THINGS TO REMEMBER
Our President, Nicola, looks ahead at the academic year

PEER SUPPORT
Feeling overwhelmed? Life getting in the way of study? Get in touch with Peer Support

THROWBACK THURSDAY
Join us on a trip back in time as we look at some of the gems from our archives

GOING FOR GOLD
AN INTERVIEW WITH HELEN RICHARDSON-WALSH

FRESHERS FORTNIGHT
FIND OUT WE HAVE PLANNED
Welcome to this edition of OU Students magazine...

Welcome to the Autumn edition of OU Students magazine!

The beginning of a new academic year is an exciting time, whether you’re returning to your OU studies or a new OU student. It’s also a great opportunity for us, the OU Students Association, to either welcome you, or welcome you back to our huge student community. In this edition you’ll find all the details on our upcoming Freshers events - this year we’ve doubled the celebration, adding a new ‘welcome week’ catered to returning students. New or experienced OU student, we’ve got lots of ways for you to get involved!

Distance learning can be hard, but we’re here for you. Head on over to page five to hear from your Student Support officer and Equality and Diversity officer about our support services.

We’ve got lots of exciting news, articles and student stories, including an interview with Olympic gold medalist Helen Richardson-Walsh, updates from our affiliated societies and the opportunity to represent the OU on University Challenge! Our cover story features PLEXUS - our affiliated LGBT+ group, who attended not one but two Pride events. Read about their experience on page 11.

It’s a busy time of year for OU students, so take a few minutes to grab a cuppa and check out the OU Students magazine!

Rachel Hughes
Vice President Communications
Who are we?
The Open University Students Association is the voice and community for all OU students. We are run by a small team of elected student representatives, with help from a small staff team in Milton Keynes. The Association enables you to influence how your University is run. We exist to promote your interests and ensure that the OU is not just a place of learning, it’s a student community!

Want to be a member of the OU Students Association? Well congratulations because by becoming an OU student you are automatically a member of one of the biggest students’ associations in the world. So you can get involved with our many activities and have access to our various services right away!

What is Freshers?
This year we are not just celebrating our new students but we are also welcoming back our returning OU students through our Freshers Fortnight! From Monday 25 September to Friday 6 October we will be celebrating all things OU with a variety of activities you can take part in - check out the schedule on page seven!

Starting your studies can be daunting, and we know this is especially true for OU students who may have other responsibilities to contend with. This is why we are dedicating these two weeks to help you get to grips with the communities, services and activities you can get involved with during your studies with The Open University.

Amplify your voice...
We have volunteers sitting on committees to make sure your collective views are represented at all levels of the University structure. We also carry out research projects to amplify your voice.

Support you...
We understand that it can be stressful to add study on top of your other life responsibilities and get the work, life and study balance right, especially when you’re a long-distance learner. To help with this we have a variety of services that you can access to help at any time during your studies.

Building a community...
With over 200,000 members we want to build a community of OU students where no one feels like they’re alone in their studies.

Create volunteering opportunities...
Want to get out and meet other OU students? Want to get involved from the comfort of your own home? Become an Association volunteer! All our roles come with full training and support from the Students Association office.

Your OU Students Association have been planning activities, events, and more for our Freshers fortnight timetable to suit new and returning students, but everyone is welcome to attend both weeks.
The first week is all about settling in as an OU student, finding out more about your studies and the support that is provided for you.
The second week is all about getting more involved as a student and the Association.

Stephanie Stubbins
Vice President Community

Find out about our societies, volunteering opportunities and our huge student community.

It’s a good opportunity to ask questions (Golden rule - no question is a ‘silly question’!).

Looking forward to meeting you during some of the activities in these two weeks!

www.open.ac.uk/ousa/freshers
**Week one**  
September - #new2OU

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**25**  
**WELCOME!**  
Keep an eye out for our activities on our website, social media and forums. Plus, join in on our evening welcome Facebook chat...

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**26**  
**LIBRARY AND CAREERS**  
We’ll be sharing all the services the OU Library and Careers teams have to offer for OU students...

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**27**  
**STUDENT VOICE DAY**  
Meet your Faculty Association Representatives and discover the work they do to improve the OU student experience...

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**28**  
**SUPPORT GROUPS**  
Join our Disabled Students Group and PLEXUS, our LGBT+ group to find out about the support, events and community they have to offer...

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**29**  
**STUDENT SUPPORT**  
Find out more about our student support services, here for you throughout your student journey...

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**30**  
**MEET-UP!**  
Take part in one of many OU student meet-up events taking place across the nation, or join in online to meet your student community...

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**Week two**  
October - #back2OU

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**2**  
**WELCOME BACK**  
Returning to OU studies? Chat to other OU students in our evening Facebook event...

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**3**  
**SOCIETIES**  
Attend our online societies fair to find your perfect fit. With over 20+ societies to choose from, there’s bound to be one for you...

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**4**  
**COMMUNITY**  
Delve into the ever-growing OU student community with a variety of events and information going live throughout the day...

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**5**  
**VOLUNTEERING**  
Find out all about our many volunteering opportunities. Elected rep? Radio presenter? Meet-up host? There’s lots to choose from...

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**6**  
**STUDIO AND WHAT’S NEXT?**  
Listen live to our student radio hosts for the next episode of STUDIO! Also, find out what’s coming up after Freshers...

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**WIN**  
**COMPETITIONS!**  
Keep an eye out over the fortnight for the chance to win brilliant prizes from the OU Students Shop...
Life changing support

Alison Kingan on her elected role as Vice President Support...

Studying with the Open University has been a life changing experience for me but without help I’d have fallen by the wayside many years ago without gaining any qualifications. Once I discovered the Students Association had opportunities to help other students I was in there, volunteering in different roles, most of which were not too taxing but eventually led to me being elected Vice President Student Support. Two of the main responsibilities of my current role are being a Trustee of OUSE (Open University Students Educational Trust) and overseeing the Peer Support Services, both of which are explained further in this edition and on our website.

I love this role because it helps students in financial difficulty and those wanting to talk to someone for motivation or who need signposting to answers. I also challenge the OU on issues that affect a number of students. Part of my role is to inform students, which I used to do through blogs and will restart that in earnest soon. In future editions I will keep you all updated on current projects and tell you about the things that are relevant to you as OU students.

I started studying in the OU so long ago that we’d just stopped writing on slates, TMAs were still handwritten by many students and were then posted to the OU. In those days I wouldn’t say boo to a goose. Studying with the OU and volunteering with the Students Association has helped me develop into a confident VP Student Support who isn’t afraid to challenge the OU/ when necessary. I could say the OU has created a monster who rampages through Milton Keynes when necessary but I’m more like the Cookie Monster from Sesame Street than Kingan Kong...

What is London Nightline?

London Nightline is a listening and information service run by students for students open from 6pm to 8am every night of term. You can talk to us about anything, big or small, knowing that you are doing so anonymously and confidentially. We won’t judge you or tell you how to run your own life; we’re there to listen to you. All of our volunteers are students that have gone through extensive training, and understand that studying isn’t always smooth sailing.

What kind of calls do we take?

If you can think of it, we’ve taken a call about it. Nightline is non-directive, so we listen to whatever is on your mind. Whether that be stress about university work, relationship problems with your family or friends, issues at work, or a combination of everything, we’ll listen to you. Last year our main themes were relationships, depression and loneliness, academic, and mental health and counselling, but collectively they made up about 40% of our calls – meaning the rest are about every other thing! It doesn’t even have to be related to being a student; we understand that life continues outside of education too.

We are also an information service. This means that you can call us if you would like to be signposted to another service, directions home if you’re lost, or even if you want to know where the nearest pizza place is, we can do that for you too!

Rough day?

What can you expect if you contact us?

We offer various mediums for talking with London Nightline. We still have our phonelines, which is our most popular format, but we also have an instant messaging service, email, text and skype if you would prefer to talk in a written format.

The way we talk to our callers doesn’t change across the formats. Our volunteers are trained in active listening, and each one will provide a consistent service. We answer with the phrase “Hello Nightline”, and from there you can take your time to tell us what’s on your mind. We’ll follow your lead, and listen to what you want to talk about.

Interested in volunteering with us?

We have three volunteering opportunities available: hotline volunteers who man the lines, Ambassadors that act as representatives of Nightline at their university, and Publicity and Fundraising volunteers who plan our wonderful annual campaigns. Each role is wonderful in its own way, so wherever your interests lie, we’ve got the role for you! Applications are now open, and will close on the 27/9 for Hotline roles, and 6/11 for Ambassadors. For more information, check our website or email us at london@nightline.org.uk.

How can you get in touch with us?

Phone: 0207 631 0101
Text: 07717 989 900
Skype Chat: nightline.chat
Skype Phone: londonnightline
IM: nightline.org.uk
Email: listening@nightline.org.uk

Best overheard #OUstudent comment: ‘That’s one of those notebooks which is too pretty to write in’
A problem shared is a problem halved...

Our Peer Supporters are there to give a wise word, a helping hand or friendly chat if OU students are feeling alone or negative about their studies. It’s always good to talk and our Peer Supporters have lots of experience to share!

Dear Peer Supporter,
I’m halfway through my module, my TMA results have been reasonable but I’m starting to fall behind with my studies and have real trouble motivating myself to sit down with my books.

Dear Student,
Thank you for contacting peer support. I’m one of the supporters and can really identify with that feeling, the excitement of learning a new topic is beginning to wane and the end of the module is still a long way ahead. First of all, is there a problem area that you’re stuck with, remember that your tutor is there to help you if you’re struggling with the coursework. She wants you to do well and will be happy to help clarify anything for you. Secondly, are you trying to study for long periods, which can be very daunting? Why not try splitting your study periods into short blocks, giving yourself breaks every half hour or so. Reward yourself with a coffee, a snack, a walk outside, chat to a friend on the phone, something nice to break up the study period. You’ll find that your concentration is so much better for short periods, and you’ll go back to it refreshed each time. Or make small achievable goals – the end of a section, part of a TMA, and reward yourself with something you enjoy when you complete it. I hope these tips help, and please come back to us on the forum or email if we can be of further help.

Dear Peer Supporter,
I have young children and a part-time job, my partner is supportive but I still feel that I have to do all the cooking and getting the children ready for bed. At the weekend I’m constantly being disturbed by the children, and friends and neighbours drop round frequently too. This is my first module and I just can’t see myself completing it, yet alone a degree.

Dear Student,
Thank you for contacting peer support. I’m one of the supporters and this is a very common problem for distance learners – trying to juggle study with busy lives. You say that your partner is supportive, so perhaps you and he could sit down and have a chat about how he can help you to have time to set aside for study? Perhaps every other evening he could do the cooking and put the children to bed? Explain to everyone that when you’re studying you’ll appreciate if they leave you in peace, but that you’ll be free to spend time with them later. Could you study in a room of the house where you won’t get drawn into conversation with friends? Your partner can explain that you’re studying, but suggest that they come round on Friday evening and you’ll be ready for a good natter. At weekends you could suggest that perhaps your partner does something with the children out of the house on the Saturday – and you’ll all have a day out on Sunday. If you feel confident that you can have these periods when you are guaranteed peace then you won’t be worrying about it, and you’ll feel more relaxed during the times that you can enjoy with family and friends. I hope that this gives you a few ideas of how to get that vital quiet time to study, and do please get back to us on the email or forum if we can be of any further help.

Dear Peer Supporter,
I had the EMA online tutorial on Wednesday. To be honest I am really uncomfortable with the online tutorials... it is a strange medium for me. One of the main reasons for my pre-assignment angst is that each one is a different type of puzzle to solve from the last one. I think that I always try and find shortcuts, but know within myself that there aren’t any!

Dear Student,
Do you know if the online tutorials were recorded? If yes, it means that you can listen to the recording after the event. To test this out if you don’t know, just launch the wizard for your Online Tutorial Room and follow exactly the same procedure as you would to take part, if there’s a recording, it should say watch again and click. It will ease your anxiety if you don’t have to attend occasionally when you’re feeling so uncomfortable that it is affecting your work. Of course, tutorials are really important to your understanding of the module materials, so I wouldn’t recommend this as a permanent solution.

Have a question?
Want to ask our Peer Supporters something? Send in questions to their inbox, with ‘Magazine: Dear Peer Supporter’ in the subject line. Questions are always treated with the utmost privacy and will only be published anonymously. Identifying details will be removed before publication.

Best overheard OU student comment: ‘Loving being able to read for pleasure for a while #StudyBreak’
Soon after being elected, I found the OU’s ‘Vision’ statement by the Chancellor and Vice Chancellor. The last paragraph had (and has) particular resonance for me:

‘Discrimination arising from individual characteristics and circumstances is not only unlawful, but a waste of talent and a denial of opportunity, preventing individuals, organisations and societies from achieving their growth potential’

Cherry Day
Vice President Equal Opportunities

Born in a small West Sussex village in the early 1950s, I never heard the terms ‘cultural diversity’ and ‘equal opportunities’ because they were not in common use. Then, you might go to university if you passed your 11+ and went to Grammar School. But if not, (and especially if you were female), you married a local lad; had children and lived in housing that either the Council or the largest local employer – the Blue Circle Cement Works - supplied.

But, thanks to a couple of wonderful teachers at my Secondary School and (subsequently) after a two year stint at a girls’ grammar school, I got my A-levels; and excellent grades in Office Practice, Shorthand and Typing. I had the technical skills to ‘take on the world’ as a self-sufficient independent female, and I did by moving to London to work.

For the next eleven years – through the seventies – I certainly witnessed first-hand cultural diversity and (the lack of) equal opportunities as any of you social historians out there will already know. Thank goodness, things have changed a bit since then but more still needs to be done. Under the Equality Act 2010 there’s a list of identified ‘Protected Characteristics’ to ensure fair play by all in our daily lives. Some of these are: disability, race, religion and gender. The OU has its own list which mirrors the one in the Equality Act and this is my template for the daily work I do as your VP Equal Ops.

I won’t lie. It’s a challenging role with a very broad brief. But a year into it now, I can see the benefits of having a Vice President Equal Opportunities. Having such a role in the Association’s Officer Team, hopefully, ensures that talent is not wasted, opportunities are not denied and OU students are not prevented from achieving their growth potential. As, I said: that last paragraph in the OU’s Vision statement certainly has resonance.
PLEXUS, the OU student LGBT+ group, and members of Open University staff marched together at Pride in both London and Manchester...

Students and staff members from across The Open University took part in two Pride events over the summer. First, Pride in London on 8 July and then Manchester Pride on 26 August. Visits to these events were organised collaboratively by PLEXUS and OU staff.

Pride in London celebrated ‘Love Happens Here’, demonstrating that love appears in all different ways, shapes and sizes. PLEXUS not only represented the LGBT+ community but demonstrated that the OU is a culturally diverse institution, whether you are a student or member of staff. We were even cheered by a Milton Keynes resident, Andy West, who was happy to see the OU in this year’s parade.

President of the Students Association Nicola Simpson said: “I had a great day with OU students and staff at Pride in London. You couldn’t fail to be overwhelmed by the experienced - the whole parade route was lined with thousands of people, all there to show support for the LGBT community. It was like nothing I have experienced anywhere else!”

In Manchester, PLEXUS was joined by Ian Fribbance, Executive Dean for the Faculty of Social Sciences, who said: “I’m very much looking forward to attending this year’s Manchester Pride Parade representing the Vice-Chancellor and being able to meet staff and students outside of Milton Keynes.”

Graham Rimmer and Alex Phennah, co-founders of PLEXUS, said: “When we started this journey a little over a year ago, we were apprehensive about what we could achieve. Being in one Pride parade wasn’t even a goal, now we have two under our belt. We’re looking forward to the year ahead and looking forward to getting started. Here’s to OU Pride 18!”

It is going to be another busy year for PLEXUS with preparations already in place for #OUPRIDE18, providing training to Students Association representatives and holding their first ever elections later in the autumn - plus much more...

If you would like to find out more about, or join PLEXUS visit their website. Remember you don’t have to self-define as LGBT+ to join, and it’s completely free!
All Rise Say No To Cyber Abuse is an international not for profit organisation, with the purpose of bringing greater awareness and responsibility to the way we engage with society on and offline. With the tag line ‘abuse is abuse online or offline’. All Rise raises the question of what is accepted and tolerated on the internet and whether we have become accustomed to the abuse that takes place.

Over the last two years All Rise has provided a platform for young people around the world to express and educate the world in what is truly taking place online and the real impact cyber abuse does have on our society.

All Rise is now hosting its third International Youth Filmmaking Competition, with this year’s theme being: Is cyber abuse an international crime?

Last year’s competition prizes included BAFTA Tickets; work experience at Twickenham Studios; visit to a film set abroad; John Lewis Vouchers and many more...

This year’s competition will have an equally exciting variety of prizes.

The competition is for two age groups; 10-15 year olds and 16-21 year olds. Entries are free.

To see last year’s entries head over to their website.

Feeling overwhelmed? Struggling to find motivation? Life getting in the way of study? Anxious about your exam or EMA? Feel isolated? These are just a few of the common problems experienced by OU students. Don’t struggle on. Get in touch with Peer Support. We are a small group of student volunteers, who understand how difficult distance learning can be at times. Between us we’ve experienced most of the problems that studying alone can bring, and we have a wealth of tips and information at hand that we can share with you.

We are a listening ear, someone to tell your study troubles to and usually we can suggest ways around those difficult obstacles that get in the way of enjoying your OU experience. We can also provide confidential long or short-term one-to-one email support, if you feel that you need more support.

Contact us by email or through the Request Peer Support Forum. Rest assured that only you and the Peer Support Team can read your message and our reply.

We are delighted to launch the new ‘Dear Peer Supporter’ section featured in this edition and continue this in future OU Student magazines. If you are happy to have your question and our answer published in the magazine, please submit your question ensuring the email subject reads ‘Magazine: Dear Peer Supporter’. We will reply to you directly, but if we choose to feature your question in a future edition of the magazine we will ensure your identity is not revealed.

There’s also the Through the Gate support service for students who have left a secure unit and are continuing with their studies.

We are a trained team who offer the same warm, friendly Service as Peer Support but with specific knowledge of the issues you may be faced with.

Whether you have a one off query, or would like long term email support, remember, you are not alone, we are here for you!
The volunteer weekend was great fun. Most of us arrived on campus around 2.30pm, where we were greeted by the Students Association staff, plus lots of signs of where to go which was a great help.

After tea, coffee and biscuits, (no jammie dodgers or hob nobs though!) we all went to one of two workshops. Although this wasn’t compulsory and we had been told what they entailed prior to the event, most of us did go and again the staff were on hand to direct us to where we should go.

When that finished we had the option to go to another workshop. These were great fun, not overly long, chatty, informative and a chance to get to know other students.

After that, we were offered more refreshments which gave the opportunity to mingle, meet new people and chat with those we already knew. The staff again were on hand to ensure that no-one was left alone which is a key factor in these kind of events where often students are attending not knowing anyone, or very few people.

Dinner was delicious with the room and tables being decorated with finesse. There was a seating plan and this was a great idea as no-one was left out, which again meant we got to chat to other volunteers that maybe we would not have done, and so make new friends. There were some speeches and the event finished at around 9.45pm.

The day was well organised, friendly, informal, full of fun, lone-student friendly and a day that will stay in the memory banks of everyone who attended in a nice way.

Here at the Students Association, we’re always amazed by the hard work, passion and dedication of our volunteers. So, in July all our volunteers were invited to take part in an event on campus in Milton Keynes. Part training, part networking and all-round celebration of their achievements. Marli Smith attended the event...

A huge THANK YOU!

Pictures of the vol. event

THANK YOU!
After such an exciting event with some of our current volunteers, we are walking on sunshine in the Volunteers Team and we just can’t think of any reasons not to get involved with the Students Association.

And if Marli’s story wasn’t enough to make you start signing up to volunteer, here are three more reasons to get involved!

**To meet fellow students!**
Volunteering gives an opportunity to stop feeling like an isolated OU Student studying alone in their bedroom and get you out there and meeting other students. Volunteering often means you get to meet others face to face and online, as well as being given the chance to travel to different parts of the country to meet up with other volunteers, with a shared mission which is a great basis for new friendships!

**Variety is the spice of life, so add some diversity to your life!**
People who choose to volunteer automatically have something in common, but come from all walks of life. Our youngest volunteer is 19, and our oldest is 83. Our volunteers are based all over the UK and Europe (plus a couple even further afield!) and have a range of life experiences, whether they are working or have families. Everyone can take part so you may meet people you would otherwise never have the opportunity to know!

**Gain skills and experience!**
Although for many volunteers, this can be an added bonus rather than the reason why they got involved, there is no denying that trying something new will increase your skill set and offer you new experiences and opportunities. This could help when applying for jobs in the future, increase your confidence whilst studying or might be just the thing to open new avenues. One volunteer also told us that being able to have experiences that were hers as ‘the OU Student’ not as ‘mum’ was very important to her and her wellbeing.

If you have been convinced, why not take a look at our opportunities page as we have three new opportunities open for applications...

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**Community Champions**
This is a new role supported by Steph Stubbins, Vice President Community, which will support work in the regions and nations by providing a well-equipped team of champions, who will be chatting to students about our services and supporting students to meet up and combat the isolation of studying alone. This role is especially good as a large amount of it can be done from home! Applications close on 15 September 2017.

**OU Students Educational Trust Ambassadors**
This new role is open until 15 September 2017 and we are looking for students with existing knowledge of the Students Association, so that they can focus on supporting our educational trust which support students experiencing financial hardship which could prevent them from studying. Much of this can be done from home, though there are opportunities to travel for interested students.

**Learner Experience Representatives**
This is a role which is open throughout the year and is an opportunity to get involved in important conversations about students’ academic interests and experiences. This role can even be done entirely in your pyjamas if you so choose, as it is home-based!

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Don’t forget...
... we cover all reasonable expenses incurred in your role as a volunteer and as an Association, we celebrate difference and pride ourselves in supporting everyone to be able to volunteer no matter the circumstance. So if you are unsure and would like to chat to a member of our team, please contact us by email.
Going for
Gold

Hockey player Helen Richardson-Walsh has combined Open University study with her career as a gold medal-winning Olympian. She gave a talk at our recent Volunteer recognition event and also took the time to answer our questions...

How did you first discover hockey?
I grew up in a very sporty family. I’ve got three older brothers and we played all sports, one of course being hockey. I joined my first club though when I was seven years old and enjoyed the Sunday morning sessions like all juniors still do today.

When did you start to think about studying and why did you choose psychology?
Back around 2009 I’d been in the international hockey team for ten years, and I asked myself what do/did they have that we don’t? Why do they keep on winning? I didn’t think they were necessarily better than us in hockey terms and so I thought it had to be because of what was going on inside the minds of them and us. I wanted to try to understand this better and so decided to study psychology. The OU made this possible through its remote learning I could study and still train as a full-time athlete.

How does being an Open University student fit around being a sports professional?
It fits pretty well. We got sent all the resources we would need and had access to the online library and so fitting in the reading and the assignments was made as easy as possible. There were quite a few times when I couldn’t get things handed in on time but the tutors all understood that as mature students, life tended to get in the way and so extensions were made available when needed them. It was also a good thing for me to take my mind off hockey occasionally.

How did you feel to win an Olympic gold medal?
It’s hard to put into words. I had worked towards that moment for 17 years and so for it to finally happen, after so many ups and downs to deal with and so much hard work, I just had the most overwhelming sense of pride in what we had achieved and how we had achieved it.

How does your study help you in planning for life after hockey?
As athletes we all know that our sports careers will come to an end, and it could happen at any time. It’s therefore important for us to plan for that by gaining qualifications and having this degree has definitely opened up a few more options for me moving forwards.

What’s your advice for people considering studying alongside their careers?
When I started my first module I wasn’t convinced I would go on and get a degree. I told myself to just do the first one and see how you feel for the next one. I’m so glad I did, so I would say that it is a great way to study. It has the flexibility to allow you to still work and live, but the structure to keep you on track, so don’t think about the long term just think about taking it one module at a time.

What did you think of our event bringing OU Student volunteers together from across Europe?
I thought it was fantastic. I always think that when people feel like they belong to something you’ll get the best out of them. By bringing everyone together, to say thank you and celebrate what they’re doing will definitely help with that. I also heard the sharing of ideas, which is extremely motivating for all those involved. It was an honour to be involved in the event.
Our new research project!

They welcome you at residential schools, celebrate your achievements at degree ceremonies, take your voice forward at University meetings… You guessed it, we are talking about our wonderful student volunteers! Vice President Representation and Research, Caroline Poppenga, describes one of our latest projects…

Students just like you, these volunteers work hard to help fellow students make the most of OU study… and they do this while juggling studies, work and family commitments!

But how much do we actually know about our volunteers? What motivates students to volunteer their time to support the Association’s work? How do they balance the demands of volunteering while studying and working? What skills do they develop in different volunteering roles? Exploring these questions is the key focus of our new research project: Volunteering Research!

This project is being undertaken at an exciting time for the Association, as we explore new kinds of volunteering opportunities that we can offer students. These opportunities could be designed for community-based projects, enable students to contribute from home, and help students identify activities with varying levels of time commitment. The findings from this project, therefore, will give us key information to better match students’ interests with different volunteering opportunities.

A short session was held during the Volunteers Event on 15 July, where topics such as linking volunteering opportunities with OU studies, or the different ways of gathering student feedback for research, were discussed. In the coming months, we will invite volunteers to share their experiences with us and helps us better understand student volunteering, with news about the project shared via the OU Students Magazine and our website.

If you would like to read more about this project, why not start by visiting our website (the Central Executive Committee paper can be found here) and the Student Consultation page where we invited students’ views on volunteering. Meanwhile, to browse current volunteering opportunities with the Association, please visit our volunteering page as we have several new roles open for applications such as Community Champions, Open University Student Educational Trust Ambassadors and Learner Experience Representatives – three great opportunities which can mostly be done from home, with opportunities to travel for interested students!

Rules and revisions

Did you know the OU Students Association has a constitution? Vice President Peter Cowan explains what it is, and how OU students can have their say on the document…

It may be a bit early to start thinking about next summer but June 2018 is when the Association’s biennial Conference is being held and the planning for it starts soon. Conference 2018 will be a bit different from the last – there will be the exhibitions and the stands, the debates, the talks and of course the evening social events as usual but next year will have one more important event. It is the chance to change the Constitution of the Association something which only comes around every four years.

So, what is the Constitution and why is it so important?

In simple terms it is the document that defines who we are, what we do and how we do it.

Why do we need to review it?

The Education Act 1994 rules that we must have a Constitution and that this must be reviewed at least every five years. We review ours every four years to match the Conference timetable as all changes must be approved at Conference. It is a chance to make sure that our governing document remains current for the environment we operate within.

How to take part?

Up to 800 students can have a direct say by voting at Conference (400 delegates on campus and 400 online) but that doesn’t mean that everyone else is left out. From mid-September we will be consulting with our membership as to what changes might be needed. This will be via an online forum open to all students and will last for about six weeks. The ideas and suggestions from this will then go to a Rules Revision Conference held in November and any student can apply for a place at this. This will lead to the suggested amendments that, subject to review by the Central Executive Committee and Board of Trustees, will be presented to Conference for debate and voting.

This is your chance to have a say in how your Association is governed.
It’s the OU Jim - but not as we know it

Peter Horrocks, Vice Chancellor of the OU, joined your elected student reps in July to talk about future plans for the University. Students Association Deputy General Manager, Wendy Burrell, shares the story...

The Vice Chancellor was talking future tense on Friday night to the Student Association’s Executive Members who had gathered in Milton Keynes for their July meeting. Following in the pipe smoke of Harold Wilson, who’d envisioned the ‘University of the Air’ in the 1960s, Peter Horrocks and his team introduced us to the ‘University of the Cloud’ describing a social and intellectual digital community, people with digitally enabled citizens, equipped to navigate life in the 21st century, including the turning up of boilers from the comfort of an armchair and live chatting with the bank at all times of day and night.

Introducing the Students First Transformation Programme, Peter explained the need to redesign the Open University for the future ensuring its survival for the next fifty years. He said that it was not enough for the University to be open but that it had to be open and successful, continuing its purpose to provide educational opportunity and social mobility allowing learners to follow their ambitions and fulfil their potential. He outlined the four areas of focus, these being an improved student experience, a ‘digital by design’ curriculum, academic excellence and a better integrated organisation.

Although the dots have yet to be joined, a future student experience was described as everything on our Christmas list including better information and advice, a proper induction, study skills packs, more proactive contact, regular web chats, answers to enquiries in real time, improved responsiveness, enhanced student support, more 121 tuition, larger 12f options and not forgetting the kitchen sink. The Vice Chancellor explained ‘Digital by Design’ saying that the OU’s current learning offering was intended for a different era and not as effective as it could be. For the future it would be designed and delivered digitally, personalised to individuals, being flexible to their needs with progress tracked by data collection. He introduced us to the concept of a newfangled online tool that will allow module materials to be instantly updated to respond to world events. Gloom surrounded the room when examples of this featured recent natural and man-made disasters! We cheered up on hearing that investment in new online systems would herald this new era – but many were privately wondering about broadband speeds and if by standing with one foot in the garden – they could take part in this brave new world?

Kevin Hetherington, Pro-Vice Chancellor Research and Academic Strategy, talked to us about academic excellence and a forthcoming review of the curriculum with challenging decisions to be made about what a good curriculum looks like and the steering away from modules that don’t attract sufficient student numbers. We’ll know what a good curriculum looks like by early 2018 and Kevin gave reassurances it would remain broad based – but there was definitely that shrinking feeling all around. The Vice Chancellor told us that the University would become a more efficient organisation, that duplication would go, one hand will know what the other is doing and much needed funds saved to plough into an improved student experience.

Student Reps in the room piled in and piled the questions. Cath stressed the concerns of students around losing modules and needing as much notice as possible when this happens. Alison, wearing her Student Support top hat, wanted better explanations for students about what ‘Digital by Design’ will mean to them; she wanted to know how the University will ensure that students have suitable devices for study and a guarantee that future online tools will be accessible for all. On a roll by now, she asked for confirmation that non-digital elements (the printed word) would still be available and if digital skills could be built into the learning at an early stage. Barbara asked for honesty and consistency in information to students. Vic questioned the possible demise of face-to-face tutorials and if students were being consulted about this.

There was total agreement from student reps when Nicci reaffirmed the significance of student – tutor relationships and the difference that these can make to individuals. She asked that the importance of personal relationships not be forgotten in a digital world.

There were further questions around computer specs, the future of credit transfer, the extension of the number of teach out years for a module, the future of online tutorials, the role of the Celtic nation offices and consistency in tutor marking. Then Peter pulled an elephant out of the bag by asking about the expected £100 million cuts and just exactly how much would be reinvested in the student experience.

The Vice Chancellor concluded by stressing that now is the time to ‘future-proof’ the University by planning for the needs of students signing up in ten years’ time and that digital technologies will be at the heart of this. He gave Students Association Executive Committee members a very firm commitment that OU students would be included in future work streams of the Students First Transformation Programme and that the student voice will influence and help decide much of the detail ensuring that the ‘future-proofing’ is made in the best interests of students.
Understanding the BME degree awarding gap

Recently David Knight, Director of Access, Careers and Teaching Support at The Open University came to speak with the OU Students Association about the OU’s Equality Diversity and Inclusion objective to reduce the degree awarding gap.

David and his team are passionate about finding ways to close the gap and wanted to talk to us about how the OU Students Association and the OU’s students can help. At the end of this piece there is an opportunity to sign up and get involved in this work.

What is the BME degree awarding gap?

The degree awarding gap, formerly known as the attainment gap, is a longstanding issue impacting students who study at institutions across the higher education sector from a Black or other Minority Ethnic (BME) background.

In short, the gap is demonstrated in the difference in the number of students from BME backgrounds who are awarded ‘good passes’ on modules at undergraduate levels 2 and 3 (which determine the overall degree classification) compared to their white counterparts. Currently the difference is significant; as of 2014/15 BME students from across the sector are 15.3% less likely to achieve a ‘good pass’ at level 2 and 3. At the Open University the difference in 2014/15 was 18.4% (in 2015/16 this figure dropped to 17.9%).

All the more concerning is that the data shows a more significant gap between black students (students who have identified as coming from a Black - African, Black Caribbean or Black - Other background) and white students. Across the UK higher education sector the difference between black students and white students stood at 25.7% in 2014/15. The degree awarding gap at the OU in 2014/15 was 27.3% for black students. And therefore this gap is a primary areas of focus for David and his team.

Why is there a degree awarding gap?

Research has shown that some of the gap can be attributed to a difference in previous education qualifications (PEQs) i.e. students starting an undergraduate degree with no A Levels/only GCSE qualifications. However when PEQs are statistically controlled a gap still remains. Research is yet to point to a specific or obvious cause for this remaining gap – though there are several theories ranging from how institutions engage with their students, the value of role models amongst staff, the range and use of support networks, and curriculum design and content.

What we do know is that this is something that higher education providers need to tackle to ensure that students from BME backgrounds are able to reach their full study potential and meet their learning goals.

Why is closing the degree awarding gap important?

Studying with the Open University takes determination, dedication and hard work. The OU has an obligation to ensure that all students can study in an inclusive environment where the curriculum is interesting, inspiring and inclusive. Students deserve a learning environment where guidance, tuition and assessment fully supports them to achieve a qualification that is a true reflection of their capability and the effort they have put in to their studies.

By supporting students to unlock their potential, we create an opportunity for them to enrich wider society through sharing their unique set of knowledge, experiences, perspectives and culture.

What is the Open University doing to resolve the issue?

Closing the gap is a priority for the Open University as it underpins their vision ‘to reach more students with life-changing learning that meets their needs and enriches society’ and so has been made a principle part of its Institutional Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Objectives.

Over the last few years the University has worked on several initiatives in the hope of making the gap smaller; for instance the provision of a training programme for tutors called Great Expectations.

The University’s Learning and Organisational Development Team are rolling out training materials to staff to explore issues of unconscious bias. The training is designed to give staff the skills to identify and understand unconscious bias, as well as tools to negate the impact of these biases. The University hopes that understanding more about the way unconscious bias operates can help improve how staff support students.

Despite such initiatives this longstanding issue is proving difficult to fix, in no small part because the exact cause of the degree awarding gap is unknown and is likely to be affected by a multiplicity of factors. For The Open University, being an open entry distance learning institution makes tackling the degree awarding gap even more challenging; without the ability to regularly meet and talk to students in a campus based environment it can be difficult to gain critical insights into the issue from a student’s perspective.

David and his team are now working with colleagues from across the University and the OU Students Association to identify ways in which they can address the gap. They hope to look at everything from marketing and recruitment of students; the curriculum; community and support tools and networks; staff and teaching; all the way through to assessment and degree awards.

We need your help!

The OU Students Association would love to hear from our BME students about your experiences at the OU.

If you’d like to get more involved do keep an eye out for communications from David and his team about opportunities for students to take part in events and exercises around reducing the degree awarding gap.
Graduate recruitment - apply yourself!

Autumn is a busy time for the Employer Engagement Team at the OU, as this is when the majority of graduate recruitment schemes begin to open.

Graduate schemes can be a great way to start your career, as they offer hands on experience, alongside training and development opportunities, while providing you with the support required to successfully complete the scheme. If you’re considering a graduate scheme, now is the time to start getting your applications ready – these opportunities may close once the positions are filled. Each company will have its own selection process, but many will include similar components, as detailed in this article. The graduate recruitment market is a competitive one and we’re here to talk you through the various application processes that you may have to successfully negotiate in order to land yourself one of these opportunities. First and foremost, it’s important to identify the companies you would like to work for. Do your research; the company will expect you to have a clear idea of why you have chosen them and what you can bring to their organisation. It’s also worth researching the application process so that you know what to expect, and it will allow you to begin your preparation.

Applying for the role

The first part of the selection process will be the application form or online application. A strong application is essential in progressing to the next stage and so it’s important to spend time on identifying the key skills required for the role and providing examples to clearly demonstrate how you match these requirements. Use the STAR technique to be sure that you’re selling your experiences and matching the example to the competencies being assessed. Make sure that your supporting information is personalised to each role that you apply for, double check your spelling and grammar, and ensure you are within the word count.

Sometimes, you may also be asked to provide a covering letter which is an opportunity to sell yourself to the employer and highlight relevant strengths. Importantly, ensure that you fully complete all aspects of the application as requested by the employer; if they’re asking for a cover letter to explain why you’re suitable for the role and you don’t include this, you risk your application being immediately disregarded. Some organisations may ask for a CV as part of your application. Your CV should include details of your work experience, education and qualifications, alongside your skills and personal qualities. Keep your CV factual, concise, and professional.

Telephone Interviews

Employers may conduct a telephone interview prior to an invite to an interview or an assessment centre. They are a quick and easy way for an employer to decide if they wish to progress your application further. It’s important to carry out all of your usual preparation for an interview, so research the company and prepare STAR answers to competency based questions. They’re looking for enthusiasm and a polite and professional manner, so ensure that you won’t be disturbed, have your CV or application form to hand, and smile!

Psychometric Tests

Psychometric tests are designed to assess, amongst others, your verbal reasoning skills, numeracy and literacy skills, critical thinking and situational judgment abilities, as well as give an insight into your personality traits. The results will then be evaluated against key competencies for the job. The tests are objective as they don’t take into account your education background. It’s worthwhile practising these tests to give yourself the best chance at success – have a go on the Prospects website.

Gamification

Gamification, or games based assessments, are a relatively new part of the assessment process and are a way to gather data on the complexity traits and cognitive processes of candidates. They don’t focus on knowledge or skills, so you don’t need any specific prior knowledge before playing the games and you don’t need any experience of gaming. Gamification is designed to be a fair and objective way of assessing individuals from different backgrounds. They are also fun and engaging, and as you can’t be certain what skill or quality the employer is assessing it’s important to play the game naturally rather than trying to second guess what the employer is looking for.

Assessment Centres

If you’re invited to an assessment centre you can expect anything from a half day, to two full days, of interview related activities, including in-tray exercises, a presentation, individual interviews and group tasks, all designed to assess your suitability for the job. They’re a good way for an employer to get to know you as a person so try to relax and let your personality show, and allow the employer to determine whether they feel you are a good fit for their company. A benefit is that if you struggle during one of the assessments you will have the opportunity to excel in other tasks. You will be assessed against the competencies required for the job, so read through the person specification and prepare relevant examples for the competencies. Remember, you’re being assessed during the whole day, so use lunch breaks to network and ensure that you maintain a friendly and professional image.

Presentations

If you’re invited to an assessment centre or interview you could be asked to give a presentation as a way of assessing your confidence and ability to communicate. You may be given a topic in advance, so prepare and practice, giving thought to the structure of your presentation, and ensuring that the key messages are covered.

Adjustments for disabilities

Under the Equality Act, employers are required to make reasonable adjustments to the selection process if applicants have declared disabilities. So don’t be afraid to ask for these if you believe you have any conditions which may impact on the selection process. It is a good idea to speak directly to a member of the graduate recruitment team to discuss your needs as soon as you are invited to an assessment centre. For example, applicants with dyslexia can be allowed 25% additional time for tests and alternative formats are possible for those with sight, hearing or motor impairment, or you might want to discuss issues around physical access to the assessment centre.

It will be up to you to explain your needs and the likely impact of your disability so that appropriate adjustments can be made. The Careers and Employability Service can help if you’d like further examples of the kind of adjustments that are possible prior to approaching a recruitment team.

If you need support with any aspect of the application or interview process, then you can request a careers consultation via our website. To see job opportunities available to OU students, sign up to Jobzone, and if you’d like to talk careers you can find us on Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn.
Reporting back...

The Central Executive Committee, your elected student leadership team, have reached a milestone - over one year in post! Read on for a small glimpse at some of their activities and achievements over the last three months...

You can download full versions of the Officer reports here.

President - reporting as Acting President
Nicola Simpson has been involved in a number of ongoing projects and initiatives as well as keeping up to date with developments in the ‘OU Redesign’. A dedicated forum space for all OU students to share their thoughts and ideas about possible future changes to The Open University was set up.

As Acting President, Nicola attended many meetings, including those of the Senate, Council and Education Committee and shared the student perspective on a wide range of issues.

She also chaired The Open University Charter Day event, sharing her story and introducing speakers. Another highlight was being a judge in the Postgraduate Research Poster competition. It was great for Nicola to meet so many research students and she found their enthusiasm infectious.

VP Administration
Peter Cowan took part in Charter Day and was deeply moved by the inspiring stories shared on the day, especially when his wife was used as an example of just what brilliant things OU students can achieve. Societies continue to play a large part in his role, and Peter has been working hard confirming affiliations of societies and giving advice to others. He also attended both the societies networking day and annual general meeting, discussing Societies’ Constitutions and guidelines.

Looking forward, he has been involved in the first stages of setting the budget for 2017/18. Winter may be coming in Game of Thrones, but our VP Administration reminds us that ‘Conference is coming’! Though just under a year away, plans for Conference 2018 are already being discussed. 2018 will be a significant event, as our Constitution will be reviewed as part of our obligations under the Education Act 1994.

Peter has also been active in his role as Chair of the Controller’s Advisory Panel, as a director of the OU Students Shop and as a trustee of both the Association and the Open University Students Educational Trust.

VP Community
Over the last two months, Stephanie Stubbins has trialled a ‘Community Drop-in Session’ – a fortnightly event where students can chat on OU Live about anything and everything that pertains to being an OU student. Also, she was pleased by the success of the recent ‘Big meet-up’ events held across the nation and beyond. New volunteering roles have been a big focus for Stephanie, culminating in the launch of ‘Community Champions’. She also had the opportunity to attend Senate in June and found the experience very insightful.

VP Education
Lorraine Adams attended the Central Representatives Seminar, working with the Student Voice team to improve representation and maximising opportunities for students to share their thoughts and opinions. Also, she as pleased to be invited to a meeting about making OU policy more accessible for students.

As well as attending two Senate meetings, Lorraine took part in the Module Team Chairs’ Development event and spoke to several Chairs. She also went to their dinner and shared student opinion with the attendees.

VP Equal Opportunities
Cherry Day has made the most of her visits to campus, meeting with several members of OU staff and discussing ‘protected characteristic’ issues. She also attended the Charter Day celebrations, and received an invite to speak at a Global Accessibility Awareness event.

Looking forward, Cherry is involved in several projects that focus on ensuring equal opportunities for all OU students.

VP Communication
Over the last quarter, Rachel Hughes has continued to work on areas of the strategy which relate to awareness of the Association. She has also lead a working group on the redevelopment of our forums, intending to provide a clear, vibrant and accessible area for OU students to engage in.

Development of the OU Students magazine is ongoing. Rachel hopes that OU students are pleased with the changes she and the editorial team are making, with the aim of creating a magazine that is both informative and fun to read.

Rachel was pleased with the launch of the ‘Talk to Your Students Association’ forums, as many new users engaged in conversation.

VP Representation and Research
Caroline Poppenga was involved in a working group that looked at our elections process. She also presented a research project proposal to the Central Executive Committee, receiving recommendations to shift the focus on volunteering to a more broad approach, rather than Association specific.

Following feedback, a restructuring of the Learning Experience Networking Zone forum was planned. The restructuring was designed to allow a shift to faculty based forums, rather than department based forums, in order to allow better communication between our reps.

VP Student Support
Alison Kingan was pleased to welcome two new members of staff to the Association Student Support team – meaning that the team is now up to full strength. She also attended Nightline’s annual general meeting in June. A growing number of OU students are Nightline volunteers.

As well as the regular Service Review meetings, Alison acted as a member the steering group looking into transforming OU student policies, and met with VP Community to discuss how students with disabilities book tutorials.

Alison continues to work on increasing awareness of our support services amongst Tutors, so that they can signpost students to us who might benefit from our offering.

OU Council Member
Barbara Tarling took part in the first joint meeting of Council and Senate. It was generally agreed to have been a success. Council members joined Senate Reference Group members and Association staff for a buffet lunch – this was a great opportunity for students to share some of the delights and difficulties of OU study with Council members. Students weren’t shy about making their views known!

She also attended a Council meeting in May, and also was involved in meetings to decide on the appointment of new Council members. The Charter and Statutes Review is now underway, and Barbara will be presenting a paper to update the Central Executive Committee on developments since the last meeting.
Central Reps Seminar...

Or something more? Nicki Hadjipanteli shares her experience...

The Seminar was good, very good, very informative, letting us know how things move within the University, at the moment, because things change with short notice or no notice at all, how things move or how things are managed by the Association generally and the Central Executive Committee specifically.

But it was more than that. It put faces to the names of the volunteers that we read their reports in the Central Reps forums. It put faces to the volunteers that make the time during any time of the year, come shine or snow, work and family commitments, to attend meetings, big and small meetings, representing the thousands of students studying long distance mostly not as a matter of choice but mainly as a precious option; an option they have taken up because life decided differently when they were supposed to be students in their late teens and early twenties.

And the Central Reps Seminar brought together people passionate about holding on to options and enhanced choices and study and qualification opportunities at the right time for each one of us, not always the time that is considered the most appropriate by standard norms.

It was humbling and respectful to see people eager and willing to learn more in order to understand how the big changes and the big cuts will affect fellow students and how any knowledge and insight gained at the Seminar will better equip them to stand their ground on the various committee meetings.

It was a great opportunity to meet like minded people who are united in their ambition to be useful, people who have become friends over the years and to meet new volunteers who are full of enthusiasm and self-motivation to work with the Central Executive Committee on issues that affect students.

If I want to mention one moment of the Seminar that I found particularly enjoyable, that would be Nigel's story about his accommodation during his student years. That was great fun facilitated by sitting outside in the hot sun and having lovely wine kindly offered by Sam. We had such a nice time and it is moments like that which make up a team and give one a sense of belonging to a team.

Thank you all and everyone for every small big smile during the Seminar, thank you for all information and insight shared generously.

Take care of yourselves in the far away places you come from and yet you find the time, the drive and the reason to meet together at Milton Keynes for the Central Reps Seminar.

Observing a Faculty Assembly meeting...

Ruth Cuthbertson tells the story...

I am really glad that I took advantage of the opportunity to attend a Faculty Assembly Meeting as an observer. I suffer from anxiety so I usually don’t put myself into situations where there are a lot of strangers, especially when I am not sure what actually happens, but I would recommend this experience to everyone.

It was great to see members of my faculty in action and to hear them raise points of concern on topics which are very relevant to the student experience. I was also able to speak to one of the academics afterwards about some concerns relating to how the new plans might specifically impact those studying the same subjects as me.

This opportunity to visit the campus and attend the meeting has made me feel more engaged and part of the university community. I would be keen to do this again if the opportunity arose, and that comes from someone who has a panic attack just turning up at a tutorial!

The most memorable part of the day? Seeing a group of associate lecturers sitting at the back during a presentation and passing around a pack of custard creams like naughty school children!
New elected representatives...

**Pádraic Ivers**
**Area Association Representative for Republic of Ireland**

I am working towards a BA Honours in International Studies. I have just completed my third module TD223 - ‘International Development, making sense of a changing world’ which focussed on: development, conflict, aid, inequality, social change etc. Previously I have completed DD103 - ‘Investigating the social world’ and U116 – ‘Environment, Journeys through a changing world’.

Before I saw the email coming through from the Students Association about the by-election for the role, I didn’t even know there such a position existed. Nor did I know much about the Central Executive Committee or the role the Association plays in representing the students of Open University. I wanted to make sure this role, which had been vacant for some time, would be filled because it is very important that students from all areas are represented.

My number one priority is to represent the students of Republic of Ireland. Since the Brexit vote last year every aspect of life, business, trade, travel etc. in on the island of Ireland faces uncertainty. Education is no different and Irish OU students are in a unique situation of insecurity as negotiations continue. Part of my role going forward will be insuring Irish students are fully aware of any pending change to their relationship with the OU and to bring forward any queries or concerns students may have.

Winning a by-election in the middle of the Central Executive Committee term has come with a steep learning curve. My first meeting felt like I was thrown in the deep-end a little. However, I received great help and support from the rest of the Committee and Association staff who made me feel welcome and comfortable once I got my head around the various acronyms and structures of the Students Association.

**Claire Davey**
**Faculty Association Representative for the Open Programme**

I am currently working towards my BSc (Open) degree. While my main interest is science – I have tried lots of different modules, ranging from astronomy and physics, to modern languages, where I learned at school, and tried my hand at German (there’s even a module about the autistic spectrum I’m rather temped by right now).

I love the flexibility that the Open programme offers to students, and I have really enjoyed exploring just how diverse OU study can be!

I stood for the Open Faculty Association Representative role because I have had previous Students Association experience. I believe in the Open programme that much, that I wanted to make a contribution in possibly shaping it for the benefit of current and future students, by gathering input from the students themselves and doing my utmost to represent their interests at all times!

My main priority as far as this role goes, is first and foremost, the students – I want to see others benefit from what I see as the best aspects from the Open programme, while doing what I can to advise and support those who may need it.

I have a few things in the pipeline, in order to increase student engagement and to give students a chance to have their voices heard – watch this space!

My first Central Executive Committee meeting in my new role wasn’t quite as daunting as I thought it was going to be – I found it surprisingly easy to settle in with the support of the rest of the Central Executive Committee! It felt like coming home...

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**Things to remember...**

For President of the Students Association, Nicola Simpson, the beginning of the academic year is the best time for a little reflection...

While lots of people look to the New Year as a time to take stock and make some changes, I have always struggled with new starts in the darkest and coldest months of the year. For me, September is a much better time to take stock of what has happened over the last year and think about what might come next.

For those of us starting a new module, either as a new or returning student there is no better time to reflect on what has gone well in the past and what we can improve on. Even for those who are brand new to Higher Education, we can reflect on our previous studies at school or college, and if that was some time ago – how we cope with other challenging things, working under pressure, finding time to fit it all in and meeting deadlines. Many modules and qualifications now provide the opportunity for this self-reflection and planning time within the module materials, but if this isn’t built into your module it is a good idea to think about how you will get the most out of your studies.

Students starting new modules are already beginning to share the excitement of receiving their new module materials and some eager students are even getting ahead in their studies so that they can afford time off later in the year when their motivation might start to lag. While I was always keen to get a head start before the official start date, I never quite managed it – so don’t worry, there are always lots of students who work strictly to the study planner or (like me) are often a few weeks behind.

The most important thing to remember is that while you are studying at a distance, you aren’t alone. There are lots of people who can help you on your way – whether that is your tutor (associate lecturer), your Student Support Team or other students. Students often talk about the importance of their own social, family and work networks in supporting them while they study so it might be worth having a conversation with those closest to you about the impact of study. Over the coming weeks keep an eye on our social medial channels and our website for lots of tips from students. You can also share your own questions and ideas. Don’t forget to use the #OUstudents, #back2OU and #new2OU hashtags to connect with other students.

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Best overheard #OUstudent comment: ‘The weekend needs to be at least 4 days long!’

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Best overheard #OUstudent comment: ‘Tea first, then take on the world!’
Welcome to Write Club

The creative writing affiliated society has gone from strength to strength over the last few years!

The Write Club Committee

Write Club, the OU Creative Writing Society for all past and present OU students and staff has recently celebrated hitting 1,000 members. And because of this amazing milestone we are asking everyone to tell us what they would like to do to celebrate. We want to know what you think we do well, what we get wrong and what we could do to engage you more.

We have just put the finishing touches to the latest Write Club magazine that goes out to all registered members. We have a wide range of interviews, articles written by our massively talented members, and a host of poems and stories to keep you busy reading for a while. The response rate to our magazines is always great, and we are massively proud of everyone who has chosen to participate in the mag.

We are currently running weekly activities in the forums as usual to keep us busy over the summer study break. So if you are lucky enough to have a bit of time to yourself over the holiday period, join us in the forums for some things to fill your time. This year we will be looking at having world building support and poetry activities, and we will be re-running the ever popular regulars ‘Character Lab’ and ‘Cluster Club’.

We want to look into the possibility of arranging some face-to-face meet-ups across the country, so will be looking for volunteers to help us take that idea forward. We are discussing a meet-up as part of a Fresher’s Event. If anyone has any suggestions or wants to help out, please contact us, we always welcome input.

We are also looking to put together a Write Club anthology, or possibly two. We have a range of great poets and fantastic short story writers amongst our membership and we would love to be able to collate some of that work into a proper book that we can put on the market. It could also be used as a way to raise some much needed funds for a worthy charity. The discussions of this are at an early stage, but it is something that we are committed to achieving.

And finally we are looking at the possibility of expanding the current committee team, so if any of you want to get more involved in the running of Write Club, please let us know, either in our group forums or by email to WriteClub@gmx.co.uk.

Lastly, as always, we want to wish each and every one of our members our undying thanks for being the core part of what makes us so great. Write Club is all about the members, and without your engagement we would never have gotten off the ground.

Thank you all for being part of this, and if you’re not yet a member, what are you waiting for? Join us!

Societies

Find your tribe, have fun and enrich your study...

Joining a society is a great way to meet other OU students, have fun and enrich your OU study.

Societies are an essential part of every student’s university life and it’s no different for students of the Open University. Joining a society can help you to feel part of the community, give you a sense of belonging to your University and keep you in touch with what other students are thinking, feeling and doing.

All affiliated societies are listed on the Association website and there are over 20 to choose from. If you can’t find a society that interests you, maybe you can set up a new one? We can help get your potential society promoted and we’ll send you a set of guidelines to help you along the way.

Please contact us through the central societies mailbox and we will get back to you with further details.

Affiliated and Emerging Societies

- Ballet & Opera Society
- Central Regions Arts Club
- Change Ringers Society
- Dr Turing Society
- Engineering For Humanity
- Entrepreneurs Society
- Fusion (Physics) Society
- History Society
- Law Society
- M500 Mountaineering Society
- Music Society
- OU Alchemy
- OU Business Associate Society
- OU Poets
- OUDES (Development & Environment)
- Psychological Society
- Robotics Club
- Shakespeare Society
- Society of the OU Philosophers
- Students for Ethical Science
- Tadpoles Society
- Write Club

Affiliated and Emerging Societies

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The Write Club Committee

Write Club, the OU Creative Writing Society for all past and present OU students and staff has recently celebrated hitting 1,000 members. And because of this amazing milestone we are asking everyone to tell us what they would like to do to celebrate. We want to know what you think we do well, what we get wrong and what we could do to engage you more.

We have just put the finishing touches to the latest Write Club magazine that goes out to all registered members. We have a wide range of interviews, articles written by our massively talented members, and a host of poems and stories to keep you busy reading for a while. The response rate to our magazines is always great, and we are massively proud of everyone who has chosen to participate in the mag.

We are currently running weekly activities in the forums as usual to keep us busy over the summer study break. So if you are lucky enough to have a bit of time to yourself over the holiday period, join us in the forums for some things to fill your time. This year we will be looking at having world building support and poetry activities, and we will be re-running the ever popular regulars ‘Character Lab’ and ‘Cluster Club’.

We want to look into the possibility of arranging some face-to-face meet-ups across the country, so will be looking for volunteers to help us take that idea forward. We are discussing a meet-up as part of a Fresher’s Event. If anyone has any suggestions or wants to help out, please contact us, we always welcome input.

We are also looking to put together a Write Club anthology, or possibly two. We have a range of great poets and fantastic short story writers amongst our membership and we would love to be able to collate some of that work into a proper book that we can put on the market. It could also be used as a way to raise some much needed funds for a worthy charity. The discussions of this are at an early stage, but it is something that we are committed to achieving.

And finally we are looking at the possibility of expanding the current committee team, so if any of you want to get more involved in the running of Write Club, please let us know, either in our group forums or by email to WriteClub@gmx.co.uk.

Lastly, as always, we want to wish each and every one of our members our undying thanks for being the core part of what makes us so great. Write Club is all about the members, and without your engagement we would never have gotten off the ground.

Thank you all for being part of this, and if you’re not yet a member, what are you waiting for? Join us!
Students take action for refugees

A branch of Student Action for Refugees (STAR) is forming for Open University students and we need more OU students to get involved in helping set it up.

Perhaps you...
• Watched the situation of refugees on the news and felt like you want to help.
• Learned about the situation of refugee and asylum seekers in your course.
• Are already involved with an organisation which helps refugees.
• Are from a refugee background yourself.
• Are just curious...

Then please join us to campaign for better treatment for asylum seekers and refugees, share knowledge and skills, and make refugees feel welcome at the Open University.

The Open University has particularly highlighted the ongoing refugee crisis, through their co-produced three-part series with the BBC called Exodus: Our Journey to Europe. You can see some clips and resources online. It would be great for us as students to do our part in highlighting the issues experienced by refugees.

STAR is a national charity made up of student groups at universities across the UK and they are currently campaigning about the refugee crisis, refugee students in the UK being charged high international student fees and the low-income of £36 a week received by asylum seekers.

The campaigns take mostly place using social media and creative actions. Alongside campaigning STAR supports STAR societies in fundraising, volunteering and educating about the experiences of refugees, there is also an annual conference and chances to meet students from other STAR societies.

Find STAR on Facebook
Find STAR on Twitter @OpenUniSTAR

Interested in History?

Then join our Society!

The History Society arranges various historical visits throughout the year and each February we organise a weekend seminar to give members the opportunity to present a short paper on a topic of their choice, within a friendly, like-minded group.

For more details take a look at our website.

Ethical science

You may have concerns about the suffering of animals resulting from their use in education and research. If you are interested in studying Life Sciences, but worried about causing harm to animals through your studies, please do not be put off. You can study for Life Sciences qualifications at the Open University without causing harm to animals. However, the OU still uses many animals in its research projects every year.

As a society we are constantly looking for support and appreciate active contributions such as writing articles for newsletters or our website or researching information about the science and ethics of using animals. If you’re interested in doing something, whether you’re already a member or not, or if you just want to show your views by joining as a member (the more members, the stronger our voice), then please get in touch.

To find out more and how to join us please visit:
the OU Students Association Ethical Science forum on the Virtual Learning Environment or our website

Email the society

Ethical Science aims to persuade the Open University peacefully to replace its harmful use of animals in Life Sciences with academically equivalent or superior non-harmful alternatives. We have been instrumental in bringing about association policy to support this aim, promote transparency in the University’s animal use and enable students to opt-out of harmful animal experiments without compromising their academic progress.

Members can contact each other via our members’ online forum, accessible from our website. We exchange information with organisations campaigning for humane science, such as the Animal Free Research UK, BUAV, InterNICHE and political parties.

We also provide information and support to students who wish to study Life Sciences without harming animals or who are interested in learning more about animal ethics issues. Please see the course choice information and advice on our website.

Sadly, the Open University reducing its residential school science modules is reducing the opportunity for hands-on practical work for undergraduate science students. But the good news is that students studying towards the latest qualifications are able to study Life Sciences without their participation directly harming animals.

As a society we are currently overheard #OUstudent comment: ‘A little study goes a long way’
Best overheard #OUstudent comment: ‘If you get tired, learn to rest, not to quit…’

Best overheard #OUstudent comment: ‘Nervous and excited at the same time, let the journey begin!’

The other side of the fence...

We are a small team of past and present OU Students seeking contributions for a book. We are hoping to collect stories, essays, poems, and pictures from people who have lived or are currently living in Social Housing with the view to publishing in the New Year.

The aim is to challenge the stereotypes associated with people who live in Social Housing. The group came up with the idea a few weeks ago after reading and responding to a number of posts on social media regarding the residents of Grenfell Tower. While the vast majority were supportive, there were (and still are) enough negative or just uninform ed comments to make us realise that for some, social housing equates to crime, poverty, unemployment and so on. We are not disputing that this happens. Of course it does. But does that mean that all people should be stigmatised because of a few bad apples?

There are many of us that have at some point lived on Council Estates, or in Housing Authority rented properties. Most of us know people who still do. It is difficult to reconcile what is said about social housing tenants with the majority of people that we know from them who are decent hardworking folk.

We are looking for contributors who have lived in social housing, currently live in social housing as tenants or have purchased their home. The content of your essay/poem/story is entirely up to you.

We have a photographer friend who will be adding their favourite work, an author who will be adding an extract from her novel and a body painter who will be adding photo's of her work (which is amazing by the way!)

We wanted to show just how amazingly creative people can be to offset the idea that we are all ruffians who drink Special Brew in wife-beater vests while signing on, as was promoted widely on programmes such as Benefits Street.

If you are interested in contributing or would like more information please email. All essays, stories, poems or other contributions also send to the email address here or you can message us on Facebook at The Other Side of the Fence.

We are aiming to work more closely with other companies on this project, such as the tenant engagement experts and the South Oxfordshire Housing Association.

The M500 Society focuses on three main activities.

More details about the society can be found at our website. You can also visit us on Facebook.

- The May revision weekend is designed to help students improve their exam performance and offering the only opportunity now available for Mathematics students to meet face to face with fellow students on both their own and other courses.
- The Winter Weekend is a Friday to Sunday residential event held early in January. The 2017 event will be held at Nottingham University from 5-7 January.
- In 2017 our guest speaker will be Professor Dick Clements from Bristol University who will be dealing with topics in Graph theory. If you are starting a course in Graph theory or considering taking one then the 2017 winter weekend will be of special interest to you.

Our magazine is published free to all M500 members six times a year. It contains articles, comments, puzzles, reviews and news submitted by members.

It is aimed at all levels of mathematical attainment from Foundation to Postgraduate.

Fingers on buzzers!...

Do you have the knowledge to represent The Open University on University Challenge?

Do you love a good quiz?

Are you the one everyone wants on their team at the pub quiz?

Why not apply to be a part of ‘Team Open’ on next year’s University Challenge?

We are looking for a team of OU students to take part in University Challenge in 2018. There’s room for students of all specialities and broad general knowledge. Being quick on the buzzer will also be an advantage.

If you would like to give it a go, register your interest using the link below by Tuesday 10 October 2017. To apply all you need is to be a current OU student and expect to be one in 2018.

Our selection process will include an initial online test, where those who score high enough make it through to a live “quiz-off” with other fellow potential contestants on OU Live.

If you want to see what our previous two teams looked like why not see them in action against each other at last years practice OU University Challenge event. Register your interest here.

Get motivated!

Tips from other OU students...

“Don’t be influenced by what other students are or are not doing and how they study. We are all different and so just do what is best for you!” Sarah

“Just keep swimming... just keep swimming! Keep on it and keep focused. Even if you do the tiniest bit just do some studying today.” Amy

“Deadlines don’t wait for motivation. Sometimes you just have to do the work anyway.” Chris

“Whatever the mark, there is always something to learn from it. Look ahead to what beckons, not back to what has gone.” Peter

“Looking forward to the end result and showing my children never to give up and to be the best they can be. Keeps me going.” Nicky

“Chocolate... plenty of chocolate” Sally

“Your tutor is there to help you - don’t treat them like the scariest teacher in your school.” Cath

“Play the tune ‘Gonna Fly Now’... Film score to Rocky.” Frank

“Have a little and often approach.” Thivashni
If you’re on Twitter or Facebook, we’re very much hoping you’ve seen and are enjoying our #ThrowbackThursday posts. This has been running for a couple of months now and we’ve taken a selection of pictures out of the archive to share with you. Look out for news of an exciting new volunteering role when the #ThrowbackThursday project finishes late summer!

On the top right of this page is a wonderful picture of our fondly remembered President Ann Gall with Baroness Boothroyd. Ann served as President of the Association from 2000 to 2002. The OU library is named after Baroness Boothroyd, who remains an active member of the House of Lords.

On the top left are some pictures from the 1976 book ‘Have wheels: Will Travel’ which records a study trip taken to Rome by Association students with a disability and their supporters. The trip is recorded using essays and photographs, with the first essay written by Maggy Jones also used as an article in the Times Educational Supplement that year. The black and white photographs are atmospheric and often moving, as they record not only what people were doing and what they saw, but act as a snapshot of Rome in the mid 1970s. The Foreword was written by Alf Morris MP, at the time the ‘Minister for the Disabled’. Do let us know if you have a copy!
My pedagogical journey is coming to an end...
Ken Oliver
The journey is nearly at an end, and its one, I never thought that this would happen. Who would think that someone who was labelled as thick would soon have a BA Health and Social Care.
Recently I have been called a legacy student, and I don’t know how I felt about that. I have seen many changes since 2010 since this journey started, these included the dreaded, transitional fees, which come to an end this December 2017.
What is important to me is that my journey of discovery would not have been possible without the vision and Jennie Lee who presented the White Paper in 1966 that shared the government of the times vision for the ‘University of the Air’, later to become The Open University as it is better known as today. Jennie Lee was also married to a truly inspirational man, who I am sure shared her vision, this was Nye Bevan, who created the modern day NHS.
The study of health covers many different facets, one of the biggest is Communication with each other, and the OU has taught me how to become more effective in communication and to vary style to suit the audience that I would be working with or addressing at that time.
I had hoped to become more active within the Association, but again my health has stopped me from doing so. I attended the Regional Consultation which was held in Newcastle recently. It was interesting and formative to meet new students and to hear the individual pedagogical journeys that they have made over the years.
We have seen many changes over the last few years with the introduction of higher fees, and I would have hoped in the recent election that these may have been reduced or a target for the removal of fees all together sadly not. We do however have the 50th Birthday of The Open University to look forward to, and to look forward to the many developments that will I am sure that this will ensure that the OU a provider of long distance higher education not only in the UK but across the world. We see the organisation redesign itself and ensure that, in the digital age, it is bang up to date.
The Open University says “Fulfil your potential by studying with The Open University. World-leading distance learning that comes to you.”
Without this I would not have been able to study, and I would not be thinking about what I might where for my Open University Graduation day, something, I never thought possible some eight years ago. Sadly, I won’t have the pleasure of my Mum seeing me walk across the stage at The Sage in Gateshead and collect my degree, but without the support of friends and colleagues from the Association and the OU, this journey would not have been possible.
Fulfil your potential by studying with The Open University. World-leading distance learning that comes to you.
Events supporting the core modules and skills include revision weekends; mid-course overview days and weekends; preview weekends prior to the courses starting and more!
Annual membership of OUPS is £15 and will give you discounted fees at all events and a quarterly magazine.
Email or visit the website

Quiz...
Grab a coffee, take a little break and see how much you know about your Students Association.

1. Which TV quiz show are OU Students eligible to take part in every year?
2. What big weekend event is organised every other year for OU students on the Open University campus in Milton Keynes?
3. What two weeks will Freshers be happening in this year?
4. What is the Association’s Twitter handle?
5. Where will you find a list of all the meet ups that are coming up?
6. What colours are the Varsity Hoodie available in?
7. How much are copies of past exam papers?
8. How many Area Association Reps are elected to the Central Executive Committee?
9. What does DSG stand for?
10. How much time do you need to take on the role of Central Rep?

Answers on page 48
Quiz answers:

1. University Challenge. If you are interested in applying to be a part of “Team Open” then please register your interest [here](#).

2. The OU Students Association Conference. The 2018 dates are 22 – 24 June. Put them in your diary and look out for the link to sign up for early information.

3. Freshers will take place between 26 September and 6 October 2017.

4. The OU Students Association twitter handle is @OUstudents. Give us a follow!

5. A full list of forthcoming meet ups can be found on the Association website [here](#). If there's not one in your area then why not organise one?

6. Varsity Hoodies are available in Hawaiian Blue, Candy Pink/Grey and Purple/Sun Yellow Further details [here](#).

7. Past Exam Papers are free! Have a look at our [online shop](#) to see which ones are available to download.

8. There are seven Area Association Reps and you can find out which areas they represent [here](#).

9. DSG stands for Disabled Students Group and they represent students with health problems and disabilities to promote their needs wherever problem affects their day to day life as a student. Visit the Disabled Students Group website for further information, or to join the group please send us an [email](#).

10. It takes approximately an hour per week to read papers and contribute to forum discussions. We are currently recruiting for Central Reps so why not see if it’s a role that suits you? Further details are on the [Association website](#).

You asked, we answered. Our brand new pink varsity hoodie is available now!

[www.oustudentsshop.com](http://www.oustudentsshop.com)