Hello and welcome to a very special edition of Studio. My name is Graham Rimmer. I’m the chair of Plexus and a fellow OU student.

Sue Is it me now?

Graham It is you.

Sue Oh, my name’s Sue and as it says on my badge studio host, along with you.

Graham Excellent welcome. We’re joined today with a couple of guests. To my left is:

Nicky Nicola Simpson, OU Students Association president.

Graham And to my right.

Fanni I’m Fanni I’m conference steering committee member and incoming CEC member.

Graham Excellent. So we’ve already started off with two acronyms there in the first opening sentence, we were told off straightaway by not using them. So Plexus is the Association’s LGBT support group and it stands for Pride, Learning, Equality, no excuses, Unity and Safety. And the CEC is the central executive committee which is our student leadership team. So welcome to you both and apologies for the use of acronyms.

Nicky We do try not to use them though.

Graham We do, we do try but I think you get into the lingo and then you’re kind of like, that’s it isn’t it.

Nicky You forget.

Graham You absolutely forget. So a special edition of Studio.

Sue I know, why is it special?

Graham I don’t know so why are we here today Nicky?

Nicky You don’t know why it’s special Graham?
Graham I know why it’s special but I want you to tell us.

Sue And I want to know why it’s special Nicky.

Nicky Okay so we’re here at Open University Students HQ, headquarters, for the Open University Students Association conference and it happens once every two years here on campus in Milton Keynes and also at home, at work, wherever you are, because we also have a lot of digital delegates joining us online. And it’s really an opportunity for the Association to come together with students and set our agenda for what we do in the Students Association. So there’s a whole lot of business; there’s motions that come here; we decide what it is we’re going to do; we vote on amendments to constitution – lots of big things and people watching at home will have the chance to learn more about all of that tomorrow.

Graham Gosh there’s lots happening there.

Nicky There’s a lot to happen and that’s just one morning of the weekend. So outside of that morning we also have a lot of really fun activities, students come together, meet with each other, arrange to meet up with people they’ve met online beforehand. We have workshops from all the different things that we do in the Students Association. So there’ll be workshops on community support, Student Voice. We also have visitors from the university today with us on campus. So a lot of students have already been here talking to our colleagues in the university, finding out about all the different things that are coming up with the university over the next few years and really making their voices heard today.

Graham Absolutely yeah I think it’s great I mean this is my third conference and it’s amazing.

Nicky Mine too.

Graham I thought it was your fourth?

Nicky 2012 was my first conference.

Graham So fourth then.

Nicky 2012, 2014, 2016, fourth yeah! And it’s interesting as you progress through and obviously I’ve taken on different roles in the Association. So when I first came to conference I was a delegate coming for the first time, really excited to be on campus and meeting people and just to meet other students that I didn’t
have the opportunity to any more and as I have been more involved in the 
Association you see different parts of it. So this current one has probably been 
the one that I would have the biggest role in because I've been part of the 
steering committee around organising conference. But also it's a chance for us 
in the student leadership team to talk about what we've done over the last two 
years and for students to ask questions about what we've done in those two 
years. So there could be a lot of hard questions tomorrow about what we've 
done over our term. So it's a very different position coming from a student 
point of view and then working through and it's lovely.

Sue Well this is from students because often we hear that people think it's actually 
the Open University's conference and it isn't is it?

Nicky That's right and it's very easy to think that when you're on the Open University 
campus. I guess we associate the two things together very, very closely. But 
Fanni has been working with me on the steering committee this year.

Graham Yes and Malika has obviously covered quite a lot in terms of what's happening 
this weekend, so in terms of being a member of the steering committee what 
are you expecting to happen over the next couple of days?

Fanni So we've been working with the steering committee since January. This is 
actually my first conference so I was part of the committee not having been at 
a conference before so I could really bring a new perspective into it because I 
had no idea what's ever happened before and some things that I said over 
time when we were organising were like, “Oh well we don't think about that!” 
So it was great so we had two face to face meetings when we were organising 
it and we were forever talking, on Facebook, on forums, via emails. We made 
the decisions and then obviously we had the staff at the office organising the 
whole thing. So our job is now finished at two o'clock when we started. So over 
the next few days there are going to be…

Graham You're done now! ((laughs))

Nicky I think well knowing Fanni that you put your hand up to do absolutely 
everything I know what you’re schedule is like for the next few days and you’re 
going to be involved in lots of activities so your job isn't quite done.

Fanni But my conference steering committee job is done!

Nicky Yeah.
Graham: I'm sure as a member of the steering committee I think the three of you are on that committee I'm sure you'll kind of go actually it probably won't end until about one o'clock on Sunday.

Sue: I was going to say it does officially finish at the end of conference but we'll let you stand down and do your other things because you are going to be so busy.

Nicky: In some ways it continues on after that though because a lot of what we're doing here is about building the student community and for some students that's their first time being welcomed into that community and realising there's something there for them.

Sue: So it'll be hugely interesting.

Nicky: It continues on afterwards.

Graham: Yeah I mean I came here three years ago and I'm like, it's buildings, it's not a warehouse, it's a campus, what is going on? We're actually about a bigger community and I think when people come here for the first time, I mean when I came here my first time and I met Sue and I met yourself, I was like, 'Oh people!' and I think there's going to be a lot of people around, 400 students will arrive on campus over well today and tomorrow morning and it can be quite...

Sue: And the online delegates.

Graham: Online delegates. If people are here face to face it can be quite daunting. I've already had a conversation at the train station earlier about being on campus for the first time and you not knowing anyone. So how can we address that? I mean obviously people can walk up to me and go, “Hi my name’s whatever...” and I go, “Hi I'm Graham and this is what I've done as a student.”

Sue: Yeah well we, as you can possibly see online are wearing different coloured t-shirts, we've got all sorts of badges. So we've got the purple t-shirt for Plexus. There is an exceedingly high viz orange for the Disabled Students Group, DSG. You can't fail to miss them. It is one of the brightest colours I've ever seen on a t-shirt.

Graham: It's certainly bright isn't it?

Sue: We've got the studio hosts. We've got badges that say 'CEC elect' as we know Central Executive Committee. And if they're already on the committee it will just say 'CEC'.
Graham: So I think if people are actually watching this who are on campus today they could look for people in these pink badges and go, “There's someone I could possibly talk to.” approach if they're feeling a bit nervous or anxious and go, they're involved.

Sue: There's others in black t-shirts either the staff and they've got staff written on the arm. There's conference makers you can possibly see on the table here. We've got the back of a t-shirt. Is it on the back or the front?

Graham: On the back yeah.

Sue: So you'll have to perhaps catch them up as they pass you!

Graham: Conference makers.

Nicky: I think the point you’re trying to make though is that there's lots of people here and we’re all here for the same purpose and Fanni I think you were going to say something I was thinking there?

Fanni: I'd already known students when I came here and when I went up to bear at reception it actually was then early in the morning doing other things, but when I came up to reception I had a bit of a shock even. I know most of the people who are quite involved with the Association but it was like a load of students and I was along the way on the built up I've made a few more friends. I've found some other Hungarian people because I'm from Hungary, I never knew before conference if there was any other Hungarians studying at the university. And I found all of these people and I've made lots of friends online through the forums and on Facebook, building up that I'm now looking forward to meeting.

Nicky: The first thing that happened to me when I went into the registration area upstairs to get my badge, get all my vouchers for the weekend, all the stuff that we need to be on campus.

Sue: Because they give it to you in a bag don’t they?

Nicky: Yeah you get your own bag. So that's a good indicator that they're here for conference.

Graham: Absolutely yeah.

Nicky: But the first thing that happened to me was a student approached me and said, “Oh we’ve met on Twitter.” So we might not have met face to face but we’ve encountered each other, we’ve chatted online.
Graham  You've missed the best thing as well we are the largest student movement and 400 people are coming to campus today to celebrate that fact. So obviously we've talked about there's a lot of things happening. So in terms of today what's the run through of what's happening today?

Fanni  So in the morning actually there’s been, well it’s part of conference kind of but there is an OU event running.

Nicky  Yeah Fanni and I have both been involved in the research poster competition today which happens here on campus and it has happened in the past but this year’s the first time that we’ve actually brought the poster competition onto the same weekend as conference.

Fanni  So it's all…I was a judge instead of Nicky today.

Graham  That's really good.

Fanni  Replacing her. So we have all different sort of research students presenting how far they've got with their research, trying to make outsiders understand.

Sue  More aware is it?

Fanni  More aware of what they're doing and you give out prizes. The Association has actually given a prize for the people’s choice, so they've been involved in it.

Nicky  So it’s a great opportunity. I love the poster competition, it’s always been one of my favourite things to go to on campus actually.

Fanni  There's just such interesting subjects.

Nicky  Well it’s not very often you get the chance to hear about research that other students are doing in the Open University.

Graham  I think that's it there's always a focus on the undergraduate. I mean it's the core part of the university, or any university, it’s the biggest element and obviously I'm a post graduate student so I don't feel neglected in terms of PGR or PGT, which is post graduate taught, post graduate research qualifications but it’s really good to see there’s something that's actually available for post graduate students right here on campus.

Nicky  So we have the chance to meet with some of our research students and hear about their research and actually what they do really well is they take their
 discipline, whatever it might be and translate it into a language that I can understand. So I can speak to a researcher who might be doing something in an area that I've never studied before, in science for example I'm not a scientist but they can explain what they're doing in a way that makes it really interesting to me.

Fanni The most interesting one I had today was actually about a Mars research that they were doing and she could explain it to me so well that I...I've never done any science or earthy or any...and I understood why she was doing the research and it took her five minutes to make me understand, I study business I have no involvement with any of this and I could understand.

Graham Yeah we have a different science in terms of business don’t we?

Nicky So that's been one part of the day and if people at home are interested in that if you have a look at our social media account you'll see that we've been retweeting what's been happening there at the poster competition today.

Sue Have we got any hashtags or anything that the students can look in on?

Nicky We have a special hashtag for conference which is oustudents18. So it's just a little extension of our usual hashtag that we do which is oustudents.

Sue You know me I'm not really a technical, geeky person am I?

Nicky There has been so much activity on Twitter, on Facebook, on Instagram, it's been great.

Fanni I've been trying to overload Facebook this morning and when it got busy I kind of stopped.

Graham It must have been on Facebook a lot this morning, it said your name quite a lot and I was like, that's fine at least people are getting involved in it. It's what I love about conference it's not about the people that are here because we have 400 students, online, taking part tomorrow and over the weekend we've got potentially 19,000 people watching this right now on our Facebook feed. So it's not about just what's here, it's about the entire community and that's what brings everyone together.

Nicky It would be great to actually see some interaction on social media from our delegates who are at home.

Graham Yes absolutely.
Nicky So if you're taking part in this don't forget to take those selfies and tell us where you are and say what you're loving about conference.

Graham I've seen some selfies already, I mean they're online.

Nicky Well yesterday was National Selfie Day!

Graham Yeah it was.

Fanni I took one in the evening as day zero of conference, because some people had arrived early last night so there were like 20 people up at the bar and I took a selfie with everyone.

Graham I've seen that, it was really good yes.

Sue Whoosh what is a selfie? ((laughs))

Graham Selfie is…I love you so much Sue I mean I almost want to do one online now but they take our phones off us before we come into the studio so it doesn't ring or bleep. I've got my phone on which is vibrating away but a selfie is literally kind of go like this, done!

Sue There you go we did one for the camera.

Graham Absolutely. We need to be doing a few pics.

Nicky You did that by magic.

Graham Yeah absolutely. So we've covered what's happening here today, obviously there's a few shows, special editions of Studio happening over the weekend. We've got one tomorrow morning, so I think is it me and you tomorrow morning?

Sue Oh again?

Graham Or is it me and Malika I can't remember?

Sue I'm for Sunday.

Graham Ah so it is me and Malika tomorrow so I will be here bright and early at eight o'clock to talk about all the business but I've noticed Fanni you've got a CEC Elect badge so what does that mean and what can you tell our viewers what's all that about?
Fanni  So every two years we do a Central Executive Committee, I can't even pronounce that word properly.

Graham  It's fine

Fanni  So we do a Central Executive Committee election which is the student leadership team. You get elected for two years and there's different rules, Nicky is the current president, we've got a deputy president, different vice presidents and I was elected as vice president media campaigns.

Graham  Brilliant.

Sue  So who can put themselves forward for that?

Fanni  Any OU student, all the 170,000 around the world we've got.

Graham  Wow, so congratulations for being elected. So can you tell us a little bit about what we can expect from yourself over the next two years?

Fanni  So I'll be looking after all the media, as the name suggests.

Graham  So you'll look after us.

Fanni  ((laughs))

Sue  Wow we'll be looked after.

Nicky  Well I think you will be working closely.

Fanni  You might be seeing me here for quite some time. I was saying to the other elected people if it's up to me they're going to be very seen over the next few years.

Graham  Good.

Sue  Good.

Fanni  Because I think it's important for people to know what you do.

Sue  And it helps other students know what the role is in case they want to put themselves forward in future times.
Graham Or to get involved because there’s literally hundreds of opportunities to get involved in the Association. You can get involved with the Disabled Students Group, with Plexus, with all the different clubs and societies. I mean I'm a member of, we’ve got the Walking Club Group now, we’ve got Harry Potter, we’ve got Business Society. There’s so many ways.

Sue The Right Club.

Graham The Right Club yes.

Sue We’ve got a huge marquee haven’t we with lots of tables that are waiting to be set up.

Graham A very warm marquee. I hope the walls will disappear tomorrow morning.

Nicky I think if it’s nice and dry we can certainly make the marquee a little bit cooler.

Graham Yeah that's good. So carry on what else are you going to be doing for us?

Fanni Yes so the new aspect that's been brought into the role that's campaigns. So obviously I will be working with all the different groups like Plexus who might want to do a campaign. And I would also like to support students in doing their own campaigns. And I would like the Association to do campaigns that are relevant to our students educationally and community-wise as well.

Graham That's good because I mean I've always submitted ideas about the community volunteering so it will be quite good now we've actually got a lead to go, “I've got this idea, what we’re doing now.” And I think students having those ideas is going to be...I mean there's loads of them isn't there so I think having students being able to come to you and go, “I've got this idea,” and then you take it forward with the CEC and kind of going, “Yeah.”

Fanni Yeah and I would like to be able to support individuals as well in what they might want to do in their communities because it's...

Graham Perfect.

Sue Because sometimes it can be quite isolating can't it study?

Graham It can yeah.

Fanni And if we can help them.
Sue And like you said you didn’t, until this morning, realise that there were other students here from your home country.

Fanni Yeah that’s very exciting.

Graham Yes fab. So we are coming to a close this show.

Sue No, is that the end of conference?

Graham No just the show, just the show!

Nicky Before we finish can I be an interviewer for a minute?

Graham Oh no I knew.

Nicky I want to put you both on the spot. So what are you looking forward to most about conference?

Sue Well I’ve already started in my excitement of just generally meeting the students and being on campus the buzz is unbelievable already at registration; meeting students first time on campus and I was honoured with honorary life membership so I believe…

Nicky There might be a little bit of a celebration for that.

Sue There might be a celebration, well even if there isn’t I am! ((laughs))

Graham Absolutely. How many times have you been to Milton Keynes to be celebrated?

Sue Yeah I think it’s a lovely time and how it’s changed over the years to see how it’s developed as new generations of students come along.

Graham Absolutely. Well for me I love coming to campus and to meet students. I’ve met some students already, the entire Plexus committee are here so we’ve set up our stall ready for tomorrow. We’ve got some meet-ups planned, we’ve got a workshop planned tomorrow. So it’s just meeting other students.

Sue And it’s just getting involved isn’t it?

Graham Just get involved.
Sue  Everything starts with a hello if it’s your first time on campus, on conference, whatever, just say hello to people. There are nervous people, there are scared people, there are excited people.

Nicky  There are people who look like they’re the most confident people in the world and are actually just as scared as everybody else.

Graham  Inside yes.

Sue  And it’s a time for personal development isn’t as well, yes you’ve got your academics, I’ll just mention that.

Graham  Of course.

Sue  But it’s time to be a student and a person in your own home campus.

Fanni  The first time I was on campus literally it was last year so I was jumping around, I was taking pictures of everything, everything that had a logo on it. It was like I’ve got to show everyone I’m a distance learner and I can make it to campus.

Graham  Six years later I’m still doing the same so don’t you worry.

Nicky  I know you haven’t asked me but I want to tell you one of my highlights – playing swingball for five minutes.

Sue  I know I saw that on the lawn and it was like swingballs!

Nicky  I just want to say I think I might have been a little bit better at swingball than Graham was.

Graham  I think yeah you were a little bit. You can have that.

Nicky  Not much just a little bit.

Graham  Just a tiny bit I’ll concede it.

Fanni  I’ve got proof of it Graham I’ve taken a video.

Graham  Oh gosh such to be out there hashtag.

Sue  There’s hay bales but I have no idea what they’re for but there’s swingballs.
Graham  I think I'm going to have to wrap it up there.

Sue  No look what I did.

Graham  I'm going to do it. So to keep involved with conference over the next few days do follow us on all social media channels, so @oustudents on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. Use the hashtag oustudents18 or visit the website which is oustudents.com/conference. So join us again tomorrow morning from 8 a.m. to find out all about business. Thanks for joining us. See you later.

All  Bye.