



# News

For the attention of: news/education editors

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## **Younger students continue to turn to The Open University**

The opportunity to "earn while you learn", gain valuable work experience, and enjoy the quality of study material and flexibility of courses are some of the key factors contributing to the increasing numbers of younger people studying with The Open University.

Over the past eight years the number of young students choosing to study at The Open University has increased nearly four-fold, with more than 11 per cent of all students registered on Open University undergraduate courses in 2003/04 aged 24 or under.

Among the young students who have chosen The Open University over a conventional university are:

- A 23-year-old badminton professional and member of the 2000 Olympics team, from Cardiff, who wants to combine study for a business degree with the demands of overseas travel and training.
- A 21-year-old analyst programmer, from Tyne and Wear, who works full-time at a car manufacturing plant and whose employer is sponsoring his under-graduate and post-graduate study in computing and technology in addition to giving him paid study leave.
- A 21-year-old development worker for a mental health charity in Kent, whose post-graduate study combined with her work experience, will enable her to specialise in her chosen field of forensic psychology.

- A 22-year-old employee at an accountancy firm in Durham, who has no regrets after leaving a traditional university to opt for OU study. She now has a degree, seven years work experience, a foot on the property ladder and no student debt.
- A 19-year-old single mum from Durham who wants to gain a degree while caring for her son full-time so that she can return to work as soon as possible.
- A 23-year-old student from Leicestershire with a severe heart defect who is able to gain a degree in a way that accounts for her disability.

Will Swann, Director, Students, identified a number of reasons for younger students choosing to study with The Open University.

"We're finding that the cost of going to other universities is discouraging people and as a consequence they are turning to The Open University. When you consider that Open University students do not have to find the money to live away from home and that our fees are significantly lower it is not altogether surprising," he said.

"An increasing number of people do not want to commit to three years of study before joining the workforce. The Open University allows them to both study and begin their career on completing school or college. They can earn while they learn.

"Some younger students have attended other universities but have not found them compatible with their study needs or their lifestyle. Studying at The Open University allows them to study at their own pace, in their own surroundings."

Of those aged 24 or under more than a third are aged 21 or under, accounting for more than four percent of Open University undergraduates. That is nearly four times the figure recorded eight years ago.

"While The Open University is often an option for those who have not obtained a conventional university entrance qualification nearly half of these young students – who do not already have a first degree – have qualifications which could get them into conventional university, if they so desired. Arguably, the lifestyle the students can lead while studying at The Open University is a motivating factor for young students enrolling with us," Mr Swann added.

Women make up the larger proportion among the 24 and under age group. Latest figures show 11,982 women and 5,686 men.

## Editor's Notes

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Journalists looking to organise an interview with Will Swann and those wishing further information on the student case studies featured in this news release are asked to contact Gabi Nobis on 01908 655026

The face of The Open University is changing as its community of students, staff, alumni and supporters begins to see the University using its new-style logo. The old blue and yellow logo – familiar to millions for 35 years – has been redesigned by world-renowned brand consultants Wolff Olins to fit with the University's 21<sup>st</sup> century aims.

While the new logo will appear on everything from stationery to course materials over the next two years, it's more than just this visible difference that the Open University community will notice. The updated logo is one in a series of changes that the largest university in the UK is making to keep it at the forefront of distance learning in higher education.

A new ten-point strategy – OU Futures – promises to provide even better service to students. Its priorities include fair access for all, an increased pace of innovation, international expansion and greater local presence throughout the UK. There can hardly be a street in the UK that does not have an OU alumnus, student or staff member within its homes.

The Open University is ranked fifth of all UK universities for teaching quality in the Sunday Times University Guide 2004 – a ranking higher than those for Oxford and University College London. More than 1,000 academics are involved in writing materials and in research that ranges from e-learning to space sciences. Another 8,000 associate lecturers provide personal tuition to more than 200,000 students.

Since its beginning in 1971, more than two million people have studied Open University degree, diploma, certificate and stand-alone courses.

## Resources

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