringing live music to Milton Keynes. One of the guests commented:

"...it was so interesting to hear about the lady’s life. How did she find the time to do it all?"

Following the talk, there was a tour of the Library followed by canapes and wine, giving alumni a chance to meet each other.

Cardiff
Professor Trevor Herbert from The Open University gave a very informative and engaging talk about Broadway Musicals - their history, identity and impact. As well as talking about how musicals began, guests were treated to some early images and extracts from a number of musicals. By the end of the talk Trevor had people singing along and wanting it to continue longer into the evening!

Afterwards, there was a chance for the guests to mingle as well as a CV surgery for career advice and information on OU courses.

Katherine Davison
Alumni Relations

Visit to Alton

On Saturday, 11th August, which was fortunately one of a few really nice days this summer, a group of members plus partners, went on a visit arranged by Audrey and Michael Collins, to the town of Alton in Hampshire.

Alton is a very interesting town with strong connections to Jane Austen. Jane lived at Chawton, which is not very far away and came into Alton to visit friends, see her Doctor and also her brothers. Captain Francis Austin, R.N. rented a house in the high street for two years, and another brother Henry, was a partner in the banking business of Austin, Grey and Vincent, who handled some of her correspondence between Alton and London.

Another literary connection was that the Elizabethan Poet, Edmund Spencer of "The Faerie Queene" fame also lived in Alton for a while.

During the Civil War, Alton saw quite a lot of action. Two battles took place here between Royalists and the Parliamentarian forces. The first one in February 1643 was considered a minor skirmish. However, in December, a major battle took place resulting in between 100 and 200 men being killed. Royalist Colonel Boles was killed, reputedly in the pulpit of St. Lawrence's Church. The church door still has bullet holes in it and a large loophole cut through which muskets could have been fired.

Another literary connection is the grave of "Sweet Fanny Adams". On Saturday, 24th August, 1867, poor Fanny, who was only 8 years old, was murdered by a solicitors clerk, Frederick Baker. Fanny’s body was found cut up in small pieces (in fact we were told that the body parts were brought back to a room upstairs in the Leathern Bottle Pub where we were enjoying our lunch!) Baker was arrested, tried and executed.

At this time, sailors of the Royal Navy were just starting to have their meat supplied in cans. Being uncertain of what they were getting, the phrase which is still used today "We must have Sweet Fanny Adams in here" was coined.

Gillian Davies
Region 13

Over the past few months, the Alumni team has held a series of successful talks around the UK called Open Insights. Aimed at alumni and their guests, each event has been a sell-out. Here are highlights from just two of them.

Milton Keynes
OU Honorary Graduate and author, Teresa Collard, was the speaker at the Open University’s Betty Boothroyd Library in Milton Keynes.

Although Teresa had planned to talk about one of her novels "Murder at Hampton Court", the focus switched to her life story. She kept the guests engrossed with a funny and entertaining account of her life, including how she was instrumental in bringing live music to Milton Keynes. One of the guests commented:

"...it was so interesting to hear about the lady’s life. How did she find the time to do it all?"

Following the talk, there was a tour of the Library followed by canapes and wine, giving alumni a chance to meet each other.

Cardiff
Professor Trevor Herbert from The Open University gave a very informative and engaging talk about Broadway Musicals - their history, identity and impact. As well as talking about how musicals began, guests were treated to some early images and extracts from a number of musicals. By the end of the talk Trevor had people singing along and wanting it to continue longer into the evening!

Afterwards, there was a chance for the guests to mingle as well as a CV surgery for career advice and information on OU courses.

Katherine Davison
Alumni Relations

Visit to Alton

On Saturday, 11th August, which was fortunately one of a few really nice days this summer, a group of members plus partners, went on a visit arranged by Audrey and Michael Collins, to the town of Alton in Hampshire.

Alton is a very interesting town with strong connections to Jane Austen. Jane lived at Chawton, which is not very far away and came into Alton to visit friends, see her Doctor and also her brothers. Captain Francis Austin, R.N. rented a house in the high street for two years, and another brother Henry, was a partner in the banking business of Austin, Grey and Vincent, who handled some of her correspondence between Alton and London.

Another literary connection was that the Elizabethan Poet, Edmund Spencer of "The Faerie Queene" fame also lived in Alton for a while.

During the Civil War, Alton saw quite a lot of action. Two battles took place here between Royalists and the Parliamentarian forces. The first one in February 1643 was considered a minor skirmish. However, in December, a major battle took place resulting in between 100 and 200 men being killed. Royalist Colonel Boles was killed, reputedly in the pulpit of St. Lawrence's Church. The church door still has bullet holes in it and a large loophole cut through which muskets could have been fired.

Another literary connection is the grave of "Sweet Fanny Adams". On Saturday, 24th August, 1867, poor Fanny, who was only 8 years old, was murdered by a solicitors clerk, Frederick Baker. Fanny’s body was found cut up in small pieces (in fact we were told that the body parts were brought back to a room upstairs in the Leathern Bottle Pub where we were enjoying our lunch!) Baker was arrested, tried and executed.

At this time, sailors of the Royal Navy were just starting to have their meat supplied in cans. Being uncertain of what they were getting, the phrase which is still used today "We must have Sweet Fanny Adams in here" was coined.

Gillian Davies
Region 13
AOUG Spring/AGM Weekend 2008

For the first time ever in its history the AOUG AGM is being held in a venue off the mainland of the UK. This innovative departure from tradition is symptomatic of the spread of the OU itself across national boundaries, clearly demonstrating that the Open University is now a world-wide institution. As the Open University spreads across Europe and the world, so too does the Association of Open University Graduates (AOUG) embrace new members from every country where the OU has established itself as an institution of learning, with an enviable teaching record, marking it as one of the foremost universities of our time.

We are confident that holding the AGM in Cork will be seen not only as a new departure, but also as a recognition of the fact that the OU is now a truly international institution, with students drawn from many nationalities and backgrounds. We therefore extend a cead mile failte, a hundred thousand welcomes, to our members not only from the mainland but also from every other country in which the OU has established a presence, to come to Cork to meet with members from all over Europe. We hope that this will be a truly European affair.

What awaits you in Cork? Cork began on an island in the estuary of the River Lee (the Irish name Corcaigh means a marsh), and it now ranks as the second largest city in Ireland. It was granted city status over 800 years ago. For such a relatively small city (population roughly 250,000), Cork has a bewildering plethora of pubs and restaurants to go to in the evening. Many pubs offer live music so you can enjoy the “craic” in an authentic atmosphere while imbibing one of the local brews, Murphy’s stout or a pint of Beamish or Guinness!

Residents of Cork (also known as Corkonians) generally have a good sense of humour and are not afraid to poke fun at themselves or others, though you may have some difficulty in understanding the local accent.

Key places to visit are the English market in the centre of the city; Shandon Steeple, which overlooks Cork on the north bank; the University through which the river Lee passes; and the very steep St Patrick’s Hill (to give its full correct title although locals drop the "St", from the top of which are magnificent views over the entire metropolis.

While St Anne’s Shandon dates from 1722 (replacing an older church which was destroyed in the siege of 1690), the famous bell tower was not erected until 1750. The tower crown consists of a gilt ball and a salmon some 4m long. The church and tower are open to visitors. Shandon and it’s "goldie fish" (the salmon weather-vane perched on top) is probably Cork’s best known and loved landmark, perched as it is on a prominent position on a hill in the north side of the city. Climb up its narrow stone stairwell and ring its famous bells. At the top -the view of the city is simply breathtaking. I would give directions, but you can see it from anywhere in the city - use your eyes!

Ballincollig, where the AGM will be held is a large, fast growing town, roughly 6 miles west of Cork City on the road to Macroom. It has a lot of history surrounding it, with the remains of Gunpowder Mills from the 18th century still a site to visit. The north side of the main street was dominated by a mile long stone wall, behind which was the Army Barracks, but it now being developed into residential, commercial, and retail sites.

Ballincollig Castle is another historic site in the area of Ballincollig. This is to the south west of the town and is visible from the Ballincollig By-Pass. There is also a ringfort on the Link Road which was partially excavated by the Cork County Council in 2006, as a prelude to building the new Fire Station Headquarters on the site.
Carrigaline

This is a beautiful town, five miles from the sea, whose inhabitants list their number one past time as drinking pints of Guinness and their number two past time as eating in the wide variety of restaurants. The town itself boasts an active night life, with five pubs in a three hundred meter stretch of street. During the day kids can tour the town or just relax at the ultra modern play park. For the more mature visitor, Carrigaline has some amazing walks with the recently refurbished "old railwayline" topping the list. This beautiful walk follows the Owenabue river right into the seaside town of Crosshaven.

Carrigaline is a growing town with a young population and is a great base for touring the southwest, being only 7 miles from Cork city and 10 from the now famous Kinsale. Carrigaline is best known for its hand produced pottery (not any more), its pipe bands and its lovely people.

Youghal

Situated in the South East of Cork, Youghal has been a popular holiday destination for centuries. It has a population of about 10,000 people and is rich in history, with 3 active festivals each year. It is an ideal family destination with its 2 Blue Flag Beaches and numerous entertainments for the children. Bed & Breakfasts, Hotels Pubs & Restaurants are in abundance. Youghal has been designated as a Heritage Town by Bord Failte. Developments include an interpretative centre and other attractions such as Tynte's Castle, an urban tower house located on the eastern side of North Main Street.

Youghal used to be a busy textile centre and one of Cork's most popular seaside resorts. It is one of the most historic and interesting towns in Ireland being situated at the mouth of the Blackwater, one of Ireland's best known salmon fishing rivers. There is a promenade leading to a magnificent 8 kilometre beach. It is well worth a visit.

Here we have an ancient walled seaport town: it was occupied in turn by the Danes and the Normans, and received a charter from King John, it was part of the great tract of lands granted to Sir Walter Raleigh. His home, Myrtle Grove still stands there (open to the public). Tradition has it that here he smoked the first cigarette and planted the first potatoes: but tradition and historians don't always agree.

The main street is spanned by an old clock tower. St. Mary's Parish Church has recently been restored to good effect, along with the adjacent town wall. Here you will find the tomb of Margaret, Countess of Desmond, who died at the age of 147 from a fall from a cherry tree. There are several other old abbeys, towers and buildings in the town - follow the signposted Town Trail. The film Moby Dick was shot on location here.

The name Youghal derives from the Irish "Yew Wood". Yew was once extensive throughout Ireland. In Youghal, yew wood was used to feed the ironworks of Richard Boyle during the 17th century.

Blarney

Probably one of Cork's (and indeed Ireland's) favourite attractions is Blarney castle. Reputed to give whoever kisses it's famous stone the gift of eloquence. Personally, I think it's a load of bunk - but it is perhaps a case of familiarity breeding contempt. Go for yourself and enjoy the views. Anyway, if the castle doesn't turn you on, the beautiful castle gardens are worth a visit in their own right.

When you come to Ballincollig you will receive a true Irish welcome. You can relax in the ambiance of a four star hotel, enjoy the full leisure centre and on Friday evening test your brain power in our friendly table quiz. Many of the local attractions outlined above will be available to members who pre-book for the outing. Full details of this outing will be printed in the next issue of Omega. Please book early as places in the hotel are limited and will be on a first come first in basis.

Matt Reville
Region 12

Association of Open University Graduates' Website

The AOUG website, aoug.org.uk is not purely restricted to Executive Committee contributions, but as yet very few members have sent in their items. We are looking for items relating to the many and varied interests that members hold to fill the specialist pages. Any member may contribute by sending contributions to the AOUG Office.

Can you supply an article of historical interest, an opinion on scientific theories, a layman view on psychology or maybe a review of some play or film you have seen? If you enjoy something, you can be sure that someone else out there will enjoy it too.

Please send everything to the AOUG Office either by e-mail, or post, with your name, region, PI number and the name of the page you think your item should be included on. Only your name and region will appear, with no contact details posted on the site.

Go on have a go - it is your website.

OMEGA WINTER 2007
"View all the senses the world around, there's none like Scarbro can be found" - Dr Wittie

It is nearly 6pm on a Friday October evening and time to meet the other AOUG members who had booked to spend a weekend at the Esplanade Hotel at Scarborough, the first ever spa resort by the sea.

The social event had been planned over many months and was able to incorporate a trio of the Association objectives:

- ongoing plans to encourage local groups of OU graduates;
- support of the Open University;
- promotion of educational and charitable activities at regional level.

Our hotel was perched high on the cliffs and provided great views of South Bay including the harbour and lighthouse. Overlooking the bay, on top of the opposite headland, are the ruins of a medieval castle built around 1155 on the directions of Henry II. The site of the castle is certainly one of the largest along the north eastern coast of the country although it was hardly tested until the English Civil War in 1645 when it was overwhelmed. Some of our group were to explore this later on the Saturday.

Dinner was early on the first evening and was most welcomed by the AOUG in Yorkshire Walking Group who had earlier that day completed an eight mile walk around Hawnyb, north of the A170. Admiring the autumn colours and hilltop views. Some of us had booked to see one of the couple of plays being performed at the Stephen Joseph theatre which is renowned for its links with Alan Ayckbourn. "The Suitcase Kid" by Jacqueline Wilson is based on a popular teenage story of a child having to divide her life between her father and mother who having split up, had taken on very different lives - hence the child having to live out of a suitcase.

Others of our group saw the new play "The Swing of Things" by Torben Betts who has received high praise for his plays and he has been likened in originality to Pinter and Beckett. This play revolves around a newly damaged church which was utilised by the parliamentarians to bomb the castle and the former sustained much damage. One of the questions on the Town Trail was to name whose grave could be found in the nearby graveyard. In fact the grave was that of Anne Bronte of the famed family who often visited the town. She was buried here having being taken ill on one of her visits just 28 years old. Back down in the lower level of the town, yet another question was to describe what the term "The Bolts" refers to. This was the name given to a series of narrow streets running behind the sea front buildings, a relic of medieval times. Fortunately the long steep climb back up to the town centre could be circumvented by using the Cliff Lift which has existed since Victorian times and at the end of the trail was 50p well spent. Prizes were awarded to the team with the most correct answers and all those who took part received a Scarborough bookmark.

Soon after noon, all gathered in the "Pink Room" to meet with the Yorkshire Regional Director, Nick Berry, who very kindly gave up some of his time to come to our hotel to act as MC for our pre-dinner Award Ceremony. Maureen Bowman, our Regional Representative, awarded the AOUG Foundation for Education Regional award to Cressida Brennan. This lady obtained her degree in spite of having to endure many cycles of chemotherapy throughout her studies. In Yorkshire we also have our own charity and as
Chair of AOUG in Yorkshire, I awarded Adrienne Van Den Tooren with the YOUGET (Yorkshire Open University Graduates Education Trust) Award consisting of a cheque and some glassware. Adrienne suffered many setbacks during her studies because of serious domestic problems and she received much encouragement to persevere from OU staff. Both Award winners had brought members of their families to support them and all shared with us the magnificent buffet served by the hotel. We really appreciated our Regional Director giving his support to our celebration.

After lunch we were all seated and looking forward to an inter-active talk on the geology of the Yorkshire coast line around Scarborough which is renowned for its fossil finds. The speaker had been booked through the local museum service and apparently we were going to be able to handle and see various examples of the artefacts collected and stored locally. This was to have been of special interest to our walking group. We waited, and waited, but to no avail. The speaker failed to turn up. (I am however glad to report that a sincere apology was received a few days later for the absence of the speaker and our members have now been invited to a special preview of the Rotunda Museum next year prior to its official opening following major refurbishment).

Using typical OU resourcefulness we brought forward our scheduled Saturday Meeting where the Yorkshire committee informally exchange views with other members. In particular we discussed possible ways in which we could involve more members in local events.

Our Saturday evening entertainment was provided by a committee member, Carol Ann Churm, and described as a light hearted paper and pencil exercise. Before the quiz there was a group exercise requiring those participating to provide the most entertaining story based on the inclusion of all the unusual objects provided to each team in a small bag. Members surprised themselves with previously unheard creative spontaneity. Prizes were awarded, the raffle drawn and attendees retired to the bar, or bed.

With all the rooms cleared on the Sunday morning, the walkers set off for a walk along the coast road from Cloughton. Apparently the planned two-hour walk extended to four as they endeavoured to negotiate an extensive wooded National Trust nature reserve. After finding liquid refreshment at a pub to accompany their packed lunches they returned to their cars strolling along a disused railway line.

Meanwhile a number of us, not so fit or able, walked the short distance to the high Victorian Church of St. Martin-on-the-Hill, built mainly through the generosity of a Victorian spinster, Miss Mary Craven. On a visit to Scarborough about three years ago some of our members had visited this church and were very impressed by it. After the sung eucharist service we were given a special tour of the magnificent building. We were especially fortunate as within the previous week scaffolding had been removed from the church interior to expose a newly cleaned window above the altar with was to be re-consecrated the following week by the Bishop. It was impossible not to be impressed by the pulpit containing various panels two of which were ascribed to Dante Rossetti. Our guide described the contents of some of the stained glass windows by such famous artists as Burne-Jones and Ford Maddox Brown. One of these bore the face of Jane Morris, wife of William Morris, who had been used as a model for one of the saints that was represented. William Morris’ work was also evident around the church especially in his panelled decorations showing his obvious talents now inspiring patterns in many home furnishings.

A gentle last walk along the cliff top with more great views of the harbour, a bar meal in the hotel, then our farewells before returning homewards after a very enjoyable weekend.

Ramsey Hertzog
Region 07
Response to Evaluation in Professional Development

The Research Context

Primary Strategy consultants are responsible for delivering a large proportion of the continued professional development accessed by serving teachers. The training courses they deliver are evaluated most often with an ‘end of course’ evaluation (reaction evaluation) designed to gather course participant responses and reactions.

Before the study, anecdotal discussion with consultant colleagues appeared to indicate that they were rarely influenced by the participant gradings and comments contained in the evaluations. They seemed to consider that participant comment seldom accurately reflected training and was too subjective to positively influence changes to their own practice.

My thesis investigated whether Primary Strategy consultants did in fact use any information contained in reaction evaluations for their own professional development. It then explored the factors influencing the extent to which reaction evaluation may be used or ignored.

Do consultants use reaction evaluation?

My findings indicated that feedback from reaction evaluation was one of the more significant factors to be taken into account by trainers as they developed their training skills (see below).

It was evident though that taken together the ‘self generated’ feedback factors had a greater significance for consultants (see right).

Total consultant response for each feedback factor

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Key to Feedback Factor Codes

1. Comments from reaction evaluation
2. Performance management feedback
3. Observation of participant response during training
4. Discussion of own performance with peers
5. Observation of transfer of training elements to classroom
6. Being requested to do more training
7. Considering the effect of learning activities when a participant
8. Observing other trainers at work
9. Making changes to training following own study
10. Putting self in place of participants
11. Making changes as a result formalized peer coaching

* Formal feedback factors
• Self generated feedback
$ Motivational factors

Why did the consultants consider ‘formal feedback’ (which contains reaction evaluation responses) less significant?

I conducted a number of interviews with consultants to explore the reasons why ‘formal feedback’ was considered to be less of a significant influence. These interviews revealed that consultants were concerned about:
• how far they could trust participant response
• how far they had control over the reaction evaluation (including the questions that were asked), and
• the lack of specific ‘formative’ comments in participant responses

Research implications for the design of reaction evaluation

It was clear that consultants applied their professional knowledge and judgement to all feedback they received. They recognised that reaction evaluation plays the role of indicating immediate participant response to a training event, but considered that for their own development this format of reaction evaluation was unsupportive.

My thesis concluded by suggesting how reaction evaluation design could be modified to increase the usefulness to consultants, by:
• constructing clear criteria for the rating scale grades, to reduce subjectivity;
• including more open ended questions, but relating these more specifically to the training the participant was attending;
• ensuring that the administrative, e.g. quality of the training venue, and training related aspects are analysed separately;
• offering consultants more opportunity to increase their involvement in the training cycle so that evaluation analysis has a greater impact on driving future course development;
• customising evaluation to give "best fit" for the aims and content of each course;
• refocusing the procedure for participant response e.g. evaluating sessions at points during the day, building to an overall grading for the day.

Dr. Janet Davis
Winner of the Sir John Daniels Award for Education and Language Studies
The Open University, in its concept as a distance provider, has very few students who regularly attend the campus. Go to any other university in the UK, in term time, and the campus is busy with students rushing between lectures, standing talking, eating, drinking, even living on site, but not so at the Open University. Some tutorials are held there in the evenings or weekends and research students do visit to continue their studies, but on the whole the OU campus is for research and administration, which is far more active than any conventional university because, as a distance provider, there is the need to keep the postal service in business, or write this at a time when the UK is suffering a postal strike!

However, for a university campus without students, it is a thriving, energetic place. Over the years, as the university has developed, more and more buildings have appeared, pushing car parks further out from the centre and creating an incredible diversity of architectural wonders. Some I find absolutely wonderful, others I can happily pass by without a second look, but they all contribute to the changes which are constantly taking place.

Because of building developments, the Association has inhabited different offices, but probably the most diverse of all the OU campus buildings, the RAF Hut, was our home for many years. Now, the word ‘hut’ may conjure up a variety of images from a garden shed to a mountain shelter but the RAF Hut was one of the first buildings on campus when the Open University started. On ‘loan’ from the Bedfordshire County Council, it was originally used as a Royal Air Force building in constant use during the Second World War and in my opinion should be a listed building. It was with some reluctance that we were moved to our present offices, the name ‘temporary’ is far from what it looks like, but we are grateful to the OU for providing such excellent accommodation.

On a recent visit for an Executive Committee meeting, the Association’s Officers had a meeting with the Vice Chancellor, Professor Brenda Gourley. To get to Walton Hall we had to by pass an enormous building project which is replacing the old Jennie Lee Library, and do a detour around the grass area to the side of Walton Hall. It was here that we came across a delightful display of Things’ metal objects representing everyday things – placed in a flower bed. It reminded me of a time when I was visiting an OU research student in Worcestershire, who lived well off the beaten track, and there in the woods was a wonderful display of statues. Art in the modern world is at home anywhere and so with the Open University. Throughout the campus at Walton Hall there are statues, paintings, objects colour, all adding to the diversity of our university.

During the summer the Open University presented ‘Art Walk 2007’ an art walk around the campus, by Milton Keynes artists showing their work alongside the university’s collection. Although the art walk has now ended and the displays moved on, the OU’s collection remains and is considerable and highly recommended. Not only that, there is a wonderful nature trail also well worth a visit.

I ask, where else can you find a university in its own contained area which has a manor house, a village church, a wartime hut, a state of the art library, to name but a few, and within its buildings, a university which is a leader as a distance provider? This is a university that has won University Challenge, received an endearing mention in Bill Bryson’s ‘Notes From a Small Island’ and invented the Beagle and on top of that caters for thousands of students out of these buildings.

The sculpture outside the new library can be seen on the front cover of this OMEGA.

Visit www.open.ac.uk/awg/artworks.html and www.open.ac.uk/nature for more pictures.

Patricia Cowling
Treasurer and Company Secretary
Spring Morning (Nov?6)

Time passing bathes in iridescent light
Softened images of yesteryear.
Unbidden they surface, Moments of transient happiness: Meeting of eyes,
Touching of finger tips, Thoughts shared
with you in companionable silence.

I remember a night
The moon shook and shivered
in her cold and icy shoe,
We stumbled upon spongy mounds
through a withered rose bush,
Playing a childish game.
Seeing not that crushed environment
fenced with iron,
I felt our minds meet:
I was Don Quixote
And you my Dulcinea.
Our lips fused
cementing an unspoken pact.
I am ensnared
by a guileless smile,
A beacon of light
in which I discover myself.

Matt Reville
Region 12

Spring Morning

I stepped into the garden and a misty spring-warm morn.
Bird song filled the air, alive with insects newly born.
Brimstone, bright yellow herald of the early spring.
Sunning on a dainty primrose. Warmed, it joyfully then took wing.
Past winter's dull grey damp mantel had showed me I grow older
But beauty, blooms and birdsong gently slid it from my shoulder.
Snowdrops' diamond dewed white buds pierce the green grass border.
Yellow rows of crocus line the drive, in erect, proud military-like order.
Busy, darting little blue gnomes from twig to twig do wing.
Bright beady eyed blue-tits twittering upside-down they swing.
Above the still, black, pond-water a haze of minute midges dances.
Through the wet brown earth the sparkling emerald tip of a tulip lances.
I startle a golden-beaked blackbird bathing. His angry warning call
Echoed shrilly by a flip-tailed wren from the moss-grown garden wall.
Bright blue-eyed weeds greeting the spring sun from their crevice upward rise.
Bright gold winter jasmine's heady perfumes early buzzing bumblebees entice.
Candle-like, chestnuts' green buds grace the glistening branches,
Heralds of beauty yet to bloom, through which the sunlight glances.
Lonely, a mournful mewing buzzard softly circles above the dark green firs,
Sweet smells, bright colours, a palate of fresh leafy greens show that Nature stirs.
Aged kingly oaks' twig- lace lattice dark silhouetted against the morning sky
As soft warm spring-scented gentle breezes through them pass and softly die.
Lone silver birch, gentle lady of the woods, the morning sun turns its bark to gold.
I stand silent and entranced, look and listen as Nature all her wonders does unfold.

Hugh Naismith
Germany