

The UCU-Endsleigh Life Changers awards are back for a second year with another set of worthy winners - people who embody everything that is good about further and higher education.

For UCU, the UCU-Endsleigh Life changers awards are not conventional 'Oscars' style awards. They are an illustration by individual example of what an amazing collective job our members do in colleges and universities. UCU is proud to represent every single one of the 120,000 educators who make up UCU's membership and I am delighted that so many of you who celebrated these unique awards with us last year are returning this year to pay your respects to another set of life changing practitioners.

The nominees in 2008, as last year, encapsulate the power of education to transform lives.

They also in their different ways tell us how proud each nominee is to work as part of the academic team in their institution, how proud they are of the impact their work has on the wider community. Getting a better deal for the Life Changers from employers and from politicians is why these awards fit so neatly into our new 'our college, our university, our community' campaign which seeks to raise the banner for education as a liberator rather than simply a training conveyor belt.

I am pleased to also once again thank Endsleigh Insurance Services for their continued support for Life Changers. Without Endsleigh's belief in and commitment to the awards and the need to recognise the work our members do these awards would never have got off the ground.

Now as we enter our second year I want also to thank the staff and students who nominated, as well as our distinguished judging panel. Most of all thank you to the nominees. These awards are one of the highlights of the year for me because they celebrate all that is best in post-16 education. Long may they continue!

Sally Hunt

General Secretary, UCU

Endsleigh is proud to be supporting the UCU Life Changers awards as it underlines and celebrates those who champion and lead education - further and higher education staff who really make a difference to student lives and those who show a lifelong commitment to learning. Many of the qualities we value - leadership, determination, courage, teamwork, exceeding expectations - will be evident in both nominees and the UCU-Life Changer Award winners.

We now operate as one of the UKs well known education brands. With over 25 years' experience, we aim to be recognised as a specialist provider of insurance making us best placed to serve both academic and non-academic education professionals.

We applaud the achievements of all those who are nominated and are proud to be the official partner for the UCU Life Changers Awards.

Stuart Wartalski

Head of Corporate Communications, Endsleigh Insurance Services



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Sarah Thorington **12**

Professor Donald Nicolson **13**

Professor Patrick Smith **14**

Richard (Nick) Nicholls **15**



Kerith Harris

University of Sussex

Student Advisors at Sussex have a very wide remit from helping students settle at Induction through to offering support on Results day and beyond – in between time supporting and listening to any and many problems that might pose a barrier to their academic success or personal well-being. They provide back-up for academics worried about their students, who can effectively pass the situation over and concentrate on teaching. The role can be a difficult balancing act as they also need to ensure University standards and regulations are upheld.

Kerith's personal contribution has been huge – above and beyond, she has rescued many students' degrees and sanity by her welcoming and approachable presence.

Part of the job is the unexpected, and her ability to remain calm, friendly and also offer practical assistance is assured. In a workplace where common sense is often far from common currency, Kerith's capacity to concentrate on the key issues and not be distracted by distress or panic means she is enormously effective.

It would be very difficult (and possibly wrong) to give detailed examples of the way Kerith has changed the course of events from bad to good, but I know of many disengaged students who were about to leave mid-course who went on to leave with good degrees after sitting down and talking it through with her.

Harder to work out and think about are the many students who have arrived in great distress and left calmer and able to face their problems with more positivity and hope than, had she not offered the extra support. She remains on call throughout, students seem to track her down anywhere and launch into their problems. She is on the frontline of the much-vaunted student experience and plays a key part in keeping the show on the road.



'Kerith's personal contribution has been huge – above and beyond, she has rescued many students' degrees and sanity by her welcoming and approachable presence.'

She is also a great colleague, totally reliable, approachable, professional and fun. She looks out for colleagues as well as students, who bend her ear beyond and outside the remit of her UCU work. Kerith's commitment to protecting her colleagues though her trade union work is unsurprising but to take on a role that places even more stress and distress in your path and to then do it with such commitment and good humour is exceptional.

I have never seen her lose patience, empathy or her cool in her dealings with students, staff or management alike making her a colleague upon whom you can rely

without doubt, knowing she has a clear view of how things can be taken forward with the highest level of mutual understanding, mindful of personal circumstances and mitigating factors.

UCU Branch Secretary Jim Guild said "I've worked with Kerith in both her professional and trade

union roles and have been impressed by her ability to cope with levels of stress and hard work which would break many other colleagues. Dealing with students who are threatening to kill themselves, who are deeply depressed and anxious, who self-harm, who have eating disorders, who have come from abusive homes, who

have life-threatening illnesses, who are caring for children which may themselves be ill or depressed, is not something our academic colleagues anticipate as forming part of their normal work – it is people like Kerith who absorb that stress and try to redirect it into useful avenues for the students which means she has an

equally important role in the educational process as the star researcher or top-notch teacher. As for her trade union work – I don't think I've met a more impressive case worker and negotiator. If I was a boss, I'd go cold if she was on the end of the phone asking about member X or the next JNC."

Nominator: Jim Guild

The nominees

Kerith Harris

Bill Allen

Womens Opportunities Unit

Lee Holder

Dr Sue Starkings

Carol Cusworth

Lesley Hart

Brian Spittles

James Derounian

Sarah Thorington

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Richard (Nick) Nicholls



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Nicholls

Bill Allen

Derbyshire Adult Community Education Service

Bill has taught Lipreading for 17 years, and works for the Derbyshire Adult Community Education Service, teaching classes in Matlock, Buxton and at Hope Valley College. Bill's hearing was damaged when he was young, as a result of working long hours at a circular saw bench.

In addition to his teaching, Bill is vice-Chair of ATLA (the Association of Teachers of Lipreading to Adults), and has been an active committee member for 17 years. He has played a leading role in ATLA's campaign for free lipreading classes. He is Chair of Hearing Concern's Education and Employment Projects group. The group's role is currently under review, but over many years, they have given advice and support for hearing impaired HE and FE students seeking employment.

Bill is vice-Chair (and was formerly Chair) of New Mills Access Group. He and other group members use their experience and knowledge of disability to advise local services, retailers and public bodies on compliance with the DDA, and they lobby for recognition of the needs of disabled people.

Bill is an active member of the CICADA committee, made up of Cochlear Implant users. He helps people with communication skills as they strive to make the most of their Cochlear Implants, to re-assess social situations they may once have lost. He is a founder member of Deaf and Hearing Support, a charity based in Chesterfield giving advice on equipment which can help people with hearing impairment to try and normalise life at home.

Bill gives regular talks to staff in medical practices to make them more aware of the needs of people using hearing aids, and to encourage referrals to lipreading classes.

In recognition of how many hearing impaired older people (e.g. grandparents) long to be included in family conversations, and how easily young people's hearing can be damaged, for example by loud music, Bill provides 'Deaf Awareness' sessions at his local primary school.

Bill is an outstanding adult education tutor. He has devised a comprehensive syllabus for his courses aimed at empowering students to lead independent lives. "You can get left out when you're hard of hearing," says Patricia, one of Bill's students, "...but I have the confidence now to ask people to look at me and speak up."

These are some of the other things his students in Buxton and Hope Valley say:

'I have lived in terror of losing the rest of my hearing but Bill has given me a lifeline and I no longer have that fear'

"I have lived in terror of losing the rest of my hearing, but Bill has given me a lifeline and I no longer have that fear."

"Bill has not only been an

excellent tutor, but has helped everyone with their individual problems related to deafness and has facilitated us to learn from each other's experiences."

"The information he has passed on about the technique of speaking and sound amplification has really been life saving"

"...the course really has changed my life- I have much

more confidence and have re-started an evening class I had stopped going to because of my hearing loss, and I can continue with my committee work for several voluntary groups."

I have worked with Bill for 13 years. He is a very modest person, and doesn't seek recognition for himself. But he is passionate about getting the needs of people with hearing loss recognised. I think what makes him special is the combination of his inspiring teaching, his support for students, and his active involvement in campaigning. Through enabling individual students to lead more independent lives, he helps people feel valued and able to contribute more at home and in their communities.

Through his voluntary and

campaigning work, he helps people with hearing loss to have a voice in the delivery of services. He doesn't just speak up on their behalf. For example he assists older students in his classes to participate in their local Older People's Congress - this looks at improving local services.

I think Bill does help to change people's lives for the better. His students are his best advocates. As one of them said recently: "Bill has overcome his own handicap and now helps others to overcome their own hearing disability. He is patient, helpful and an excellent communicator."

Nominator: Steve Bond



Women's Opportunities Unit University of Ulster

The Women's Opportunities Unit is located in Dalriada, at the University of Ulster, Jordanstown campus, Northern Ireland.

The Unit has played a pioneering role in the personal, professional and political development of women returnees in Northern Ireland and sees its 21st year in May 2008. It aims to promote Social Inclusion in the 21st Century, increase women's participation, improve the quality of women's training and reduce barriers to access. Through the courses it aims to permeate the boundaries between education and training, it works more closely with business and employers to ensure vertical and horizontal integration of these women in the labour market and their respect communities. The courses enable women to make their own contribution to technology, to future oriented jobs, to create their own enterprises, to use technology as a tool in the growing service sector and to gain employment at management and supervisory levels.

In the past 21 years the unit has had immense job satisfaction seeing women find a new path -

'The greatest gift anyone can give is their time, and this unit gives it in abundance both personally and professionally. I'm doing a degree I never thought possible at my time in life... you do a wonderful and difficult job'.

Tina Newell (2007)
Criminology Student

'The diploma course has equipped me to do a degree. All-in-all, coming to this unit was one of the best decisions I have made in my life... Thank-you.'

Jennifer Farr (2005)
Theology Student

'If the access course in IT and Management Studies had not been available to me i.e. an older adult returnee, with two children, I would have never have found the inner confidence to start over personally, today I have an education, a good career and a better lifestyle for my children. Your work is underrated WOU!

Moira Fields (2003)

'If only more educational establishments could use these courses and approach as a benchmark, truly we would have the students best interests at heart'.

Judy Emms (2007)
External Examiner (OU).

The list goes on... and these are just some of the success stories the Women's Opportunities unit can tell over its 21 years of operation. Women convinced they have no prospects and in the end fulfilling their

potential through hard work and the right direction and support. Perhaps the unit's strongest attribute was the fact so many of the staff had started exactly where these women were now sitting at that precise time.

I left school with no formal qualifications and by the age of 16 was a single mum, with no job prospects. I enrolled on a course through the unit in 2002 and completed a Diploma in IT. I was then able to carry on with my studies and gain a Degree in Computer Science. My confidence grew, I learnt invaluable skills. The pastoral care and support that is given to student within the unit is second to none. Today I work for one of the UK leading Insurance providers, and have continued my education. I am in no doubt that the people I am nominating do a brilliant job and deserve some form of credit, they are life changers.

But the story doesn't end there. Not only does the unit support the students, but the internal support is equally as impressive. Two years ago one

member of staff originally one of the past female students, was diagnosed with Gender Dysphoria and had subsequently made the huge leap from female to male. The support of colleagues and students past and present has been overwhelming such is the bond.

I wish to nominate the Women's Opportunities Unit for a Life Changers award, it's hard to pick one member of the unit to stand out, and they've all played a part. Especially significant would be the recognition at this point in time, as the University of Ulster has now decided the unit is to close. This kind of learning can make a tremendous impact - on the lives of the women who have completed the courses, on their communities, and on Northern Ireland as a whole, sad it is now no longer on the universities future objectives.

Nominator: Tracey Doherty



Professor Pauline Murphy
Founder of Ulster Womens Unit

The nominees

Kerith Harris

Bill Allen

Womens Opportunities Unit

Lee Holder

Dr Sue Starkings

Carol Cusworth

Lesley Hart

Brian Spittles

James Derounian

Sarah Thorington

Professor Donald
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Lee Holder Stroud College

I am nominating Lee Holder and Ian Jones for their outstanding work on the In Tune project at Stroud College in Gloucestershire. Lee was the course tutor and Ian was the support tutor. This project worked extensively with N.E.E.T.S and students at risk of exclusion from education, through music technology.

Lee and Ian's total dedication, enthusiasm, hard work and sense of humour enabled the project to be a

complete success in terms of brilliantly reengaging these challenging students who had lost their focus in education, in achieving the required academic qualification targets for the funded project, and also progressing students onto further education courses who might otherwise have dropped out of the system.

The project was extremely hard work as they went out into the community and worked with the students in their own environments-schools, community centres, pupil referral centres etc. The logistics alone of transporting up to 40 boxes each day of computer equipment from a van and then teaching successfully is worth an award!

The team managed to create a climate of trust with the students by creating the ground rules together and this made the learning environment a safe place for the students to understand that they could achieve without being categorised. The subject matter drew on the specific interests of each participant and the teaching methodologies employed sought to provide instant engagement, and motivate and encourage them to participate fully in the learning. The small group size was designed to allow the particular needs of individuals to be assessed and met.

"In the 90s I formed a band as a creative outlet for my feelings as an angry young man. Now in my 30s I no longer feel angry or young, but I've never forgotten how liberating it was to channel my frustrations in order to create something positive. It was this experience which was at the fore when designing the delivery of the In Tune course to reach at risk and disaffected young people"

Lee Holder

This is truly life changing for most of these students - for some education was just a waste of time. From Lee and Ian's work with them, they can now see the value

and a way forward in life as they realise they can achieve a qualification in something that they actively enjoy and have a passion for.

"The In Tune project was a tremendous success and fully engaged all the participants and enthused many more besides. The end show created huge excitement amongst fellow students and staff and gave the students a brilliant opportunity to be seen in a positive light. The tutors were excellent in their approach, ensuring all students presented a very high standard of work. The course has led to several students altering option choices and choosing Music next year."

Simon Phelps, Lakers School, Forest of Dean

Lee and Ian set up the project from scratch - outlining equipment needed, ordering it and setting it up within the tight timescale and budget. They had a

vision of what they wanted to achieve and I, as project manager, was happy to let them push their innovative ideas forward. They succeeded in that vision. At all times they would reflect on the previous project and work hard to make the project better at the next venue.

The project has proven to be a 'safety net' for those who would not have carried on with their education and has had an impact on the recruitment for courses at the college at levels 1, 2 and 3.

"The In Tune project

changed my life. Last year I had no interest in school and certainly didn't want to carry on in education- I couldn't wait to leave. Now I have done the In Tune project I have a place on a Level 2 Music Technology and Performing Arts course in September at the college. But as I have worked hard since the project I am hoping I will gain 4 GCSEs and so be able to go straight onto the Level 3 course. Here's hoping! My mum is amazed!"

MJ, Student on the In Tune Project

"Thank you for a great time at In Tune. You taught me how to work with music software, it helped me a lot... I am popular now with other students. I showed my DVD to my parents, my mum and my auntie were very proud of me."

Student on the In Tune project, who had previously been an outsider at his school.

Nominator: Katie Ordenez

'I've never forgotten how liberating it was to channel my frustrations in order to create something positive'



Dr Sue Starkings

London South Bank University

Dr Sue Starkings has spent a significant part of her academic career developing learning support services for students in Higher Education, not only in her field of Mathematics and Statistics, but also in English and Study Skills. This focus has been driven by Sue's own experience. She came from a working class background on an estate in Southwark, with no immediate role models, male or female, to encourage her to enter education. Sue left school at 15 but returned to education at 24 as a mature student and a working mother of two. Through sheer determination she has forged a successful career in Higher Education, recently becoming a National Teaching Fellow, one of only 50 in the country to be nominated for this prestigious award.

Sue has been determined to give others the encouragement to enter higher education that she missed herself, helping people to overcome barriers to success and changing lives as a result. She has provided inspiration and encouragement to individuals in her early career as a teacher, but it is her determination to continue to do so at management level that is particularly impressive - she now changes lives for hundreds.

Her influence can be demonstrated through London South Bank University's summer Fast Track programme. Sue secured funding for, and then developed an ambitious programme of support for students under the widening participation umbrella. This six-week summer programme was set up in 1998 in order to cater for students from non-traditional backgrounds who would previously not have considered university as a viable option. Indeed, the nearby Boroughs of Southwark, Lambeth and Lewisham had some of the lowest progression rates in the country at the time. Sue has since developed the course such that prospective undergraduate students are given the chance to enter the university with increased confidence and develop their range of academic skills. Each year these students become acclimatised to university culture prior to the start of each academic year, learning key academic skills at a pace that allows them to build confidence.

Today, the Fast Track course is well-respected by students, with very high levels of student retention and satisfaction. Most importantly, there is a strong focus on widening participation and opportunity for all. The programme is also open to students who may go on to study at a different university.

"I am grateful to those that organised the course - not only does it give you confidence but it motivates you to want to carry on studying. For such a short course it is amazing how much one can learn ...".

"The course helped me become more confident with my studies, improving my writing and reading as well as verbal communication skills. I would recommend it to anyone who wants to study in Higher Education. I am now applying for a degree in nursing".

Sue provides firm leadership, organisation and direction to the programme, giving a significant degree of support to her teaching staff and fostering innovative

teaching ideas (e.g. cross-curricula collaboration, fully embedded IT training and e-learning). She also gives guidance to her staff in maintaining her vision of a motivating and rewarding course for the students, emphasising that teachers on the course are student-centred in their approach.

The Fast Track course has become a model for encouraging students of wide ability and backgrounds to consider university and to give them the opportunity to enhance their skills as

'Not only does it give you confidence but it motivates you to want to carry on studying. For such a short course it is amazing how much one can learn'



independent learners. Over 1,500 students have individually benefited from the course; Sue has been the relentless driving force behind this.

Nominators: Graham Barton, John Bainbridge, Catherine Boyle

The nominees

Keith Harris

Bill Allen

Womens
Opportunities Unit

Lee Holder

Dr Sue Starkings

Carol Cusworth

Lesley Hart

Brian Spittles

James Derounian

Sarah Thorrrington

Professor Donald
Nicolson

Professor
Patrick Smith

Richard (Nick)
Nicholls



Carol Cusworth

Doncaster College

Kerith Harris

Bill Allen

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Carol has been a dedicated teacher, then a level 1 course leader for over 10 years at Doncaster College.

I believe prior to this she worked for 10 years as a waitress in a hotel. Then having married and had children she decided to return to college and gain some new skills in computing. She enrolled on a 'Women in IT' course which is a basic, introductory course which was devised solely for woman 'returners' who

maybe lacked confidence. Apparently she loved the learning process and went on to obtain a BSc (hons) in Business Computing and then studied and achieved a PGCE, so that she could pass on her knowledge.

Carol taught for several years on various courses and levels before being promoted to be the level one course leader. This was her main area of teaching (though not exclusive area). At Level 1, the young people that enroll are typically age 16 and straight out of compulsory education. They are often entirely disengaged from learning and coming for the £30 per week EMA. She has single handed reengaged these learners into education with many going on to achieve A level equivalencies and then onto HE.

She has fought 'tooth and nail' on occasion for the fair treatment and equality of 'her kids', when they may have been seen as 'poor relations' for example by other levels of education.

As the course leader she has always been incredibly supportive of the teachers, learning mentors and learning support assistants in her team. She has always gone 'above and beyond' on many occasions to support both the learners and staff.

She was recently (Sept 07) promoted to Curriculum Leader and I applied for and got her former position as Level 1 course leader at Doncaster Colleges, ICT dept.

As a new course leader (alongside a new level 2 course leader), I am so very, very grateful for her complete loyalty, guidance and support in my new role. She has on many occasions contacted me 'out of hours' to offer support and friendship as I have found the new role rather challenging (to say the least!). Carol is never arrogant and allows both I and the Level 2 course leader (who is the co-nominator) to bring our own personality

'She has fought tooth and nail on occasion for the fair treatment and equality of 'her kids', when they may have been seen as 'poor relations'

to the roles, and even though she is hierarchically our superior she never interferes and really only gives advise when really needed or when asked.

To be greeted with a heart felt welcome is the first thing that amazes you when you meet Carol for the first time, so full of life, inspiration that she absolutely glows with extraordinary personality. Never down or never

dull she really brings the true meaning to life itself.

My first encounter of meeting Carol showed extreme warmth towards me; basically I was on the scrap heap or felt that way, unemployed, no prospects with very little if any qualifications applying for a position realistically I

didn't have a chance of securing. I didn't feel that way within seconds of being interviewed, talk about compassion, self worth or self belief! Wow I felt a million dollars!



Openly Carol knew I was struggling and had very little experience to teach but she welcomed me with open arms and wanted me to teach for her, oh boy let the church bells ring and that is how I exactly felt, this just sums up what an extraordinary person she really is"

Level 2 course leader

On behalf of the hundreds of young lives she has changed and the adult lives she has improved just by working alongside and being so skillfully guided by her, we truly believe that she is a life changer.

Nominator: Cath Butler



Lesley Hart

University of Strathclyde

Nominee Lesley Hart is currently Director of the Centre for Lifelong Learning, University of Strathclyde. This year the Learning in Later Life Students' Association (3Ls), celebrates twenty years of growth and development thanks to the support and leadership she offered at its humble beginnings in 1987 when she was Programme Co-ordinator, then from 1991 - 2001 as Head of the Senior Studies Institute (SSI), and now as the Centre's Director.

The Association grew out of a 1987 initiative when the University offered a small Learning in Later Life Programme of classes. The response was amazing with every place filled. At the end of this first year, a deputation of students approached Lesley to discuss forming a democratic group under the University's auspices to allow their learning to flourish and also include a strong social dimension. Soon the 3Ls Student Association was established with its own constitution and financial autonomy.

From these early beginnings with 80 members the Association has grown to around 1000. The initial small programme of social activities has been transformed into an annual calendar of events. All current and past students on the 3L Programme of classes can join.

Irené Rankin, current President of the 3Ls Association, reflects on why it is so successful with sustained growth over a twenty year period.

"When people have to consider life after work, often the first question is What Now? The Association offers so many learning and social opportunities-



things for which there was never time, things that seemed well nigh impossible. It has such a positive impact and one student recently commented 'Thank goodness for its existence.' Lesley had the insight to realize that an older students' Association would add an extra rich layer to the student experience."

The first president Jim Alexander (who is still going strong!) takes up the story.

"Lesley was keen that we learn from other

organizations and sent me off on a study tour to find out about the Folk High Schools in Denmark. I thought it important to create opportunities for travel as well as organize local events like theatre visits and Burns Suppers. The exchange visits were tremendously stimulating and friendships still survive to this day!"

Jim, a former salesman, had taken early retirement and was enthused by the sense of purpose gained in his Association role. After completing his two years' presidency he was encouraged by Lesley to take his new passion for learning further and undertook an Access course. Then Lesley offered him a part-time job in the Institute organizing study trips and related events. Spurred on by success he enrolled on an

undergraduate history course and in 1997 proudly received his degree with his family in attendance.

"Without the confidence that I developed in the Association and prodding from Lesley I doubt I would have had the courage to begin. And when, sadly I lost my wife and daughter, the

Association was a lifeline. Reflecting on the last twenty years of my life I can't imagine how they would have turned out without it. I can say, hand on heart, that the 3Ls has been a totally transforming experience and we have Lesley to thank not only for getting it off to a flying start but keeping us on track."

Another unique aspect of the Association is the Clubs that have emerged from the classes. These allow students to pursue their specific interests and organize their own meetings and activities. All clubs are open to 3Ls members. Each club has its own committee, sets its own agenda and feeds back to the 3Ls through the Council of Clubs. Whether taking place outside or meeting in the University learning is sociable, experiential, real and ongoing.

Here is what some of the club members say -

Ellen Graham, French Club - "We started with outside speakers but now everyone is willing to take a turn."

Eddie McConnell, Art Club - "I never ever thought of myself as an artist but people are so encouraging. Recently I won a competition and I'm over the moon."

Jessie Clark; Tuesday Club - "We help out with special University mailings on Tuesdays when required. Our members rarely miss a call to action."

Ruby Pollitt, a founding member of the Architecture Club (currently over 80 members)- "It all began with Glasgow City of Architecture 1999. We became hooked on Glasgow's Victorian heritage and the emergence of the modern city. We just can't get enough of it!"

Nominator: Irene Rankin

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Brian Spittles

Ruskin College

I am nominating Brian Spittles a former tutor in English Literature and Cultural Studies at Ruskin College, Oxford. Brian is now retired but as well as spending many years at Ruskin he has also worked with the British Council in teaching British Studies in Central Europe and with Oxford University's Department of Continuing Education. Officially he is an Honorary Fellow of Ruskin College.

I first encountered Brian as a student at Ruskin College, Oxford in 1983. Ruskin is part of the network of Workers' College which have been established over the years partly by funding from the TUC. It is an institution aimed at providing higher education for those who, for various reasons, missed out on the chance earlier in life (in the case of women this was often for child care reasons, for men the necessity to go out and earn a living, or simply

'A wonderful human being, a superb teacher and someone who has remained my friend over many years'

that opportunities didn't exist or that the individual's potential was not realised until later in life). As such it take entrants who have missed out on many educational opportunities and immerses them in the world of learning (and where better for such an experience than Oxford).

In my own case I was a coalminer from South Yorkshire and had only left mining two weeks prior to arriving at Ruskin (age 34). As such I was fairly raw but

soon found that Brian was very able to bring out the best in me in terms of my, hidden and/or underdeveloped academic and intellectual attributes. His patient, detailed, indeed painstaking, approach to every aspect of

the educational process benefited me enormously. Nothing was too small to seem unimportant, such as the time he took me aside to explain the difference between "its" and "it's" and on many occasions, too numerous to mention, I benefited from his friendly, always cheerful advice despite the fact that forging something out of such apparently unpromising raw

material must, at times, seemed a daunting if not impossible task.

My own trajectory took me to Bristol University where I studied for a BA in Drama, Film and TV, then back to home town of Sheffield for an MA in Film Studies at what was then Sheffield Polytechnic. Later I spent some 9 years in Hungary teaching Film Studies at various Universities, where by chance I bumped into Brian again, this time in his role as adviser for the British Council and its Overseas teaching programme. His enthusiasm was undiminished nor had the years in any way eroded his intellectual and profound pedagogic abilities.

I am now Senior Lecturer in Film Studies at Sheffield Hallam University. My first book was published in 2004 and my next will be out in 2009. My 'journey' from coalminer to university lecturer would not have been possible without Ruskin College, its wonderful staff and most of all, Brian Spittles, a wonderful human being, a superb teacher and someone who has remained my friend over many years.

Nominator: John Cunningham.



James Derounian

University of Gloucestershire

James Derounian is a Principal Lecturer in community development & local governance at the University of Gloucestershire and a National Teaching Fellow.

James also works within both his local and the university community, taking an ardent interest in community development issues, and he uses these scenarios to illuminate his lectures and create a cohesive university

community. He also understands the need for students to have practical experiences and so takes them on many fieldtrips, giving them the opportunity to get involved and

participate in local issues. This provides students with a voice and prepares them for the real world, providing students with the opportunity to put the theory of their subjects into practice.

James is an inspiring lecturer who always expresses a keen interest in his students and creates a relaxing atmosphere for learning. His engaging and enjoyable lectures show the great enthusiasm he has for his subject area and through the use of case studies, often gained from his experiences, he encourages students to relate to real life situations. His teaching style encourages active learning and participation, which gives his students confidence that they can achieve their goals and even surpass their expectations.

Furthermore James recognises that everyone learns differently and therefore he adapts his teaching methods to encompass this. He also solidifies learning through recapping on work previously covered and therefore students feel they gain more from his lectures.

Through his genuine interest in his students' backgrounds, he helps students find ways to build on prior learning and he offers helpful career advice. James, being a very approachable person, is always willing to help above and beyond the call of duty. Indeed, students know that they can go to him for advice with regards to any aspect of university life. It is very clear to students that he genuinely cares, taking a keen interest in how students are doing in other modules and in their personal wellbeing. James plays a significant role in enhancing the student experience thus students hold him in high regard and have a great affection for him. This can be seen from the following quotes taken from students and a member of staff at

'James is not only an inspirational lecturer but also a role model in the field of community development'

the university:

"On a field trip there was a clear division of opinion between two groups of students which was causing some friction and tension. However due to James' approachable nature and his sensitivity to all points of view, this meant that he was able to become a key intermediary between the groups and this alleviated the tension on the trip." Kirsty Aughton (Joint Heritage and Landscape Management student).

"I've always enjoyed going to James' lectures. He has an ability not to talk at you but he talks with you"

Helen Double (Joint Human Geography and Psychology student)

"James has the ability to relate to all students, he doesn't hold any prejudiced views as to what your background will mean with regards to your ability to learn

and understand." Gemma Simpson (Human Geography student)

"I've always been shy but James has given me confidence to speak out in class and ask questions. It's in his nature to put people at ease" Claire Ball (Joint Human Geography and Heritage Management student)

"James' friendliness, sensitivity to student issues and sense of humour make him an approachable and exceptionally well-liked lecturer. He has offered support and encouragement regarding many aspects of studying at university and planning a career afterwards. His modules are fun, interesting and informative, and he

has an unusual ability to engage and involve the whole room during lectures". Kate Johnston (Heritage Management and Human Geography student)

"James has awoken my interest in the field of community development, which is about empowering people and providing them with a fair chance to help shape their society. James utilises a community development approach in his lectures encouraging students to build on their individual strengths and to actively work together with

other students in class activities to develop lectures that are suitable to students' learning needs. James is not only an inspirational lecturer but also a role model in the field of community development". Tina McCausland (previously Heritage Management and Human Geography student and currently Disability Coordinator staff member at the University of Gloucestershire)

This nomination comes with significant support from many students and members of staff at the University of Gloucestershire.



The nominees

Kerith Harris

Bill Allen

Womens Opportunities Unit

Lee Holder

Dr Sue Starkings

Carol Cusworth

Lesley Hart

Brian Spittles

James Derounian

Sarah Thorrrington

Professor Donald Nicolson

Professor Patrick Smith

Richard (Nick) Nicholls



Sarah Thorrington

Stoke-on-Trent College

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Professor

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Richard (Nick)

Nicholls

Having completed her degree, Sarah Thorrington put aside plans to go into teaching when she was offered a chance to work in a live music promotion business.

Then one day she read a report in the Guardian on poverty.

"I remember feeling strongly that what would change people's lives would be learning," said Sarah. "It started a shift in my outlook and ambitions, which soon resulted in me starting a teacher training course."

In just one year, 1996 -7, Sarah gained her C&G teaching qualification, a counselling diploma and an introductory adult literacy tutor's certificate. "When I did my placement in a literacy class I felt that teaching literacy was where my strengths were," she says.

Sarah became a volunteer tutor at Stoke-on-Trent College, where a big demand for literacy classes was beginning to develop. At that time in Stoke traditional industries were in decline and many workers were finding it was no longer possible to leave school without qualifications and gain a job for life. By 2004 Stoke-on-Trent was ranked as the 18th most deprived local authority in the UK.

Sarah soon became a full time literacy teacher at Stoke-on-Trent College; in 2003 she became an Advanced Skills Teacher and then Workplace Development Leader. In this role, "I engage with employers and extend Skills for Life provision into the workplace, to reach more learners and develop programmes that meet their needs, however and wherever," says Sarah.

Sarah has been known to work at the Post Office at 5am, at Sainsbury's from midnight till 3am, and in another factory from 10pm till midnight - as well as working a normal 10 hour day in college. "Night workers have the right to access to learning too," says Sarah when colleagues look aghast at the hours she works..

Jim McDermott, the Lifelong Learning Co-ordinator at 'First Potteries' says, "Sarah has always made herself available to give advice and guidance or invigilate online tests at any time whenever she was called upon. Her professional approach has made life much easier and more convenient for all involved."

Dave Condliffe, Project Worker for the Communication Workers' Union, works with Sarah organising Skills for life courses for his members. "Sarah has helped me to progress in the Union through the

confidence she has instilled in me," he says. "From the feedback I receive from members who attend Skills for Life courses, she is a complete inspiration."

On top of all this, Sarah is also studying for an MA. "When learners first come to classes they say they want to better themselves," she says, "but as lecturers we are under pressure to get them through exams as quickly as possible. This prompted my research question for the MA: How can teachers ensure that literacy classes improve the life chances of learners?"

Sarah asked a group of colleagues to volunteer for an action research project. "I wanted to empower lecturers

in the same way that our classes should empower learners, and to raise morale in the department," she said.

Sarah believes that literacy opens doors - "but what I have read for the MA suggests it's as much about speaking skills as

writing skills," she says. The research therefore concentrated on trying out different speaking and listening activities with literacy learners.

"The research helped me to get back into enjoying what I do," says Val Wood, one of the participants. "In my classes now we spend time building up speaking and listening skills and learners have produced some outstanding work. Two of them have gone on to win

prizes in the RAW stories national competition; their stories are going to be published in a BBC anthology and they both received prizes to the value of £250."

Sally Lowden used the research with a small group of ESOL learners. "The

students valued the opportunity to discuss issues which related to them personally and to feel that their individual language needs were being addressed in the classroom," she says, "whereas too often the classroom language is 'top-down', dictated by the curriculum and focused on written skills which can be easily evidenced."

Finally, one of Sarah's learners, Lisa, says, "I did two English courses with Sarah and got an equivalent to an English GCSE. She was fantastic. On our first meeting she recognised that I was dyslexic and it turned out that I was and never knew. She gave me confidence and made me feel proud of myself. She showed me ways of doing things I thought I'd never achieve. I am a better person and a happier person for meeting her."

Nominator: Kirstie Benerfer



'I remember feeling strongly that what would change people's lives would be learning. It started a shift in my outlook and ambitions'



Professor Donald Nicolson

University of Strathclyde Law Clinic

Professor Donald Nicolson is founder and director of the University of Strathclyde Law Clinic. Unique in Scotland, the Clinic enables students to gain hands-on legal experience by providing free advice and representation for people who would otherwise be unable to obtain legal assistance.

A graduate of the University of Cape Town, Donald first came to the UK in 1983 to study for a PhD at Cambridge. On graduating, he knew that, if he returned to South Africa, he would be conscripted into military service or face jail. As a passionate opponent of apartheid, he was granted political asylum and settled in the UK. For Donald, a major factor in his political radicalisation was his experience as a student adviser in the UCT Law Clinic, providing legal advice in local townships. Although choosing to pursue an academic career, he was determined to continue helping others, and to provide similar opportunities for his own students. He therefore set up his own law clinics, first at Bristol University and then, on a far larger scale, at Strathclyde. Since the founding of the Strathclyde Clinic in 2003, around 300 students have been involved in helping clients.

For many students, a law degree can seem like just a path to a lucrative career, or merely an intellectual game. However, others embark on their legal studies with much nobler ideas of 'doing justice'. Donald's main motivation is to foster these social and moral commitments, by encouraging students to choose legal careers which give something back to the community. According to third year student Fiona Davidson, 'As a rather mature fresher, I was at first daunted and distinctly overwhelmed by university life as a whole, but Professor Nicolson's vibrant passion and enthusiasm for the Law Clinic, its ethos, its aims and commitment to social justice and assisting those most in need of legal assistance reflected the very reason I chose to undertake the LLB. I am extremely proud and honored to have been selected as a student adviser at the Law Clinic.' Similarly, for Julie Hodson - a student on the Clinical Legal Practice course established to support the Clinic's work - the course 'was brilliant in providing a viewpoint of the law that you would not gain in other classes... Donald made us consider the ethical perspectives of certain situations and instilled a sense of morality in me that I did not have prior to the course.' Enthused by their experiences as students, many Clinic alumni have continued to help out after qualifying as lawyers.

As well as providing students with practical experience which can make a real difference to their confidence, their academic results, and their employability, the Law Clinic has undoubtedly proved a 'life changing' experience for some. Jenny Wallace was on the verge of dropping out of university when she saw a poster about the Clinic. She joined the Clinic and went on to become its student director. She says 'I will

'I believe that it truly makes a difference to the lives of both the advisers and the clients and it would not exist without Donald'

qualify as a solicitor in October - and it's mainly thanks to Donald.' For Virginia Toyi, who doubted whether she had chosen the right course, joining the Law Clinic 'is one of the best decisions I have made in my life. Not only do I

enjoy studying law so much but I feel completely fulfilled as I am able to help others. It is both challenging and satisfying.'

However, it is not only students who benefit from the Law Clinic. Since 2003, it has helped nearly 500



clients, dealing with issues ranging from consumer disputes to unfair dismissals and unlawful evictions, and providing help on both a practical and an emotional level. According to Clinic members Helen Bain and

Stuart Kelly, 'Clients consistently praise the work of the Law Clinic - we truly are making a substantial difference to bettering the lives of the people of Glasgow ... and Professor Nicolson is continually developing plans to expand in the community so that more people can receive the benefit.'

There is no doubt that Donald is an inspirational role model for his students, giving up much of his own time to run the Clinic on top of his teaching, administrative and research commitments. Another student adviser, Chloe Cannon, says that 'I think it is inspiring how someone so clever has not just jumped into legal practice to make a packet of money but has instead dedicated huge parts of his life to volunteer causes.' Jenny Wallace also notes that 'Although Donald is extremely busy, he makes time to develop personal relationships with all of the students he deals with - more than the average lecturer.' She goes on to say that 'The Law Clinic is an integral part of the life of many law students, academics and now solicitors. I believe that it truly makes a positive difference to the lives of both the advisers and the clients; and it would not exist without Donald. His commitment and vision have made a fundamental difference to both the civil justice system in Glasgow and the students of Strathclyde Law School, and will continue to do so.'

Nominator: Aileen McHarg

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Professor Patrick Smith Buckinghamshire New University

Patrick is Professor of Learning and Teaching at Buckinghamshire New University where he has spent the last twenty-five years enhancing the learning experience of a wide range of higher education students. While the professorial role can often involve a diminished engagement with undergraduate students, Patrick has actively sought out opportunities to continue working with students at all levels, working recently with cohorts on a range of awards from foundation degrees to masters programmes. Working as he does at an institution which promotes widened participation and a 'second chance' at Higher Education, Patrick's commitment to education as a transformative endeavour is truly exceptional.

Patrick's current role is as both educational developer and teacher on a wide variety of work-based learning courses. Ranging from intermediate level to masters level, these programmes recognise and treat the workplace as equal to 'the Academy' as a source of learning and regard work-based students as equivalent to their full-time University peers. Pat insists that anyone engaged in any kind of proficient and expert activity, be it (for example) teaching dance within local communities or managing crowd safety and security at major events has the right to think of themselves as highly-skilled individuals and proceed to have those skills recognised through formal Higher Education qualifications. In this respect, his work to promote access to both Higher Education and true Lifelong Learning has been pioneering while his pastoral and professional support of students in transition has been a privilege to witness.

Pat is also the author of major publications which are acknowledged by curriculum developers nationally and

internationally, as core reading for anyone who requires an articulate and critical view of the (mis)use of 'learning objectives'. In this way too, he has contributed a broadened understanding of the role of learning outcomes in curriculum development and thus to the expanded learning opportunities of many thousands of learners.

In recent years, at a point when he might have been considering retirement, he has been the key developer and promoter of, and lead tutor on, an innovative and ground-breaking Masters' Degree programme in Leadership and Management. The foundation of this particular course is not the classroom but the individual participant's workplace and particular experience. While other higher degrees in this domain might emphasise the roles of 'the subject content' and 'the tutor', Pat has built a course that treats 'the subject process' and 'course participants' as equal partners in the learning process.

During the period in which I have been working with Patrick, a large proportion of his students have been mature learners, entering higher education for the first time and often with some considerable trepidation. I am

aware that a good many of these students attribute their successful induction into the higher education community entirely to Patrick's efforts and in their subsequent progress and achievement they recognise the importance of his ongoing support, generous and detailed feedback and his holistic

approach to student learning and development.

While his modesty would prompt him to claim that he merits no exceptional regard, Patrick's many students would all attest that he has indeed 'gone the extra mile' throughout his working life. I have no hesitation in nominating Patrick as a 'Life Changer'.

Nominator: Roger Dalrymple



'Students recognise the importance of his ongoing support, generous and detailed feedback and his holistic attitude to student learning and development'



Richard (Nick) Nicholls

Solihull College

A former student of Nick's (Damian Ibison) said to me "in all the years that I have gone through the various educational establishments I have never been so inspired as I have been by the teachings of Nick - I have learned not only the subject but the applications I can qualify it with." Nick's outstanding passion and enthusiasm for learning and trade union education is what makes him so special and this enthusiasm is passed on to all who come in contact with him.

Nick teaches for the Trade Union Studies Unit within Solihull College and is based at the Communication Workers Union (CWU) Education and Training Centre near Oxford. For many years Nick was a CWU activist and served as a member of the CWU Executive. As a person who under went his own

education in later life (he obtained his degree at the age of 39), Nick has great empathy with adult students and does his utmost to remove as many barriers to learning as he can. Nick teaches the TUC Diploma in Contemporary Trade Unionism and imparts his love of labour history to students. He spends many hours offering one to one tuition and coaching to get students up to standard during which time he is developing their confidence so that they

can become self enabled learners - he treasures all input and helps students to believe that their contributions are as valuable as any other. The heart of trade union education is to work together as a collective to achieve individual goals and Nick's teaching style is testament to this ethos.

As a former student Jan Zablocki stated "his warm, natural, sensitive, humorous, mischievous and charming but provocative demeanor makes you feel at ease and encourages you to open up with your own ideas and contributions in a subject matter."

Nick is able to politicise without polarising and opens up avenues of discussion and thought for students that they would not necessarily explore. As one student, Laura Wright noted "his style of teaching is both

enthusiastic and thought provoking he can make you laugh one minute then light the blue touch paper and sit back and watch the inevitable lively debate take place." Indeed Nick's ability to generate a debate around issues is legendary and to watch him in action playing 'agent provocateur' to pull an issue into focus is an honour.

In his teaching Nick encourages students to use and develop their enquiry skills and to dig beneath the surface of the immediate task or issue that they are



dealing with. This interrogational approach to representing members, collective bargaining and academic learning has equipped students to be effective union reps on the one hand and successful learners on the other. Nick has encouraged many adult trade union learners to embrace learning for its own sake and follow progression routes into higher education degree and Masters courses. Indeed a mutual colleague (Paul Pritchard) who was taught by

Nick and is now himself a tutor with Trade Union Studies at Solihull noted "it was Nick who recognised that I had the ability to become a tutor and encouraged me to apply. Left to my own devices I most certainly would have lacked the confidence in my own abilities to take that step. Nick has been such a great help to me offering supportive and constructive advice. I believe that had Nick not taken me under his wing I would not

have been able to realise any of the achievements I have made over the last few years. Nick always has a new article or book for me to read to help me widen my knowledge of labour history and his enthusiasm and joy at passing these on is infectious."

The respect and esteem in which Nick is held by his

colleagues and students is reflected in the fact that he is affectionately known as 'Gandalf' - the wise wizard from Lord of the Rings. Working with Nick over the years has been an honour and a privilege. Nick is unique; there is no one quite like him, and his demonstrable commitment and belief in trade union education and learning over half a century means that he is a true 'life changer.'

Nominator: Julia Matthews

'Nick is unique; there is no one quite like him and his demonstrable commitment to and belief in trade union education and learning over half a century mean that he is a true life changer'

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Designed and published by UCU, 27 Britannia Street, London WC1X 9JP
Printed by Trident, Units 24-26, The IO Centre, Armstrong Road, London SE18 6RS