Welcome and Notices

A very warm welcome to all our staff and students at the start of the new academic year! We would like to start our sixth edition with a few notices:

We are excited to let you know that we are planning a ‘Welcome to the School’ event for Associate Lecturers in our School – details to follow shortly!

Student buddies - experienced students are available on many LHCS modules to support you.

Why not have a browse on the Science Study Sites? The UG Science site is the go-to place if you are studying BSc Biology, BSc Chemistry, BSc Health sciences as well as BSc Natural Sciences.

• You can join in your qualification-based community and activities – starting by posting a message to your qualification forum
• View recordings of Chemistry Essentials and cell biology workshops

The PG Science site is for you if you are studying our Postgraduate curriculum.

Biology week 1-9 October

During the first week of October we’ll be joining in with the Royal Society of Biology’s Biology Week to celebrate all things biosciences by hosting some special events for any students interested in biology:

• Following her fascinating recent talk on careers in bioinformatics, join Dr Wendi Bacon for an Introduction to Bioinformatics interactive workshop. Thursday 6th 12:00-14:00 (booking required).

• Friday is #ImABiologist day when the RSB celebrates diversity in biology careers. Meet biologists from the Open University at our I’m a Biologist panel event, find out how they got into biology and what they love about it. Bring your questions! Friday 7th 12:00-13:00.

All event details are on the biology forum on the science study site.

School research: Jon Golding introduces the Cancer Cluster

The Cancer Cluster is a diverse community of academics, PhD students, postdocs and technical staff from the faculties of STEM, FASS and WELS. Our research covers areas including: bioinformatics, epigenetics, cell signalling, radiotherapy, photodynamic therapy and health economics.

Some examples of our work are the £700,000 Innovation for Cancer Care in Africa, linking industrial and social innovation to improve access to cancer care in East Africa (and soon in India), led by Maureen Macintosh, Smita Srinivas and Dinar Kale. Our bioinformatics work has identified three new gene hubs as potential drug targets in breast cancer (Sushila Rigas), and novel long non-coding RNAs that drive prostate cancer (Francesco Crea).

Most recently, we have been working on the incurable childhood brain cancer, DIPG, supported by the children’s charity Abbie’s Army (£5000), and have found thousands of RNAs that change expression as the cancer cells become resistant to radiotherapy (Jon Golding, Maryam Latarani, Francesco Crea). We hope that this new work can identify how to prevent or even reverse such cancers from becoming resistant to radiotherapy.

Our translational work identified how to improve photodynamic therapy for a type of skin cancer in horses, increasing treatment responses from 14% to 93% in a clinical trial (Jon Golding). Our research also feeds back into our teaching. We have developed cancer database tools that are used in S290 and have made histology slides of various cancer tissues that are used in the Digital Microscope.
Meet one of our students

I started studying with the Open University at the end of 2018, after having to leave my sixth form with only 1 A-level due to health issues. I am studying a BSc in Health Sciences, hoping to become a secondary school biology teacher in the near future.

When I first started studying with the OU, I did struggle to figure out how to study ‘alone’. At first, I would study for hours on end, and I just couldn’t learn anything! However, by the end of my first year, I had a system sorted. I devote 4-6hrs a day (like at school) to studying, and then I force myself to log off. This gives me structure which allows me to focus on my personal life as well as my education.

In March 2022, I saw an advertisement for a student internship to evaluate the buddy peer support system, so I applied immediately - and got it! My confidence has improved massively whilst being an intern and I would strongly recommend students to apply for internships. The skills you develop and the whole experience are so beneficial in terms of employability and personal growth!

This year, I’ll be studying S350 and SXH390 (the project module!) and I’m extremely excited. This means that it’ll be my last year studying with the OU but, to be honest, I wouldn’t mind coming back to study as a postgrad student! -Saskia Davitt (current student)

Meet one of our tutors

I started working for the OU in 2012, shortly after retiring from full-time work. I had worked in research as a solid-state (crystal) chemist for a number of industrial and academic institutions, including UCL and TU Delft, with contacts across the UK, Germany and the Netherlands. My first OU module was the Science Project Module SXM390, and I joined the team on the Level 3 module ‘Chemistry – Further Concepts and Applications’ at its inception in 2015. It is an excellent team and I am proud to be a member of it.

My other abiding passion is music: I play the lute and related historic plucked-string instruments. I accompany singers and instrumental soloists, and do quite a lot of performing. My main interest is in historically-informed performance of music of the Renaissance (c. 1490 – 1625) and Baroque (c. 1600 – 1750) periods; I am intensely interested in European cultural history over these periods, which provides the contexts in which the music was played.

I am a Trustee of the charity Cambridge Early Music, which runs Summer Schools and concerts and promotes Early Music in the Cambridge area.

-Peter Cains

(Chemistry Associate Lecturer / tutor)

Spotlight on the Student Support Team (SST)

The STEM (and Access) SST is made up of three sub-teams all working together to support students through Social Media, Forums, phone, Email and Webchat.
Advisers provide Information about studying within the STEM faculty; Senior Advisers provide in-depth advice to help students make fully-informed decisions; and Educational Advisers provide guidance to help students overcome barriers to study. We would like to introduce SST managers Liz and James:

Liz Shakespeare leads the Educational Advisers in the Science and Computing & IT Student Support Teams. ‘I’ve worked for the Open University for 10 years. I enjoy furthering my academic development and have completed several qualifications, currently working my way through a BSc in Psychology and Counselling. I’m looking forward to helping more students succeed this year and want to remind everyone that we’re here to help at every stage of your journey.’

James Jepson leads a team of Senior Advisers for the Science Schools. ‘My previous academic and work experience has been mainly in the arts, but I’m now in my 6th year in STEM. One of my favourite parts of my role is working collaboratively with teams across the university to improve the Student Support journey – this includes acting on the valuable feedback I receive from students and academics. I’m looking forward to supporting students through the new academic year and recommend that anyone thinking of making changes to their study plans, contacts us as early as possible to discuss their options.’
Skills for Biologists - a summer programme of workshops

During June and July, we ran a series of workshops for our biology and health students on ‘Skills for Biologists’, co-ordinated by LHCS Employability Lead, Janet Haresnape and Associate Lecturer, Ruth Gilbert. The facilitators shared first-hand experiences of working in biology-related jobs, including working in a research laboratory, undertaking field work in exotic places, and working in bioinformatics.

A total of 149 students either attended or accessed the recording of at least one of the workshops, with those on HIV, Foodborne diseases, Communication skills, Surviving life as a field biologist, and Bioinformatics being particularly popular. Comments from participants highlighted how useful the sessions were in showing what professional biologists work on and how learning is applied to real world situations. We hope to run this programme again next summer, including other discipline areas. We would like to thank all those who contributed to the success of the programme – Wendi Bacon, Jane Beal, Ruth Brown, Penny James, Roseanne Miller, Scott Tytheridge, Kevin Warwick and Lynda Weir. Why not view the recordings?

Do you have something to share?

We would also be very interested in hearing from anyone who might like to join our editorial team!

Just e-mail STEM-LHCS-Teaching@open.ac.uk including ‘newsletter’ in the e-mail subject header.

The LHCS Newsletter, brought to you by Fi Moorman, Karen New, Eleanor Crabb and Simone Pitman.

Enlarge your view to learn more about The Chemistry of Autumn Leaf Colours Compound Interest (compoundchem.com)