Hello, good evening. I'm Rob Avann, returning officer for the OU Students’ Association elections 2018. Welcome to sunny Milton Keynes for the deputy president candidate questions and answers. Now we recorded this on Saturday afternoon after the royal wedding using questions that had been submitted in advance. However, your moderators are modding a live discussion tonight.

A little about moderation; so we have a team of moderators operating tonight and they will be watching all live comments as they come through. We want this to be a really engaging and interesting discussion on the answers to the questions. But please remember to ensure that all comments are respectful, fair, not personal and in line with the spirit of our policies on bullying and harassment. Speak as you would as if the person was in the room. Any comments that fall outside this will be removed and we will be reviewing all comments afterwards and taking action if necessary.

Now we have two candidates to interview tonight. Please remember all profiles are up on our elections profile at www.ersvotes.com/oustudents. Now the session we have planned tonight is really exciting. So over the next hour we’re going to be interviewing your two candidates for deputy president; Yanny Bruere and Steph Stubbins. Yanny is joining us remotely from Barcelona and Steph is here in person in Milton Keynes. We’re going to speak to each of them twice. So in the first half we’re going to be asking them your questions with a focus broadly on the university. And in the second half we’ll be asking them your questions with a focus on the Students’ Association. So without further ado, let’s get started and first up, after this short break, will be our first chat with Steph Stubbins. (02:30 short break).

Welcome back. So in the room here we have Steph Stubbins. Good evening Steph.

SS Good evening.

RA And we’re going to start this session by looking at the questions around the Open University specifically. So in your manifesto, Steph, you haven’t offered any particular promises like your fellow candidate. Why is that in particular?

SS I think it’s because I want to make sure that I deliver what I have pledged. There’s a lot of uncertainty, a lot of change and we don’t know what’s going to happen yet. So it’s important for us to make sure that we’re around, listening, being in the right place, saying the right thing at the right time and making sure that students can have that input. And that’s why I want to be there for students.

RA Okay so you see the role very much more about what’s in the role description and making sure you deliver it as opposed to making promises and other things?
SS  Definitely. I’d also like to hear from students what they would like me to do if I’m elected, make this more of a student facing role even though there’s going to be a direct university facing part of the role anyway.

RA  Okay so Kate has asked are you planning to tackle the age-old topic of students feeling that their views and opinions are not listened to or acted upon either by the association or the university? If so, how would you go about it?

SS  This is one of the things that I’ve said in my pledge is that I wanted to make sure that we’re held accountable. That anything we do that we say we’re going to do for students, we actually come through with to make sure that students have got their say in all the decisions, well not all the decisions, but the main decisions of what we’re doing within the association, making sure that we understand how they’re feeling about things, going for hot topics. And, as far as the university, making sure that the engagement that they’re having with the university is meaningful engagement. And it’s not just through student reps, it’s normal students that aren’t directly involved with the association get that chance to get their voice directly to the university.

RA  Okay so what would you look to change based on what’s there at the moment?

SS  Personally, with the university, is to make sure that they’re coming through with their promises that they’re going to make student engagement more appropriate. Instead of just talking at students, to listen to students and to act on what students are saying. I feel really strongly about that part of it. As far as the association, we obviously want to improve our student satisfaction levels. So we need to know from students what they think we should be doing better and how we can get them more engaged meaningfully too.

RA  Okay thank you. So moving away from that, Danielle and Kat have both asked what ideas or thoughts do you have for initiatives or actions on how we can start regaining student confidence in the university following recent events?

SS  I think that the university needs to be a bit more transparent about the things that they’re discussing. Obviously there’s going to be confidential meetings, especially around decisions that haven’t been definitely confirmed, but I think there should be more openness. And we should, as reps, be able to talk directly to students about things that are less confidential. And decisions that have been made, we should be able to put that message across to students in a more informative way. And the university need to be a bit more spot on with when they get the information out because they can be quite slow.
RA Okay and so what specifically would you want to see us change as an association in order to help with that?

SS I suppose I’d like to see more communication directly between students and elected reps. I’d like elected reps to be able to get out there more and let students know what we do on an everyday thing. They might hear snippets of things that we’re doing, but I think we could communicate better with that.

RA Okay. Alright, so moving away from that one now, how will you seek to keep up to date on council and senate business in case you needed to deputise for the president or, indeed, replace the president possibly?

SS Well I’m hoping for a very close relationship with the president, whoever is elected. And this would be formally when we’re on campus and informally. And hopefully we’ll have some sort of connection and communication plan that we’ll have in place so that, at any time, if I need to step in and deputise for the president, I’ll be able to do it and I’ll be informed enough to do that.

RA Okay so you see it very much as a conversation between the two of you really, whoever’s elected to keep you up to date? How do you think you might stay on top of the business that’s going through and decisions that are coming out of those two bodies?

SS I suppose I’d need to read the papers, I’d need to find out what the president has felt about each of the meetings and make sure that when I’m going into anything that I’m deputising for, that I’ve got some of the key points that the president would like to put across. And of course, from the CEC, when we can share information from the CEC in general as well.

RA Okay. So we notice from your manifesto that you’re studying leadership practice at the moment.

SS I am.

RA So what would you apply from that if you were successfully elected into this role?

SS Well so far, when I’ve been studying leadership, I’ve found that the leadership module has helped me with my role that I’ve got currently and, in reverse, that the role has helped me with my studies. So I’ve got a combination of plusses in studying leadership. I think the main thing is making sure that the focus isn’t on what I’m doing and who I am, the focus is on what I can do for students and what changes can be implemented by the work that I do. So being there for students and making sure that it’s about the people that we serve in leadership.
RA Okay so Paul and Owen have asked what you will seek to do about the threats and opportunities of Digital by Design and concerns over future study materials? What would you want to see the CEC do about those?

SS Well I know that we’ve consistently been putting the students’ fears and worries and their preferences forward to the university. I think we need to carry on doing that. I’ve heard that there’s going to be a blended approach when it’s pedagogically appropriate. I’m worried that’s just going to be, say if it’s a literature course, they’ll provide literature books that are already printed. It’s the actual printed material, the quality printed material the Open University provides us is something that students really enjoy. And it’s important for students to be able to succeed in their studies and that means being able to retain the information, being able to cope with the study. If they’re working all day on a computer, to come home and work on a screen, for health reasons, it’s not acceptable. But it’s also the way students learn, if they need the printed material as well, the university should provide it.

RA Yeah okay. And last one to finish on, so Greg asked why does the OU matter to you and why should it matter to society?

SS The OU matters to me because it’s made a big change in my life. It’s been a life changing experience. It’s not only given me the confidence to volunteer, to realise that I can stretch myself personally and my mind. I can actually see changes that I will make in the future with my life because I’ve had that confidence and I’m gaining skills. For other non-students, if they’re thinking about studying, I’d say, “Go for it.” For students who feel like they’re struggling, just get to the end of the module and look for the next positive one because you’ll always find something you like in another module. So just go for it.

RA Okay. Steph Stubbins, thank you very much.

SS Thank you. (11:57 Short break).

RA Okay and welcome back and on the line live from Barcelona we’ve got Yanny Bruere. How are you Yanny?

YB Very well thanks Rob, how are you today?

RA I’m good, thank you. Not bad at all. So let’s go through your questions regarding the Open University, Yanny. These are the questions that students submitted in advance. So Richard asks what does the role mean to you?

YB I think the role to represent your fellow students is a really important role. I think the deputy president role is a really, not customer facing, but pupil/student facing
role where you try and really connect with the students. And so you’re kind of the link between the president and the students.

RA Okay and Colin asks if you’ve currently got any other responsibilities and, if so, how would you propose to manage those commitments?

YB Yeah so I currently work full time in Barcelona in revenue management. So I would be looking to leave that job and then focus on the deputy president role if lucky enough to be elected.

RA Okay and are you studying also alongside the role?

YB Yeah. Yeah still studying law part time, yeah. So I’ve got an exam on the 11th June and then summer break, yeah.

RA Okay so how would you be looking to balance all of those different commitments that you’ve got?

YB Yeah so, like I’ve just said, I would plan to leave the role I’ve got in Barcelona. So I'm fully focussed on studying and the position of deputy president if elected.

RA Okay so let’s move away from that and talk about the question from Danielle and Kat who asked what ideas or thoughts you have for initiatives or actions on how we can start regaining student confidence in the university following the recent events?

YB Yes I think there needs to be a bit more transparency from the Open University and the OUSA. I think I’ve said it a few times now that the communication needs to be improved. I think we need to get more people involved. So we need to get more students involved, students of all backgrounds involved, and that communication really needs to be worked on, I think.

RA Okay, okay. And how, in particular, do you think the association might be able to help the university rebuild that confidence?

YB Yeah I think there’s a variety of different platforms of re-engaging students and getting people. So thinks like YouTube. The younger generation now are on YouTube and Periscope, like I’ve said before, and it’s about engaging them so they don’t have to go out of their way to forums and this kind of thing. It’s about engaging with their daily activities. So everyone has a smart phone and it’s not too difficult to tap into that. Maybe an app, we can use an app with push notifications as well.
RA So would you want the Central Executive Committee to very much be pushing news out for the university or to be calling on the university to do this? And how would you see those things moving forward?

YB Yeah so I think the Central Executive Committee would have to really shape some good ideas and some key areas that we can improve and I think to present those in a really meaningful and diligent way to the Open University who would then hopefully implement them.

RA Okay so part of your responsibilities, if you were elected as deputy president, it would include deputising for the president. How would you ensure that you were adequately prepared for council or senate should the need arise for you to go to those?

YB Yeah sure, so I think getting as much feedback as you can from the previous president, deputy president and working closely with the senate and the council is going to be a really key element to the role. So you can really deliver a really effective approach.

RA And what experience have you had previously of going to committee meetings, decision making meetings, that sort of thing?

YB Yeah so I think I’ve touched on it before, that I used to own my own business with my ex-partner and we used to have a variety of different meetings and committees and that we’d host and attend. In addition to that, I used to present at the local college. I used to do business talks with the local college quite closely with Northampton Booth Lane College. So I did about 15 meetings there talking to young students over a two year period.

RA Okay, okay. Several voters have asked if you could tell us a little bit more about your national students’ scrutiny panel pledge. What would be its purpose? Who would it serve? And how would you ensure that any feedback from that panel would hold weight when proposing it back to the university?

YB Yeah absolutely, I think with this scrutiny panel in mind I referred back to the student charter and principle one, I think, I can’t remember off the top of my head, is something along the lines of we need to value diversity and different perspectives and ideas and knowledge and the difference that this brings is a great strength. So I think, much like the House of Lords, in the way that when legislation is being passed in parliament there’s a scrutiny period, which the House of Lords have a look at the amendment and if they want to amend it. So they have a look at the Bill and if they want to amend it they pass it back to the House of Lords to alter.
So I think to include a really diverse, broad range of students on that panel. Sometimes if you have an idea and it’s your idea, you’ve come up with it, sometimes you don’t always see the flaws and the mishaps that that idea does have. So I think to have a scrutiny panel would just give it extra proof and really be able to scrutinise an idea so we get the best outcome.

RA So you see that very much in addition to the Central Executive Committee not instead of?

YB Yeah of course, yeah. It’s just another way of getting more people involved with more perspectives and ideas and different cultures, which is a massive strength, as you probably know.

RA Yeah okay. So Greg asked why does the OU particularly matter to you and why should it matter to society?

YB Yeah so the OU, we’ve been around for 50 years now haven’t we? And when we were introduced it was really revolutionary and a brand new concept. So that’s the role it has in society. It’s known for creativity and innovation and these different things. And to me personally, it’s given me a really good opportunity to study in a flexible way and it gives so many people different opportunities as well. So it’s a different option to people who go to the brick universities and it gives just so much variety and variance to different people and it caters to their lifestyle.

RA Okay, alright. Yanny Bruere, thank you very much.


RA Welcome back and we are here again with Yanny Bruere for the second half of the questions tonight. So this section focusses very much on the questions that we’ve had regarding the more association focussed than university focussed. So Yanny, first question, Barbara has asked what are the biggest challenges facing the Association, in your opinion? And how would you address them?

YB A big one, I think, is the engagement and diversity. I think we’ve got 43 candidates standing in this election at the moment, which is a good turnout, which is a very good turnout. But I think three of those are non-white and it’s not truly reflective of obviously our student population, of the minority backgrounds. So I think there is some kind of discord there, some disparity there and I think we really need to engage with that a lot more and try and get people from all backgrounds involved.

RA Okay and you spoke about diversity quite a bit in your manifesto, didn’t you? That you want to do a lot more on that front.
YB: Exactly. I think we’ve got some really good things. You’ve got PLEXUS for the LGBT community, the Disabled Students’ Association as well. And I think they’re really good foundations, a lot of hard work has gone into those. And I think we just need to build on that and try and really encourage more people from different backgrounds who want a different interface to really get involved with the OUSA.

RA: Okay. Next question, so could you tell us much more about your question time idea? What would be the purpose? And how would you encourage students and staff to engage in it?

YB: Yeah so the purpose of that is to sort of move away from Milton Keynes so not everything is done in MK. And obviously, as you know, the OU is national, it’s global even. So the idea is to go to smaller places where students are often isolated and they can’t travel down to MK, to be able to go to these places and advise them. And have it in different regional areas; so Bradford, Leeds and not just down south all the time to really connect with them.

RA: And would you see that as very much an association led thing or would you see that also involving university people or a mixture of both?

YB: Yeah I think it would be association led, but I think you need people from the OU itself to come and be on the panel as well. So they can be held accountable to some things as well and asked questions.

RA: Okay. Next question, so we’ve talked a little bit about diversity. So what would you want to do differently in order to make students feel very comfortable and secure in the association?

YB: Yeah so, like I said, we’ve got some really good groups going at the moment. I think it’s just about building the confidence in those. So probably having more meet-ups, getting people meeting each other more face to face so we can build the harmony. And giving more roles to people in those communities, in those groups as well to give them some leadership skills and the ability to have a say and influence over the group as well.

RA: Okay and you mentioned in your manifesto about maybe needing to challenge the president from time to time. So when and how would you seek to challenge the president?

YB: Yeah so I think it comes back to the scrutiny thing, doesn’t it? I think the scrutiny panel would be one way of challenging the president. And I think directly as well. For a president, they need a strong deputy president as well to be able to really
keep them on their toes in such and make sure that everything that is being pushed forward by the president is for the best interest of the students.

RA And how might you seek to develop a relationship with the president, whoever’s elected to that post? How would you want to develop that?

YB Yeah so I think you’d need to work closely with the president. It’s going to be a key partnership moving forward and I think there has to be some kind of a pact to always be able to serve. Whoever gets elected will be doing it for the same reason and that’s to have the best outcome for the students. So I think, with that in mind, you can develop a close, common shared interest and vision moving forward.

RA Okay and as deputy president and also if you were elected to the post, that means you also sit on the Board of Trustees, which has responsibility for their strategy. What parts of our current strategy are you most excited about taking forward and what bits would you want to potentially drop or reconsider?

YB Yeah so I don’t know too much about the trustees and where they’re currently at and this kind of thing. But I think to be able to be on the Board of Trustees to be able to help shape the future of the OUSA would be a really vital, pivotal role and something I’d look forward to.

RA And what parts particularly then would you really want to take forward? What things would you really want to see us do?

YB Yes so the charity side, I think, is a good point and the engagement issues again. I think that’s a good opportunity for the trustees to get involved there.

RA Okay. Paul asked how you will seek to improve the connection between OU students and the Association?

YB Yeah so, again, it comes back to the engagement doesn’t it? The connection between the OU students and the association, sorry.

RA Yes, yeah.

YB Yeah so it comes back, again, to the engagement issue and trying to motivate students to get involved. I'm sure there’s lots of people out there like myself, like this time last year I didn’t know about the association. So I'm sure we just need to look at different ways of informing them about the association and what we do. And I think once we are able to do that, I think people can get involved a lot quicker.
RA Okay and what particular skills and experiences (this is a question from Ruth) do you think you could offer that really directly relate to the deputy president role?

YB Yeah so I think the strong leadership skills. Like I said, I’ve been running my own business for the last three years and now running a team in Barcelona. So I’ve got hands-on experience of management, managing people, creating new visions and ideas and bringing people together to create that unity to bring out the best in everyone basically.

RA Okay. Yanny Bruere, thank you very much.

YB Thanks Rob. Thank you. (31:00 short break).

RA Welcome back. So we’re here again with Steph Stubbins for the second half of tonight’s broadcast. So this section very much focusses on the OU Students’ Association. So Steph, to start off with your first question, Paul asked about the visibility and profile of the association and the identity of being an OU student. You mentioned that you would really like to raise the visibility of the association, including reporting back on what student reps do and have achieved. How would you work with the other CEC members to make this happen?

SS Well we’ve started doing meet and greet with students so that they have a chance to talk to CEC members. I’d like to see more of that happening. And also a different way of reporting back to students, getting small blogs up. I also wanted to set up like a monthly surgery. So currently I do community drop-in sessions, which are going quite well. I’d like to use Adobe Connect and do ‘talk your Students’ Association’ style events. So students can pop in and bring their ideas or their concerns about the association and the university in a more relaxed way. As far as the visibility, I think it’s improved since I’ve started studying. I think we need to do more of the same. Obviously if we could reach more students through the OU, through student home, get maybe even a separate area on student home, which is all Students’ Association news going up, I think that would be good. Because part of being a university student is having that support from other students and from the association and I think it should factor very much throughout the students’ journey.

RA Okay and how would you want to bring back those things that you pick up from the drop-in sessions, for example, back into the CEC to discuss or for reps to be aware of? How would you see that being able to work better than it does at the moment?

SS Well I think you could do a summary of anything that students have come in. It could feed back in through the CEC forums. Maybe do a paper for the CEC so that other students can see what students have raised and some of the ideas that
might be coming through. And making sure that the students that are in those drop-in sessions can go and look at the CEC papers and they can see what they’ve said has come through. If it’s anything that’s not quite appropriate for that sort of paper then maybe feed that directly to the student to let them know that that’s been passed on.

RA Okay. So in your manifesto you mention new volunteering opportunities. What gaps do you see in our current volunteering offer and how would you want to address those?

SS I think we could do more one-off volunteering opportunities. I know that the archiving went really well. I was on campus whilst I did a few small spots on that. But to see new students coming up and being engaged in volunteering, I’d like to hear from other students what they would like to do with the association. They could come up with an idea that we haven’t thought of. Also making the most of the opportunities that we’ve got there and doing a re-run of them, making sure that we’ve got as many students as engaged as possible. But listening to students more than anything. They’re the ones that know the gaps that are there more than anybody else.

RA Yeah okay, thank you. So as deputy president and as a trustee, which comes with that role of course, you would have responsibility for leading on the strategy of the association. What part of our current strategy are you most excited to work on before the next time it’s reviewed?

SS I’ve had a little taste of the engagement with research students so I’d like to be part of that. I think just the community building, I know that will fall under the VP communities’ remit, but supporting some of the other offices in their parts of the strategy, I’d like to be the supporting role. But communication, I think we can improve that. We’re doing quite well, but we can always improve.

RA Okay and is there anything in it that you think we should drop or not do?

SS I think it’s difficult for us to work on some of the strategy elements that involve the OU directly because if they’re not actually meeting us halfway, we can’t come through on those strategy points. But it doesn’t mean we should give up on them. We might need to re-look at the way that we approach the university or approach that strategy.

RA Yeah okay. And when and how might you seek to challenge the president?

SS Oh that’s a good question. If I felt there was decision making or a conversation that I felt was maybe not appropriate for the association or if the president was unsure
about something or if they needed support. I would see it as definitely being the communication part with the president to make sure that they feel comfortable with what they’re doing and they’ve got someone that they could talk through any issues or any situations that they feel they need that extra viewpoint on.

RA Yeah okay. What if you felt they were doing something that was wrong or that you needed to step in or you heard feedback from other members?

SS I’d come and speak to you. As general manager you work very closely with the president. So I might also talk to the deputy general manager because that would be the person that I’d be working with and maybe we could deal with it in an informal way before going any further forward with it.

RA Okay, alright, thank you. So what would you do differently to the two deputy presidents that you’ve served alongside in the current term?

SS So Julia’s had a very difficult time because she came in right at the end of a term. So I don’t think I could say what I’d do differently for her because I would have an unfair advantage because I’ve got some experience in the association and I’d be starting at the beginning of the term. As far as Nicky, oh. I think I would probably be more student facing than she has been. I know she’s had to take on the president role halfway through her part of her deputy president role. So I think that some of that lost the base of things for students. I think that element’s been missing through the CEC.

RA Okay and tell us what you learnt from observing a recent trustee’s meeting that you would apply if you were elected into this post?

SS Well I learnt that the people in the room are just normal people. It’s not a scary situation. The discussions that are in the room are very, very important. They can make a difference to how the association works and the reputation of the association. That the conversation is very much everybody in the room can have a say and some sort of consensus comes to mind before a decision’s made. Very friendly atmosphere and biscuits. Mel was right, there’s biscuits.

RA Okay. Alright, Steph Stubbins, thank you very much.

SS Thank you. (40:47 short break).

RA Well that is it from Milton Keynes tonight where you’ve heard from your two candidates for deputy president; Yanny Bruere and Steph Stubbins. Please don’t forget that voting opens tomorrow, Monday 21st May and will stay open until Wednesday 30th May at midday UK time. You should expect your voting email
some time over the course of tomorrow. I hope you've really enjoyed the show tonight and that you've heard enough to help you make up your mind on who to cast your vote for. A recording and transcript will be made available as soon as possible and please follow our website; www.oustudents.com. Thank you for watching and remember to vote, vote, vote.