

the cOUnter clOsUre

**Welcome to the first newsletter of Region 13 staff
re the planned closure of our beloved Region
We intend updating colleagues with direct views from staff as well as ideas, events, questions
and issues that we all have**

EDITORIAL

Region 13 staff are dismayed by the planned closure of the East Grinstead Office. Whilst the closure of the regional office is disturbing enough, we also believe that there are serious threats to the OUs work that will have fundamental consequences not only for the curriculum and working conditions but also for the viability of the university.

In particular we are concerned about:

The lack of consultation

The email from David Knight, Director of Associate Lecturer Services, to R13 staff, sent as recently as November 7, gave an assurance that, 'The University is committed to maintaining offices within the South East' and more specifically that AL Staff development and exams will continue to take place in the regional office. It is highly worrying that even very senior members of staff were kept in the dark about the planned closure, or if they emerged after November, that these plans have been made hastily and without due consideration of and consultation with those closest to and knowledgeable about the issues. It appears to have been treated purely as a business decision, not as an educational one.

The facts behind the termination of the lease

The statement released on the Intranet regarding the reasons for closure have been challenged as disingenuous. These are the latest responses to our queries. These are still not correct and are being challenged.

<http://intranet6.open.ac.uk/projects/east-grinstead-project-implementation/faqs#7>

Implications for colleagues in Region 13

It appears most Faculty colleagues are being offered relocation to R01. How realistic an option this is, of course, is open to serious doubt. Furthermore, other crucial R13 staff who of course live in the area do not find relocation a viable option. For them the news has been particularly devastating. The package on offer is not generous at all. Some staff have been with the OU 20, 25 or even 30 years. This decision will mean huge knock-on costs to other locations.

Implications for the OU mission

We believe this closure is not a 'little local difficulty' and one off solution to the specific issue of the South East offices. It represents an ongoing 'direction of travel' and systematic attack on the values, mission and modus operandi of the Open University which has historically combined global, national and local reach with regional and local presence in order to support the unique open entry policy. Over the last five years we have seen significant changes that

erode all we stand for in terms of social justice and the imposition of a discourse and set of practices that privilege distance and online rather than supported blended approach; central standardisation rather than diversity and innovation; global rather than local; systems of technology mediated intervention and 'support' that are structured to move away from both local and 'human relations-based approaches.

The changes have been presented as the only rational response to the funding context in England without any transparent discussion about the direction of travel and business model being driven forward by the VCE. From promises of a 'double bottom line' we have moved towards a bottom line that has been re-framed as a purely economic one.

What does Rev think about closing down local resources?



http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/b04066tn/Rev_Series_3_Episode_2/

Archdeacon Robert: You have spent all your money and there's a groundswell of feeling in the Deanery.....that St Saviours has been subsidised far too long

Rev: They can't see the point of the largest and oldest church in the area?

Archdeacon: Well they think the money spent on your stipend could be more imaginatively used elsewhere. Their phrase.

Rev: Well-they're wrong. My phrase....it's just a business now isn't it?

youtube

The Times They Are a Changin' (1964)

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e7qQ6_RV4VQ

R13 Colleague Blog 7.5.14

So we are one day shy of it being 8 weeks since Keith Zimmerman came down and read from his script to tell us the office is closing. That means it has been 2 months of uncertainty, lack of answers and continued anxiety about my future career and how I will be paying the mortgage come this time next year.

It seems to me there are some really simple questions being asked which aren't being answered like: 'if I take all my leave but get another job, will I have to pay my leave back' or 'what should I do about my pension'; 'can I work from home and do my current job'. It is frustrating to say the least. I understand the need for negotiation with the Union (thank goodness I was already a member) but am surprised at the lack of organisation on the University's behalf – it feels they are making it up as they go along. I know they haven't done anything like this on this scale before, but would have thought that would be all the more reason to have a project plan in place prior to the announcement.

I have spent some time over this last couple of months going through the motions of coming in and doing my job. Such a shame as it is actually a job I love doing which had prospects and career development opportunities, despite it only being part-time. It appears the 'project team' and senior managers have very little understanding of what it feels like to be in a position

like this. Morale and motivation are rock bottom here yet the continued professionalism of my colleagues is quite incredible.

Having been in this position before in my career (in my mid 20s, a good number of years ago now) I know all the platitudes of 'best thing for me in the end' and 'it all works out well' as it really did. I changed career and came in to education. However, I was given gardening leave (3 months) and my VS on top. Not a bad deal.

I have updated my CV and even had 2 interviews. One was working up in London, full-time but the added cost of travel and 3 hours commute made it unfeasible. I am going back for a second interview this week for another job which involves travelling around. I don't particularly want it but think the interview practice will be good for me and I need options at this stage. I have to feel in control of something during this turbulent time.

Will let you know how it goes in my next blog!



Staff Club News

We have three key events planned for the next couple of months

WEDNESDAY	TUESDAY	FRIDAY
7TH MAY	17TH JUNE	20TH JUNE
12.30PM	12.30PM – 1.30PM	2.00PM – 6.00PM
Tricia Cusden from Look Fabulous Forever	Penny Kocher The Frugal Fashion Shopper	Region 13 Summer Barbeque

Tricia Cusden from Look Fabulous Forever

www.lookfabulousforever.com

Is visiting the Regional Office on **Wednesday 7 May from 12.30 to 1.30pm** [ish]. For a very reasonable price of £2 you can be entered into a raffle for a free makeover, which others can watch and listen as Tricia explains her techniques and the products she has developed for the older person [men are included!]

<http://www3.open.ac.uk/forms/lookfabulousforever>

Fashion for the Fashionistas – free illustrated talk

Penny Kocher who runs a Blog, The Frugal Fashion Shopper <http://frugalfashionshopper.wordpress.com> will be coming to give a talk on shopping fashionably in charity shops. Another person who started a new career after retirement, in this case as a fashion blogger, user of Twitter and participant in conferences regarding ageism in fashion.

Penny will be here in the regional office **on Tuesday 17 June, from 12.30 – 1.30pm.**

Please bring your lunch along.

<http://www3.open.ac.uk/forms/fashionforthe-fashionistas>

Region 13 Summer Barbeque – provided free by the Staff Club

Friday 20 June, 2.00pm – 6.00pm at East Grinstead Sports Club. A chance to relax and enjoy ourselves together. Former colleagues are being invited to join us after the barbeque at 4.00pm
Entertainment will be provided.

<http://www3.open.ac.uk/forms/summerbarbeque>

Our Questions:

These are the questions Region 13 colleagues collated together following one of our regular full meeting at which most staff attended.

They were sent to the OU Project overseeing the closure about 3 weeks ago and we have yet to receive answers.

Given the lack of answers we all feel stuck in a bit of a void

a) Pensions

- Staff at R13 need and request a whole staff face to face presentation re PENSIONS-when will this happen?
- What are **Enhanced pensions**? What is the OU offering?
- What is the 'funding change' and how will it affect people's final pension?

b) Tentative offers

- Why do we have to respond by 09 May when Council meeting on 13 May could give us more info to inform us?
- When we will get more information in order to make informed choices

c) Voluntary severance

- Why x3 offer if final amount then capped?
- Why capped at 52 weeks? This is arbitrary
- Why have some staff not been given their tentative offer?
- Is enhanced severance guaranteed?
- Will relocation to R01 guarantee London weighting and relocation costs?
- Will the OU be offering a training allowance for those who wish to retrain?
- Staff request extended fee waivers as part of retraining-please can you arrange this asap?

d) Closure

- Will staff who choose to leave early still get the enhanced package?
- Where are the regional FAQ's we were promised?
- We urgently need information about notice periods?
- For those people who are thinking of relocating - will there be a trial period to enable them to see how they manage the additional travel to a new location. Should they decide, at the end of this period, that the travelling is not manageable, will the offer of voluntary severance still be available to them. In other words is there a 'cooling off period'?

- How will the remaining staff be expected to cope with early staff losses? E.g. many LS staff are temps or have less than 2 years' service.
- How will critical work be managed if it cannot be done here due to staff losses?
- We need information re Leave-Use or keep?
- If the region does close early what will happen to staff who chose to stay on?
- Staff have been told that final severance/early retirement settlements may vary according to date of service departure. This has resulted in the unnecessary stress delay as to what final projections would be and the fear that if people are told to go early there packages will be reduced.

For the purposes of payment of individual packages and in recognition of the impact that closure has upon the lives of people; would it be reasonable for the OU to specify a closure December date for those affected and base individual payments payment on this final closure date rather than the date an individual leaves?

e) Annual Leave

- Would staff have to take their annual leave entitlement before the 31st July?
- Are staff entitled to carry over up to 10 days
- If staff are working after the 31st July would they get a percentage of the annual leave entitlement form 31/7
- If staff are unable to take due to staff shortages would they get it as payment or lose it
- If staff have annual leave booked in August there is a concern that they could end up owing it back to the OU-could this be clarified asap



Matisse cut out of the week

Henri Matisse: The Fall of Icarus (1947).

Cheer yourself up by going to see this extraordinary exhibition at Tate Modern

Remember when

Remember when the movies came to Region 13 – Calendar Girls, Wizard of Oz, Snow White and Bollywood – not to mention Blue Peter and Strictly...! Those were the days – actually thinking about it, they were always just before Christmas. Course it wasn't the real movies although the excitement was pretty intense nevertheless. Where would the Region 13 Oscars go ? AL Services for their re working of the Wizard of Oz, The Academic Assistants modestly presenting Calendar Girls, Learner Support dazzling us with Strictly.. , a version of Blue Peter that Staff Tutors had prepared earlier or the romance and Technicolor of the Adviser's Bollywood. Didn't it bring all the Region 13 staff together - What Larks!

Why it is a privilege to work for Region 13

Because we make a difference:

- to the hesitant enquirer, we encourage them to start and believe in themselves.
- to the overloaded student overwhelmed by deadlines, we help them plan a strategy juggling personal and study workloads to complete.
- to the panicked student with exam phobia, we talk then through strategies for coping, sign post supportive resources and encourage them to take the exam.
- to the Asperger student we meet with them explain the OU model of support and follow them as they reach their full potential.
- to the home bound student we open a door to opportunities, barriers fall, learning follows, they are empowered and goals are achieved.
- to the thousands of students needing home exams, they trust us we trust them and success follows.
- to the career changers and career improvers we give advice and guidance and they fly on with their lives.
- to students for whom we are advocates for to Exams & Assessment, Awards & Qualifications and Registration & Fees, overcoming barriers.
- to the teaching of our tutors which we enhance and develop, sharing best practice.
- to our partners in the Professions H.E. who so value our expertise and links.
- to students, tutors and our colleagues who we support through crisis, illness and bereavements.
- to our colleagues who we celebrate with through marriages, births and retirements.
- to the hundreds of thousands of students we have witnessed graduate and achieve and their dream

