

Dr Sue Robbins, CRES Pastor

I have been an A Rocha supporter since Peter and Miranda Harris first told me of their vision to set up a field studies centre and bird observatory in the Algarve, in response to the demise of migrating birds flying over the Iberian Peninsula. Caring for God's creation chimed with my own thoughts as a Christian, being a scientist whose first degree was Applied Biology and who has had a life time's love of the outdoor environment.

My working life has been spent teaching: first, teenage school children, then after having my own family, 24 years at Oxford Brookes University teaching Biochemistry. During the latter part of that time I revamped the personal tutoring system for our Academic School, making it pro-active in building relationships between tutors and tutees. This led to students who were experiencing difficulties coming out of the woodwork and asking for help. Often the issues were personal and I became the person that staff sent their tutees to for advice. As Head of Student Support in my Academic School I received training through an introductory course in counselling and ran a triage system, working closely with the University Head of Student Support who provided our students with rapid specialist help.



The main findings from the student support aspect of my work was that non-academic problems were the most frequent reason for students dropping out of courses or struggling to complete assignments. If a person's head is taken up with problems at home, such as health of themselves or family members, finances, etc, or issues in their workplace, there is little or no capacity left for academic study. When these problems were addressed through finding appropriate advice, even though the issues were not actually solved but help was in process, students were able to concentrate on their studies. In my Academic School student retention improved from 83% to 92% over three years and this was deemed due to the personal support that students experienced.

I am delighted to become CRES Pastor, where I see my role as being available to support students where they are struggling to study or meet deadlines for their course. I don't anticipate having all the answers, but I will listen and facilitate students in finding help.

Having retired from Oxford Brookes, I now volunteer as an outdoor activity instructor with an A Rocha Partner in Action, Adventure Plus, and with CRES as a local tutor.

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