[The Open University](#) will be [offering up hardware](#) to its programming students as part of a shake-up of its computing curriculum.

The distance-learning institution's new computing and IT degrees place more of a focus on work-based, vocational principles than theory. Students will get credit for previous work experience or accreditation, in the hope that companies will be more likely to pay for their staff to study on the OU's courses.

As part of this, all computing and IT students will be sent a circuitboard with an array of sensors and inputs. The device, which is called a SenseBoard, plugs into a computer's USB socket, and can then be programmed using a language called Sense, which is based on MIT's drag-and-drop [Scratch](#) language.

Mike Richards, one of the two team chairs for the "My Digital Life" course module, the first component of the computing and ICT degree, told *Silicon.com*: "Although [Scratch] was invented for children the idea is it gets past the barriers of syntax, strange commands, and it makes it easy to start building programs -- you're not confronted with a blank piece of paper. Many of the students will never have touched a computer in any creative way at all and we're going to be getting them to programme internet-ready applications in a couple of weeks."

By Duncan Geere
Source: wired.co.uk