

## NEWS IN BRIEF

**Retirement rethink**

Current lecturers will retain their right to retire at 60 after the Government abandoned plans to extend the statutory public-sector retirement age to 65.

In a compromise deal, designed to head off far-reaching strikes across education, health and the civil service, the Government said that only workers who start careers next year will have to work to 65.

**Cancer Research coup**

Cancer Research UK and Cambridge University have recruited world-renowned scientists Bruce Ponder and Fiona Watt to lead their £45 million state-of-the-art research institute.

Professor Ponder, known for his work identifying high-risk cancer genes, will be responsible for more than 300 scientists as director of the Cambridge Research Institute when it opens next year. Professor Watt, deputy director of the new institute, is known for her work on epithelial stem cells, from which most cancers are thought to arise.

**Bristol to help Africa**

Staff and students from Bristol University will take part in a project to improve the quality of teaching in one of the world's most deprived areas.

The Graduate School of Education led a successful bid for a £2.5 million grant from the Department for International Development for the five-year project working in Ghana, Tanzania, Rwanda and South Africa.

The school leads a consortium that includes the universities of Bath, Dar es Salaam (Tanzania), Cape Coast (Ghana) and Witwatersrand (South Africa) as well as the Kigali Institute of Education (Rwanda).

**LSE study memorial**

Political science students at the London School of Economics will benefit from a £1,500 prize being set up in memory of Iain Crawford, one of the architects of the Government's top-up fees policy, and his wife Louise. The prize, awarded to the student who performs best in his or her first year exams, honours Mr Crawford, a former LSE employee who died after a long illness in 2004, and Louise, also an LSE employee, who died later that year.

**The web goes wider**

A new website has joined the quest to help widen university participation. The site, [www.freshsties.com](http://www.freshsties.com), provides links to student mentors for those from non-traditional backgrounds who are interested in higher education. It also offers career advice and contacts.

The idea is the brainchild of

# Rammell ups cash support for part-timers

Jessica Shepherd

The Government this week announced a multimillion-pound funding boost for part-time students in England, including grants to help pay fees for the poorest students.

Bill Rammell, the Higher Education Minister, revealed that hardship funds allocated to higher education institutions to help part-time students will quadruple from £3 million to £12 million from September 2006. Government contributions to fees for the poorest part-time students will be increased by more than a quarter.

David Vincent, pro vice-chancellor of the Open University, said that the announcement signalled a "historical turning point" for the part-time sector.

The move was also welcomed by Drummond Bone, president of Universities UK, the umbrella organisation for vice-chancellors. But Professor Bone added that part-time students would remain underfunded compared with their full-time counterparts.

Under the changes, £12 million a year in 2006-07 and 2007-08 will be allocated by universities and colleges to part-time students through the Access to Learning Fund. Institutions will be allowed to use money to implement fee waivers for part-time students or to increase other forms of support.

Government contributions to fees will rise from £590 to £750 for students studying half the time and from £885 to £1,125 for those studying three quarters of the time. This will apply to about 85,000 part-time students.

Unlike full-time students, who

from 2006 will be able to defer paying fees until after graduation, part-time students still have to pay upfront. And unlike full-time undergraduates in England, part-timers can be charged different fee levels by institutions.

Mr Rammell said that the funding "may not be the last word" but addressed some of the concerns of the sector.

Professor Vincent said that the announcement marked a change in relations between the Government and the part-time higher education sector.

He added: "This package shows that the Government has understood that the part-time sector needs to be heard as much as the full-time sector."

"There appears to be a real desire to work with the sector, too, to try to resolve the problems that the Higher Education Act created and to exploit the part-time sector to its full potential."

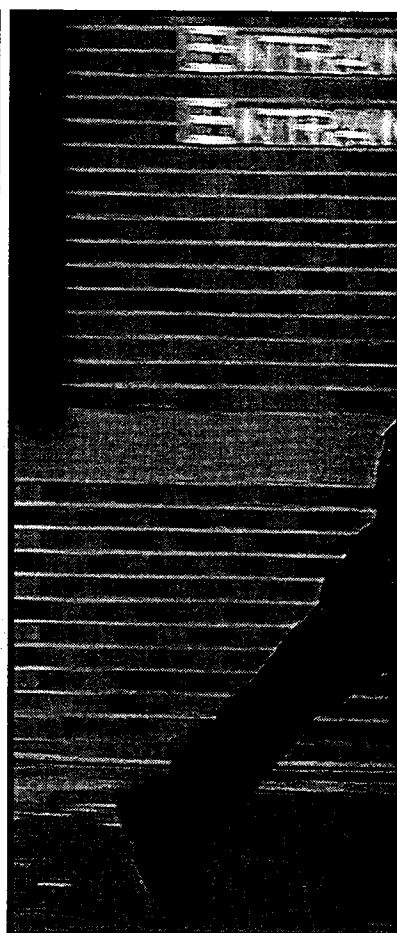
Michael Driscoll, vice-chancellor of Middlesex University and chairman of Campaigning for Mainstream Universities, said: "The absence of student support arrangements for part-time undergraduate study from the 2004 Act was a big omission."

"We therefore very much welcome the fact that the Government is seeking to ensure that both part-time students and the universities that support their studies are not disadvantaged in 2006."

Mr Rammell added that the Higher Education Funding Council for England would consider proposals for increasing support to institutions for part-time students.

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First on the scene: Malcolm Wollan, paramedic in the UK to be given the professor in pre-hospital emergency

## Tasty little for unref

Olga Wojtas

Racy Reformation potboilers touted as popular among French-women may have been a ploy to attract male readers in search of titillation, according to new research.

Pollie Bromilow, a lecturer in French at Liverpool University, revealed her research into 16th-century Frenchwomen's reading last weekend at a conference entitled *Women in French and Women Postgraduates in Spanish* at St Andrews University.

Dr Bromilow began to question whether women or men were being targeted since women's literacy rate is thought to have been about 10 per cent that of men's in Reformation France.

"Printers saying 'women read this' could be a way of giving male readers a promise of access to

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## At-risk subjects see resurgence