Good morning Conference 2018, welcome back into the Hub Theatre to everybody who’s here in Milton Keynes, and welcome to our digital delegates watching from wherever you are around the world. I just briefly want to give you a run through about what this morning is going to be. We're going to be here in the room for about an hour and a half. We are going to have a little bit of a celebration. We've recently nominated some OU students to be Honorary Life Members of the Students Association, and so we're going to recognise them this morning by asking them to come up to the stage area here, and we'll share a little bit about their experiences and ask some of them to talk about their experiences if they would like to.

Then I'll hand over to one of our colleagues who organises a club, and she's going to talk about the experience of what it is to make an OU Students club, and VP community will then join us and ask everybody in the room to make a pledge, and I'll let her cover that when we get to that.

We'll also have a little bit of time to introduce some of the new Central Executive Committee members who have recently been elected, we have a couple of questions for them. Over the last couple of days I know there have been a few prize draws happening, so people have been taking part in the treasure hunt and also in the PLEXUS draw, so we'll draw the winners for that.

And we'll have some closing remarks before we go to a song to finish. So for anybody who was here yesterday, we had a pop-up choir, the Harmonious Choir came and did a really wonderful session with us. There were quite a few students who joined that session and it was a great experience, and anybody who was part of that, or indeed anybody in the audience who wants to join in, we're going to have a really special song to finish Conference on. I don't know if that has happened at previous Conferences before, but it's going to be how we end Conference 2018.

So without further ado, I'll go back to the nominations for Honorary Life Members. For those who don't know, the Students Association is run by and for students, so we couldn't do what we do without massive contributions from OU students who are taking on volunteer roles in all sorts of different parts of our work. So from organising meet-ups in local communities, to taking on representative roles within Governance Committees, and elected roles within the Central Executive Committee, and there are just hundreds of different ways that people get involved.
HLM status is awarded to those students who have contributed and have been recognised for their contributions usually over a long time.

So I'm going to ask first of all for... I've got lost, I'm going to do something else first. I need to backtrack. I need to drink more of this coffee that's sitting in front of me! (Laughter) As well as having Honorary Life Members, we're actually also honouring a staff member today as an Honorary Vice-President. I'm just looking around to make sure she's in the room. Yeah, she is. Okay. Sally, could you stand up please just to let everybody know where you are. (Applause)

You can see a lovely photograph of Sally up there behind me. I want to just tell you a little bit about Sally and who she is. Sally has been nominated as an Honorary Vice-President after 29 years of service in the Students Association. Sally's role is very much a behind the scenes role. What she does is she looks after finance in the Students Association, and she supports a lot of students who are volunteers in the Students Association when it comes to us putting in our claims and don't quite know what to do. But she has a much bigger role in looking after the finances within the Association. So it's a very important strategic job, but it's one that's behind the scenes and her work is quite often hidden.

For those of us who have worked with Sally, students and staff at the Association have valued how much support she has given us, and just the huge effort she goes to to make everybody feel at home in the Association, to be welcomed, to be supported. All of our colleagues agree that she's just an absolute star. So we'd like to call Sally up here to receive a little token of our appreciation. (Applause)

M/F Speech!

Sally I'm sorry, I can't give a speech. But I'd like to say thank you very much, and I've really enjoyed being with the Association, and believe it or not I'm going to miss you all. So, thank you. Thank you very much. (Applause)

Nicky So you'll all be pleased to know Sally has a few more weeks left, so all of your claims from the Conference will be dealt with. (Laughter) Don't worry, she has that taken care of.

So now I can move on to the HLMs, and the next person I would like to recognise is a woman who is sitting right at the back there, Lorraine Adams, who is currently VP Education. Lorraine has had a really long serving volunteer experience with the Association, and I'm sure many of
the people here will have known Lorraine and will have worked really closely with her. Lorraine has spent six years on the Central Executive Committee, and she was a volunteer long before that working on Governance Committees.

On a very personal note, I want to say Lorraine has got me out of a few tricky situations in meetings with the OU where I have been the person who's been the hothead getting angry in the room, and Lorraine has managed to bring us back to a professional way of talking. So she has a real incredible way of dealing with people in the University, a really incredible way of putting new volunteers at their ease. This year I think she's done a fabulous job of being the Chair of the Senate Reference Group where many of you will have met Lorraine over the last three years. Lorraine, would you like to come up and say a few words and receive your award? (Applause)

Lorraine Well, thank you for those kind words. I'd like to thank the Academy, my parents. (Laughter) Sorry, wrong place, wrong speech! I'm coming to the end of my long journey, 18 years with the Open University and 12 years with the Association. I am passionate about the OU, and even more passionate about the Students Association. I've enjoyed my time so much, and I will really miss it. But I wish the next CEC all the best and I'm sure they'll do a wonderful job as well. Thank you. (Applause)

Nicky The next person who's receiving an award today is Alison Kingan. Just like Lorraine, Alison has given a lot of time to the Association over many years, and you'll know that Alison is continuing as the VP Student Support on the Central Executive Committee over the next two years.

For me personally I would just like to share that Alison has an incredible breadth of knowledge about the OU and how things work there. But she also has an incredible array of supporting other volunteers and helping them to open the doors to all of those people in the University that we need to talk to. She has an incredible way of working, I have never seen anybody take such good notes in a meeting. You can be really, really assured that whatever Alison has written down on her page is exactly what was said. So she's a great resource and has been a great asset and wonderful help to me personally.

But she has been recognised by a lot of other students who nominated her for this award, and she is the absolute true spirit of volunteering. Alison has really defined the role of student support and she's really made it her own. For a while Alison also looked after the responsibilities for equal
opportunities within the Student Association, so she was really doing two jobs at once, and that was a challenge and one that Alison took on and did really well. So Alison, would you like to come up and accept your award? (Applause)

Alison
I have to say this is an incredible honour, and thank you very much. But I believe the only reason I've been given this is because they know it's the only way they will get me where I might get my picture taken. (Laughter and applause)

M
You've been tweeted! (Laughter)

Alison
Oh my God! So I'd like to thank the Association and fellow volunteers and staff, because without you all I would not be here. I have told the story before of my first conference where I was so nervous that I had to speak to somebody about my dietary requirements, and the person I was speaking to said you need to speak to such-and-such a person. So I was saying yeah, yeah, yeah, and not listening to anything they said because I was so, so nervous. And I thought, 'Yeah, they said go down the corridor and turn left', so I went across to another building, I went upstairs. About half an hour later I thought, 'I'm lost, I have to go back'. So I went back to the person and said I'm really sorry, I was so nervous I can't remember what you said, could you direct me to this person I need to speak to again, and she said yes. So she turned me round and I had to walk two paces to the person I was supposed to speak to. (Laughter)

So I thought I would change things a little bit and instead of thanking people I'm going to (inaudible) people for putting me in this really embarrassing situation where I am really nervous still. So first of it's Roz Evans who is sitting over there, (applause) who described me when she saw me at my first conference as a rabbit caught in headlights because I looked so nervous. And then thanks also to Nick and Nicky and Ruth and Marianne, previous Presidents, and Nick Morris, who have helped me grow a little bit and do a little bit more with the Association and stretch me in areas that I could go to. I could not do this without them.

Thank you also to the members of staff, particularly Wendy, Jess and Verity, who have been my main contacts. And particularly for Wendy, when I started she definitely calmed me down. Like Nicky was saying, when I was really angry she calmed me down and said that's okay. So thank you very much, I will cherish this and it's very special to me. Thank you very much. (Applause)
Nicky

I don't know about you but I don't know how I'm going to get through this without a wee tear. Okay. So the next person who I'm going to invite is Sue Goodyear. (Applause) Sue has been nominated for her commitment to OU Students, and is a long serving volunteer to the Association. Sue has volunteered in so many roles we didn't actually know what to put beside her name. (Laughter) So she's represented students on the Central Executive Committee. She's a Trustee of OUSET, the OU Students Educational Trust. She has been an actor in our (priority?) videos, one of which you can see a photograph of up there. And you might have also seen her recently as a STUDIO host, so she's been working away this weekend making Conference come to life for everybody who's at home.

Sue has so much energy and so much enthusiasm for OU Students and the Students Association it's infectious, and I think she's been a great recruitment person for the Students Association because she's managed to encourage a lot of people to get more involved. Sue's incredibly compassionate and has a lot of empathy. If I can recall my very first meeting of the Central Executive Committee where I came along as an observer, because we invite students to come and see what happens in the leadership meetings. I don't know if Sue remembers this, but Sue sat beside me and for two days Sue wrote down and passed me notes about everything that was being talked about in that room. So every time there was a CEC or words or letters used that I didn't understand, she passed me a note to tell me what they were, and it gave me the confidence then to think that I could do something like this too. So a very personal recognition for that little bit you've played in my journey.

You have such a wit and humour, and I'm sure people have seen that over the last couple of days, and we really look forward to continuing to work with you. Please come up and say a few words. (Applause)

Sue

Unaccustomed as I am to speaking, (laughter) I've been told I'm only allowed to give a short speech. I didn't even know until a few moments ago that I was allowed to speak, so I've had to Google how to do a thank you speech. (Laughter) So as your introduction how pleased you are to have won. I've actually got all emotional, so result! How important is the award? It's indescribable, I'm amazed. How strong the competition was. (Laughter) Hey-ho.

Now we get to the thanks. Thank everyone who contributed in some way. And that is every single student of the OU who's emailed me, who's phoned me, who's spoken on forums. I've been elected into roles because some of you took the time to vote for me. I've seen a lot of you put
yourselves forward in sort of the scariness of thinking, 'Can I do it?', and yes you can. Oh, have you checked your PPI? (Laughter and applause) If you loved that one you'll love the next one, apparently there's paid modelling jobs. (Laughter)

Though I've just got to tell you an amusing and interesting story. I'm an OU student like the rest of you. How amusing is that?! I graduated. I never ever thought I would. I've volunteered. I've actually gone from not speaking in meetings, as people can attest to, to standing in front of you, and it has been with all your support. And your gobs are smacked. Thank you. (Applause)

Nicky This is getting harder with every person. Okay. Finally I would like to invite Melanie Philpott to receive the Honorary Life Member Award. Melanie, as you will know, is somewhat-

F Why is that awful face (inaudible) (Laughter)

Nicky We didn't get that message, sorry. (Laughter) As you will know, Melanie has also had a lot of roles in the Students Association over many years. Some of you will have met Melanie at residential schools. You might have met her here at Conferences in the past where she’s been fundraising for OUSET. She is a current Trustee of the Association, and she has been an OUSET Trustee in the past, as well as just generally getting everybody's attention on Twitter and supporting students every single day on social media. People who are asking questions about the University, about the Association, Melanie is the first people out there.

She's also quite famous for her cups of tea. She is probably celebrated more for tea drinking and biscuit eating than any other student I have ever met. (Laughter) She is such an enthusiastic member of the Students Association, it is such an honour to ask you to come up and receive your award and to share a few words. After Melanie talks to being nominated for HLM, she's also going to stay up here and share her experience setting up a club, the OU Make Club, so you can transition straight into that if you wish.

Melanie Okay. I might have to stop crying first,

Nicky Okay. Up you come. (Applause)

Melanie I'll have to find the right speech first. I actually wrote it all down because I find public speaking quite terrifying. Not that one, you don't want to hear
that one yet. It is very, very exciting, and I'm really pleased that I get to talk
to you because I'm so passionate about volunteering with the Students
Association. I've volunteered in lots of different roles over the years, and
I've had some amazing experiences, experiences I wouldn't ordinarily
have had had it not been for the Students Association.

The opportunities I've had – excuse me, runny nose! The opportunities I've
had have helped me personally, they've developed me professionally. I've
made key contacts with people in the University from attending Students
Association events, and I feel that I'm part of the University. It's not just a
series of call centres or just online, look it's real and it's fabulous to be part
of it. And of course I've made lifelong friends, lovely Sue, and I've had a
heck of a lot of fun along the way.

So if you're a delegate, whether you're online or you're in the room today
and this weekend has been your very first experience with your Student
Union, I really hope that you've had a fantastic time, and I really hope that
you're going to stay involved. There is a volunteer role that is just right for
you, and it will enrich your life in ways that you won't even
recognise/realise, it's just amazing.

Of course all volunteers are supported by an amazing staff team, and I
want to say thank you to you all because you're fabulous. (Applause) But
also a special thank you to Wendy. (Applause) Oh, there are tea bags,
where did they come from? My God, this is amazing! Wendy's been an
amazing cheerleader to me throughout my entire volunteer journey, right
from the very start. So I know you've already clapped, I'd like you to clap
again. Thank you, Wendy. (Applause)

It's an absolutely massive honour to become an Honorary Life Member,
and I'm thrilled that I will get to stay part of the Students Association family
after I've finished my qualifications, so thank you. (Applause)

Nicky Thank you. We're going to give Melanie a wee minute to compose herself.

Melanie Tea bags, woo! (Laughter)

Nicky We've just nominated some new Honorary Life Members, but there are
quite a few others here in the room. I'm not going to ask you to come up
on stage and speak, but if you would feel able and you want to please
stand up and everybody can acknowledge the service that you have
made, and your continued involvement. (Applause)
I've got more tears. So you haven't just been part of the OU Student Association community, you're all now part of the HLM community which is really thriving and growing really strong, so I know you're going to continue to be active there. Melanie, would you like to return and talk about your experiences in the club?

Melanie: Okay. I'm going to talk about clubs. Affiliated clubs with the Students Association, this is quite a new thing. And I'm not going to necessarily talk to you about my club, I'm going to talk to you about a new club. Clubs are a great way to connect with people who share the same interests as you, and it is really, really, really easy to set them up. Some of you may have heard now that I have a bit of a thing for biscuits, and perhaps over the course of this weekend I've met at least four other people who also share my love for biscuit loveliness. We decided – I haven't met these four people yet, I'm hoping you're going to come and see me after – we're going to set up the OU Students Biscuit Appreciation Club. And I know you're all going to join. Now five is the key number here, there must be at least five people to start an affiliated club.

What we're going to do when we come to start setting this up, we're going to look at the web page OUStudens.com/clubs, and we're going to check out the guidelines and the code of conduct, because biscuit appreciation could get quite rowdy and messy maybe. (Laughter) Then we'll suss out how we're going to communicate with each other, and maybe we'll set up a Facebook group because that's super-easy. And after that we'll fill in an online form and wait for approval. And that really is it, it's that easy.

Once we've been approved – please approve our club, whoever it is that approves clubs – we will have our information on the Association website, and we will get offered a forum on the Association forum space. Is that what it's called, the forum space? Somewhere online you can have a forum if you like. The great thing about being an affiliated club is the free publicity you get, and we are students and we love free, right?! So you get loads of publicity.

Here's a shameless plug. Last July I had a new idea for a club, and together with Steph, wherever Steph is, and Colin who's somewhere over there, we set up the OU Make Club. As of seven o'clock this morning, we have 224 members. That's over 200 people with the same interest, chatting and connecting with each other. I'm kind of excited about that, and actually a little bit proud of it too.
So there are seven clubs already set up: there's Language Club; Walking Club; Dyslexia Club; the Carer’s Club; there's a Reading Nook, and I'm going to look up that one after Conference, and new ones pop up every week. There's a full list on the website so do take a look, and maybe you'd like to create a club, or maybe you'd just like to join a club.

But I'm going to hand over to Steph and she's going to talk to you a little bit about the Pledge Drive. Steph, would you like to take the floor? (Applause)

Steph: Clubs are doing really well so far. I really hope that you want to get more involved. On your chairs you should have found one of these which is a pledge card, and on the back it gives you an opportunity to tick some boxes, which is to join an OU Students Association club.

F: No.

Steph: Have they not been put out?

F: No. (Laughter)

Steph: I have one card, who wants it?! (Laughter) So we will be handing out at the community stand. At the community stand you will find a card like this, maybe more, and on the back it's got tick boxes: one is to join an OU Students Association club; one is to create an OU Students Association club; and then the other one is GDPR, to let us know that we can have your email address so that we can contact you about your pledge.

Please talk to other OU students. If you're unsure about actually creating a club you might find someone who's got a similar interest and might give you the confidence, or might even take the opportunity to set the club up that you can join. But please look at the pledge card and please join in with this. The year before last we had pledges and we signed up for different things. I actually have done most of the things on the pledge card, so I wrote an extra one that the bottom which was to create a business society, which I actually did and I'm really proud of it. So make yourselves proud and do all these pledges.

I also want to take the opportunity to let you know about a new volunteering opportunity. Some people in the Hub might have actually seen this this morning in a volunteering workshop where we discussed student led projects. Now through student consultation we've heard back from students that they wanted an opportunity to get involved at face-to-face volunteering. But unfortunately not everybody lives around Milton
Keynes, and although online is good that we can connect in those sort of ways, they want an opportunity to do something that made them feel like it was more worthwhile and a cause and something they could build into their own community.

Also with the volunteering team we attended a conference hosted by the NUS, and it was about volunteering. We mixed with other universities, shared ideas and best practice. It was such a good idea in one of the workshops that we went into about the student-led projects, we asked students whether they were interested. This might be that you’d want to do something to support people in the community, you might already be interested in something that is a worthwhile cause, you might have an idea that you want to discuss further. The idea is that you look at one of these cards, look at the steps, put your ideas forward, and we can help and support you from there with the funding, with promotion, we’re helping to set a project up yourself. So if you’ve got any ideas please come to us. Thank you. (Applause)

Nicky: Okay. So everybody in the audience, what we’re going to do over the next five minutes – this wasn’t on the schedule but what we’re going to do right now is we’re going to take hands in the air for suggestions of clubs and student projects that you yourself are going to get involved in and that you have an idea for. I also saw Peter had an idea flash across his face because he had a little glimmer light up his eyes when Steph was talking about student led projects. I think we might have a microphone. If we don’t have a microphone you can say your ideas and I’ll repeat it. Do we have one there, Rob? Yes. So, Peter first then Melanie. Just since we don’t have the postcards on your seats.

Peter: I’m very sorry but that was just a glimmer. ((Laughter))

Nicky: Are you going to start up the glimmering club, then?

Peter: I’ll have a think about that.

Nicky: Melanie?

Melanie: I’m hoping to start a biscuit appreciation club.

Nicky: Are there any takers for the biscuit appreciation club? There you go, there are several members already. Anybody else who would like to start a club? Just here in the red shirt.
M I think I have two in mind anyway. I will start off with one. I want to start off with a unity and diversity club, and I want to start up a left-handed club, those who write left-handed.

Nicky Okay both hands in the air for those two clubs, yeah. ((Applause))

M The reason why I said left-handed was because when I was growing up in Africa if you write with your left hand your teacher would beat you. So, I was beaten mercilessly. So, I have to change to right hand because I was writing with the left. Because my culture won’t let you write with the left.

Nicky So, now you want to celebrate the left hand?

M Now, I want to celebrate it, absolutely.

Nicky Absolutely, yes.

M I can write with both hands now. ((Applause))

Nicky Was there another hand in the air here? Yes.

M Hello, I’m thinking of establishing an engineering club. So, budding engineers do get in touch.

Nicky Any budding engineers here? Yes, there are a few hands in the air, absolutely.

M We’ve got at least five so I’m okay.

Nicky There are definitely five hands up. Back here in the back section in the blue t-shirt?

Maureen Hello, I’m Maureen. I’d like to start a photography club. If anybody’s interested in a photography club then please let me know.

Nicky Where’s Colin? Colin, one of our budding photographers here. ((Applause)) Lots of hands in the air. Just behind you, Rob.

Verity Hi, I’m Verity. I would like to maybe set up an OU Netflix appreciation.

Nicky That sounds like a good idea. ((Applause)) Beth?
Beth: I came to the conference partly because I'm passionate about Asperger's. So, in the volunteering group this morning I put forward the idea of an Aspy hub that we could start in a location and find a community, not just the OU community, but put it out into the community at wide.

Nicky: That sounds like it's touching more in the student led projects idea that Steph was talking about. Yeah, I'm seeing lots of nods again around the room for interest in that. Hands in the air of that one. Yeah, look at that. ((Applause))

Linda: Hi, I'm Linda. I'd like to start a sports club so we can challenge other unis and show them we're better than them.

Nicky: Any particular sport Linda, or just sport in general? Discus?

Linda: Tennis.

Nicky: Tennis? Any tennis players in the room? Do we have any tennis players? Yes, five hands have gone up already. What about this back corner; I haven't heard much from you guys? Don't be shy.

Kaz: Hiya, I'm Kaz. I'd be interested in setting up a rugby club. ((Cheers))

Nicky: A few rugby players in the Association staff team so I'm quite excited about that one. Any other rugby players here? Yeah, a few hands up. Okay, Patricia's hand was up down here. Just for the record this is all on camera so you're not getting out of it. ((Laughter))

Patricia: I want to start up a public speaking club to build on the workshop from yesterday.

Nicky: Yeah, lots of nods there. Did anybody go to the workshop yesterday on public speaking? Would you be interested in joining a public speaking club? Absolutely, there we go. ((Applause)) Ian, is yours a new club idea?

Ian: I'm thinking about a debate club.

Nicky: That sounds good. Interesting oohs. We haven't had an ooh yet. ((Laughter)) Hands up that I've missed – who have I missed?

Carol: I'm Carol. I'm thinking about starting up a wine appreciation society. ((Cheers and applause))
Nicky  Wine appreciation. Over here, Anka?

Anka  Hello, I’m Anka. I was thinking of setting up the OU procrastination club – at some point. ((Applause))

Nicky  That sounds like a very popular club. Over this side?

F  I’d like to set up a student’s strollers club. Not a walking club; people who like to go out for 15 minutes after work and know little places all over the country and we can post them on Facebook.

Nicky  Well, I have just set up this month a walking club that is for everybody, and it includes strollers. Where’s Mikael? Mikael is one of our self-confused strollers, sitting right in front of you. So, I think that club is there; please come and join us and we’ll join forces on that one. There was a hand up right at the back row here.

F  Let’s have a guess what my club is going to be? It’s a clubbing club. So, wherever you are in the country we share the knowledge of clubs, how to get up at five when you’ve just come back, and how to have the perfect hangover cure.

Nicky  How many people had a perfect hangover cure this morning? Did anybody find the perfect hangover cure? No. That club’s needed definitely. ((Laughter)) Anymore? Danielle. We’ll wrap this up in the next couple of minutes and then we’ll move on.

Danielle  Hi, I’m Danielle. This is totally not my idea so I’m not taking credit for it, but I’ve heard it mentioned on campus, so I’d like to say to the student that suggested it that I’m totally down for it, so I’m going to be one of your five: Disney club.

Nicky  Absolutely. I’ll join that one as well. Peter, you have an idea? Sorry, Rob, we’re really making you work this morning.

Peter  It took a while for that glimmer to eventually emerge. I’m going to have to check with myself to see whether this is legal but if it is ((laughter)) an OU students’ flash choir club.

Nicky  A flash choir – can you elaborate on that?

Peter  I’ll tweet where I’m going to be and the time and place and we’ll turn up and sing. ((Applause))
Nicky: First flash choir meeting today. There’s another hand up here at the back. I’m so glad we decided to do this.

M: Hi, yeah this one’s not actually for me; it’s for the new President Elect: a Daffy Duck Appreciation club. ((Applause))

Nicky: We’re going to talk about the duck costume in a wee minute or two. Clare?

Clare: Well, I’m a bit of a horror fan, like movies and novels, and I do special effects make-up as a hobby so I was thinking of maybe starting an OU horror club possibly.

Nicky: Excellent. Are there any horror fans in the room? Oh wow, that surprised me; there’s a lot more horror fans than I thought there would be. There you go, you’ve definitely got a club. Over here?

F: I was just debating the idea of an OU science fiction and fantasy club.

Nicky: Absolutely, yeah I’m joining that one.

F: Apparently a lot of people like it.

Nicky: I think the science fiction fantasy people might have just beaten the horror people there in terms of interest. We could get a wee bit of rivalry going on. Okay, one more right in the middle back there. This is the last club suggestion for today; make it a really good one.

F: I was thinking of indoor climbing because I noticed there was the mountaineering society.

Nicky: Yes, that’s right. Indoor climbing is the fastest growing sport I believe in the UK. Are there indoor climbers here?

F: I do it, as you’ve guessed. But it’s really hard to find someone to do it with you if you don’t know other people that like it.

Nicky: Can I see those hands up again. Everybody turn around and look at each other. There you go. Make sure you catch up with each other after this.

F: There’s four so it would work.

Nicky: Excellent. Let’s move on. I have to go back and get my notes, get my business head back on here. Thank you. ((Applause))
The next part of today’s agenda is actually to bring up some of the incoming Central Executive Committee members. There are four of them coming on the new team coming in, and I’d invite them to take a seat beside me. So, first of all Cath, our President Elect. ((Applause)) Fanni, VP Media and Campaigns Elect. ((Applause)) Billy, Arts and Social Sciences Faculty rep. ((Applause)) And Kat, VP Community Elect who is busy taking all these ideas of clubs. ((Applause)) My first question has to be for Cath. ((Laughter)) Why are you wearing a yellow duck costume?

Cath

The immediate reason is I’m raising money for OUSET, the OU’s Students Educational Trust. It started when I was procrastinating from revision and wasting time on social media. And it occurred to me when stone cold sober to ask in the big OU group with 19,000 students whether people would fund me if I dressed up as a duck for the conference. Unfortunately people noticed the post and said yes, and I was kind of committed to it then. I think we’re at over £800 at the moment via my Just Giving page. ((Applause))

Nicky

£800 that’s quite an achievement. And there’s still money coming in?

Cath

There is. And I have a collecting box over there if anyone wishes to add to it.

Nicky

When we get to the really serious questions we might have to ask our supporters to silence the quacks a little tiny bit. I have to pick a different question because the one immediately following this is far too serious so let’s jump. Kat this is your first conference?

Kat

It is yes.

Nicky

Can you tell us what your highlight of conference has been?

Kat

For me, and I think this is probably shared by a lot of people in this room, the highlight has been meeting everybody and meeting all these new people. The buzz across the weekend has been fantastic and it’s just made me so exciting to come in this role.

Nicky

And what were you expecting to find at conference?

Kat

I think I came expecting a lot of friendly people and a lot of people that are very proud to be OU students. And I think we’re going to walk away from here even prouder.
Absolutely. Do we all agree with that: we’re all proud OU students? 

Fanni

I always knew that I wanted to be involved, no matter what university I went into, because when I was in further education I was quite involved. So, when I looked at different universities it was one of the main priorities for me to have a Students Association or Student Union that’s working. And specifically to Media and Campaigns I stood because when I started getting involved every meeting I went to it was like, oh well, we can’t reach enough students, we can’t communicate well enough. So, over time I’ve sort of plotted down all the ideas that I’ve heard from other people and that I’ve thought about.

Can I share something about what I know about you, about what you did before you even enrolled for the OU?

Fanni

Yeah.

The first time when I met Fanni she told me that the first thing she did when she was looking for a university was to look at the Students Association to see what activities the Students Association were doing, and if we hadn’t have been meeting her requirements she wouldn’t have registered for the OU. ((Laughter)) And that was such an enormous relief for me to hear that we were doing the right things, but are also absolutely wonderful.

Fanni you have talked quite a lot about being a full-time student and being a younger student as well. Do you want to share any of the ideas that you have around working with younger people?

Fanni

I would like to make possibly a club. I should have put my hand up for it; I forgot about that. So, the first point I actually spoke to Danielle back last year in July because she had a CCR, a Central Committee Representative role put up on her profile, and I never realised that it was her till January when I met her for the first time. So, supporting young students, well obviously the demographics are getting a lot younger than they used to be, and I feel like younger students are not really stepping forward. So, I would like to have a support club for younger students, and obviously raising it with the university whenever I can that I’ve been doing things since October, since I’ve been involved.

Fanni’s being really modest here. So, Fanny came to Senate, which is the academic governing body of the university, last week and she actually
raised this issue on the floor of Senate where she talked about how the university isn’t doing enough to support and encourage younger students to come to the Open University. So, although students are getting younger for the Open University they’re not actively seeking them out. I think she did a great job on really calling out the OU on that this week. So, don’t be modest with what you’ve been doing.

Now Billy, faculty representation, what are you most looking forward to now you’ve been elected?

Billy

I think the important thing is the conversations that are going to happen, the chance to actually go out there and meet students, take on board what they’re saying, picking up conversations. We know this last while has been a bit tough; there have been loads of things happening. I think we need to go back to being students and take the conversation back there. So, actually meeting the people that I’m representing; but also working right across university, across faculties I think is really important. But as I say for me, I said that in my manifesto, is I really believe in community, so I want to start a new conversation taking us back to being students and then taking us forward again.

Nicky

So, it’s about a two-way conversation.

Billy

Yes.

Nicky

And you’re the middle person between students and people at the university making decisions?

Billy

Yes, all the reps. Part of my role obviously is to be that bridge between students and the university. So, what I have to do over the next couple of months is listen and learn. I need to listen to what’s being said and learn how to take that forward.

Nicky

Listen and learn – that’s a new motto. I like that one. Cath, now that you’ve had time to compose yourself from that very happy, joyful first question, we have been asking students over the weekend, and you heard us ask Mary, one thing about the OU that makes us mad, sad or glad. Could you share your mad, sad or glad things with us?

Cath

What makes us mad is when they don’t meet the student needs. Need I mention the word online delivery here? ((Applause))
Sad is one of the things that is not the OU’s fault in any respect whatever: it’s the external funding environment means that we don’t have so many students, and as a consequence the curriculum is being reduced a little bit. And I think that probably makes all of us sad. For me it means that there are a couple of courses that I’m particularly keen on and they’re going, which always seems a bit of a shame, doesn’t it?

And glad, I look at everybody here in this room and I hear all of the stories of people saying they didn’t believe they could graduate, as Sue did earlier, and people saying that they never had any confidence in themselves, and I see how much it’s changed. And I think isn’t that wonderful. ((Applause))

Nicky

Just to follow up on your sad moment, I think that was also Mary’s sad moment, wasn’t it?

Cath

I think it was.

Nicky

So, the fact that you have something in common already with the acting Vice Chancellor, can you talk a little bit about partnership and what good partnership would look like to you?

Cath

What I would like to see when the Students Association are working with the university is that we are genuinely regarded as equal partners; that it’s not a question of tick-box, oh look we’ve got a student in the room, we’ve consulted them. The question that our input is valued, that we’re regarded as full team members, that we are contributing uniquely and that the student perspective is seen as really, really adding something. I think there were some great examples out there of parts of the university working with students like that, and I’d like to see that happening across the board.

Nicky

And that’s something that you’ve experienced as STEM faculty rep?

Cath

Absolutely yes. I’ve been fortunate that because I have previous experience with societies I already had good contacts with some parts of the STEM faculty, and with some of them they very, very much do welcome that student input. So, I’ve seen how good it can be when it’s right.

Nicky

Kat, I’m going to come to you again. I’m going to ask you challenges that OU students face and what support a good community can help, how can a good community help students that are facing challenges?
Kat: I feel like firstly knowing the community is there. And I think this weekend has been a good point in that there are a lot of students to find out that there are clubs, there are societies and there are people that are there to help. So, getting the word out about the community is something and continuing that throughout the academic year and throughout the holidays as well.

Nicky: Could I just ask the audience, only if you feel comfortable, was there anybody who came to the conference for the first time that didn’t really feel there was much of a community for OU students and they were quite surprised by how much there was? Because I felt like that the first time I came to conference in 2012. Yeah. So, there’s a whole range of people obviously who don’t know that there’s a community for them.

Kat: Yeah, exactly. I hope people are going to go away feeling like they now know about this community and spread the word about the community.

Nicky: And that they’re part of it.

Kat: Yeah, absolutely.

Nicky: Fanni, I’ve a question for you about what you think makes the Open University Students Association unique? Because obviously it was part of your thinking to come to the OU in the first place. So, what makes us unique?

Fanni: That we do kind of factor that we do everything distance learning, we are not volunteering here; all the volunteers were involved, all the students were involved need to find these different ways. We all come from all of these different backgrounds and for some people to make it even to this conference, I thought I knew how diverse and how different we all were and how we could all come together as a community. Like last year if you’d told me that Steph, who’s one of my very good friends now, that I would have – I don’t know if I’m allowed to say her age – but she’s two and a half times my age, and I never thought I’d… ((Laughter and applause))

Cath: Yeah, same as me!

Fanni: So, I never thought I could be part of this really big community. And I’m really pleased I am.
Nicky  I thought that too when I started with the OU. I don’t think you’re unique in that way. Because the Open University has such a diverse student body and getting involved with the Students Association, you do meet people that you wouldn’t have met otherwise in your day-to-day life. And that’s been one of the wonderful experiences for me too.

Fanni  Can I share an experience?

Nicky  Yeah, sharing experience and finding common ground that you didn’t know was there before. I’m seeing a lot of people around the room who are nodding.

Fanni  I want to give you an example.

Nicky  Go ahead yeah, please.

Fanni  Okay. So, the first time I did a group activity sort of thing was revision weekend. And I went up to the bar about ten minutes after I’d arrived and there were quite a few people, there was Barbara, Peter, there were quite a few people sat there, and I felt really weird sitting there because the way they were talking about the association and the amount of knowledge everyone had I thought they were the senior team of the university. Then the next morning I realised that they were part of the volunteering team and that they’ve gone through the same path that I’m now trying to follow. And that was…

Nicky  So, first perceptions aren’t always the right ones, are they?

Fanni  Yeah.

Nicky  That’s a nice experience to hear about. Okay, I’ve a really big question to finish on. It’s for Cath. And you have a few minutes, so take your time. What do you want to be the main focus of the Students Association for the next two years?

Cath  I don’t think I can talk about one single focus. Our activities cover many strands and so they should: we have all the work in the community that Kat will take forward; we have all the student support work that Alison and Cherry will be leading on; we have our student voice work which I’m leaving till last, not because I think it’s the least important, but for me probably that’s one where I personally am particularly keen for us to develop where we are, to get that right within the heart of the university.
This ties in with the question Nicky asked me earlier about the partnerships.

Nicky Can you explain, Cath, for people who might not have heard that term before, student voice, what does that mean to you?

Cath That’s one of those slightly ambiguous terms isn’t it, but I think it probably means many things. And Sam in the audience you’re probably going to jump at me if I say this wrong now. Yes! I think it’s taking forward the student viewpoint, the student opinions, the student thoughts and needs into every aspect of our education. It is our university, and we would like them to remember that. ((Applause))

Nicky I’m trying to see if Sam can give us the thumbs up. Did she like that answer there? Yes, both thumbs up there, so absolutely. Just for those who don’t know, Sam’s a member of the staff team on the Students Association. She’s the head of student voice. And I just want to take this chance to say actually Sam has been an incredibly supportive person to me, has a wealth of knowledge, and I couldn’t have got through some of the meetings I’ve done this year without Sam. I can’t see your blushes but I can see you’re blowing me kisses so that’s nice. ((Applause)) Cath, do you think it’s a big challenge?

Cath Yes!

Nicky What’s going to be the most challenging thing?

Cath Ooh, I suspect I may not know that until I start to be absolutely honest. I think anyone in this role inevitably is going to have a really, really steep learning curve. I mean, I do feel very fortunate that obviously I’ve got you to talk to and other past presidents like Ruth as well who have said that they’re very happy to talk to me about everything, and that I’ve got a fantastic team that I’m working with. So, it’s all going to be a challenge, trying to do things like transition from my current role to the new one and make sure that my priorities aren’t just STEM anymore; seeing things on a broader scale. The fact that as incoming President things I say can be taken as Students Association policy so I have to be very careful and not quacking around the place in case I’m misinterpreted. But just getting to grips with everything.

But as I said, I suspect I’ll discover the real big challenge once I actually start. But I’m looking forward to the sort of support I’m sure I’ll be getting in dealing with those.
Nicky

Absolutely. And if there was one thing that you would like to say to everybody today who’s here, maybe people who are hearing about the Students Association for the first time, what would you like them to take away?

Cath

First of all thank you for coming, thank you for getting involved. And secondly, please, please keep talking to us. Mel mentioned earlier there will be a role that will be right for most people and will be incredibly fulfilling; even if you don’t want to take on a formal role. Talk to us if there’s an issue. Talk to us if there’s something good. We have forums, you’ll see us around on social media, please, please keep being in touch. We can’t do it without you.

Nicky

Absolutely, totally agree. ((Applause)) Thank you to our four panellists. Can I invite the entire incoming team up here so that we can take a group picture? ((Applause)) Central Executive Committee and Board of Trustees. ((Photographs taken and applause)) Thank you very much for our four incoming CEC members for coming to speak. Cath I don’t know how you’re coping with that costume on in this very, very, very warm room, but it looked like that was a big relief to take the hat off.

Okay, so the next thing I’d like to do is to invite Graham Rimmer to come down here. PLEXUS, our LGBT support group, have been doing a raffle over the course of the weekend and we’re going to draw the winners just now. Verity would you like to come and help? I think we’d like Verity to come up here too.

Graham

Yes, we’ve got a fragile Chair of PLEXUS here this morning.

Verity

So, I’ll pick them and you can read.

Billy

Okay. I’m doing nothing; I’m just holding the bucket.

Nicky

You’re going to read out the names.

Verity

So, I’m reading out the names. I’d better read my own.

Billy

These are numbers.

Verity

Oh, it’s numbers.

Nicky

Have you not got the names on the back?
Billy    I have.

Verity    Oh right, this is the first winner, the lucky number 41, Zana Saunders.

Nicky    So, if Zana can you just give us a wave but you don’t need to come down. Just give us a wave. ((Applause))

Verity    Well done Zana.

Nicky    Make sure that you come and see us afterwards and we can arrange the prize.

Verity    I’m just reading.

Graham    Oh, you’re reading, okay. Four and then we’ve got an online delegate one as well.

Verity    All right lucky number 50, Grace Lolly. Grace? No?

Nicky    Might not be here so we’ll hold that and we’ll let her know online.

Verity    Well done Grace. Lucky number 53 Maureen Winbright. Yay Maureen well done! ((Applause)) Is it me?

Nicky    It’s not Verity.

Verity    Fix. All right, lucky number 48, Christopher Witton, or it could be Willow, but I think it’s Witton. Christopher either way, it’s definitely Christopher. Christopher?

Nicky    No.

Verity    We’ll do that online.

Graham    Is Sheila in the room or has she gone home?

F    No, she’s not. There are a lot of people outside.

Graham    Oh okay. I just want to say thanks to Sheila for making them.

Verity    Yes, Sheila made them and they are actually amazing. So, congratulations to all the winders. They are very, very special.
Graham: Come and see us at the end. ((Applause))

Nicky: The next draw we have to do is the treasure map. Did people participate in this treasure map hunt thing? Oh, it was too hard Melanie, was it? Okay. Beth, do you want to bring that over? Cath, do you want to volunteer to pick the names out? Okay, so we need three winners here.

Cath: Okay, here comes the first one.

Nicky: Rohema? Excellent. So you can see us afterwards. ((Applause)) Sula O’Duffy. Well done. ((Applause)) Elizabeth Wagga. Melanie is giving you a really, really, really good round of applause there because she thought it was really hard. Well done for everyone who managed to complete that and we can arrange your prizes afterwards.

Okay, so we’re right on schedule. This almost never happens to me; that’s quite amazing. So, I want to take the chance to share some closing remarks about conference and to share a few thank you’s for people who have contributed a lot to make this weekend happen. And then we’ll move on and I’ll hand over to Peter who’s going to lead us in song.

So, I came to conference for 2012 for the first time and it was my introduction really to the Students Association. And just up there at this side of the conference was where I sat, just right against the wall and I didn’t for a million years imagine that one day I would be standing up here being Student Association President. It has been an incredibly overwhelming journey to get here for me. I just want very briefly to share a little bit about myself and my story because it goes a long way to thanking the people who have supported me when I first came in 2012.

At that point in my life I wasn’t in work and I was quite ill. I have a medical condition that kept me at home and I was really, really isolated. The Student Association allowed me to get out and meet people that I just hadn’t been doing. At that point I didn’t think I’d ever have a career, I probably didn’t think I’d ever have a job again. I was doubtful as to whether or not I would actually finish my degree because I’d been trying to do it for such a long, long time. And coming to that first conference gave me a spark to get more involved.

So I’m saying that now because there might be people sitting in this room now who in two years or in four years or in six years’ time could be the person who’s standing up here delivering this speech because the Student Association gives you so much if you give a little bit to it. It’s so rewarding.
And the people who have helped me to get to this stage are people who are in this room, other students, staff members in the Student Association.

And I particularly want to thank Rob and Wendy who have been incredibly supportive to me over the last two years in particular. They are two people who give so much to the Students Association and a lot of people don’t know just the lengths that they go to. Rob in particular personally would be the first person to phone me and say, “Is everything okay? How are you doing? Have you any issues?” And that kind of personal support is such a big part of the role that staff play here, and all the volunteers will agree that we have those really special relationships with staff too.

So I’d just like everybody here to take a moment to thank our staff team for what they do for the Students Association, for reps and ultimately for OU students. They’re as passionate about OU students as we are as reps and it’s really important that they’re recognised for that, so thank you so much. ((applause))

There’s a member of staff here today, Amy. Where’s Amy? Amy, she’s trying to hide in the corner. So Amy Ferguson, our Conference Project Manager, has been with the Association for a short time and Amy’s role has been to coordinate all of the staff conference teams, to support the Conference Steering Committee and turn our sometimes very wacky and weird ideas into something really workable, and I think Amy has done an absolutely wonderful job of putting conference together and of supporting all of the staff to make this what it is today.

So Amy is the glue that has held this whole operation together and she works absolutely diligently. She solves every problem that you can possibly think of. There’s no task that is too big or too small for Amy to look at and support us with. She’s been a really good negotiator all of the way through conference. This event takes so much planning to happen. There are conversations that are happening with people across the university, arranging keynote speakers to come here, supporting volunteers. It’s a phenomenal amount of work and I would just like to call Amy up here, we have a small gift as a token of our appreciation for everything that you have done. ((applause))

Amy

Just really quickly, thank you so much, it really is the help of the staff and all the students that make it worth it and put all of their effort into it. So thank you so much. ((applause))
Nicky

I imagined you were going to say something like that, so modest as ever. Conference Steering Committee. Conference Steering Committee is a group of students who get together and set the agenda and the ideas and decide what’s going to happen here at conference.

Can I see, if they’re able to or willing to, can I see Conference Steering Committee raise their hands and let people know who they are? Have Conference Steering Committee had a good time? So for us it started back in January, so we’re a group of students who are made up of people who are currently on the Central Executive Committee, and students from the wider student body who saw the role advertised and applied for the opportunity to come here.

Malika’s welling up over here, I haven’t even said anything too emotional yet and Malika’s tears are starting to flow. Conference Steering Committee has just been an absolute joy for me to work on, it’s been a real highlight of my time in the Association. We all know how important conference is and what difference this makes to students so we really do love getting involved, but the members of that committee have put in so many hours of discussions as well, deciding very things like, you know, should we have a treasure hunt, you know, things like that.

They don’t come out of the air, the ideas that students have, they get discussed and they take those forward to much bigger things, like setting the agenda and creating the documents for the motions and the amendments yesterday. Largely that work was undertaken by Peter. So there’s a phenomenal amount of work that they put in and I would really like people to show their appreciation for the volunteers on that committee. ((applause))

OU staff. Where are they? There’s some of them over here. So there’s a lot of Open University staff who support us, so all of our technicians who make the sound happen, the people who are up here waving at us, making sure that the technology is working. The catering team, who by the way opened the bar especially for us. ((applause)) All of the people who make this happen. The people who set up the rooms, who do all this phenomenal work, we have to recognise their role as well, and so we’d extend our thanks to the Open University.

Let me just check my list and make sure I’ve got everybody. So keynote speakers. I’m sure everybody agrees Mary Kellett yesterday morning and Mary Curnock Cook were absolutely inspirational and it was so wonderful to have the opportunity to ask questions of Mary. And when I talked to her
initially about this and what it would look like the first thing she told me was, “I don’t want to stand up here and talk and do a big PowerPoint presentation, I want to hear what students are thinking and give them the chance to speak.” And I think that really came across yesterday.

We probably could have spent hours with both of them, and sadly, there just isn’t enough time in the day to do all of that. So thank you very much to the two Mary’s, as we call them, yesterday for joining us. Give them a round of applause. ((applause))

We also had 80 volunteers here as conference delegates, so conference delegates received a request to join and help make conference happen. So out of all of the delegates are 80 people who helped out in various ways over the weekend, so we had conference makers like meet and great, we had business champions, and a whole host of roles. So everybody who took part in some way as a conference volunteer can you raise your hand or give an indication of what you did? Excellent. So a big round of applause for everybody’s contribution. ((applause))

And finally I want to thank the delegates to conference because you have made it absolutely an amazing weekend, so that goes to the delegates who are here in Milton Keynes and to those people who are online as our digital delegates. It isn’t conference without students and we’re just overjoyed and overwhelmed by the positive feedback that we’ve already had. And I really hope people take that positivity away from here and go home with it and remember it when you’re having those horrible moments and you think I can’t do this, just like Mary was talking about yesterday. Remember that there’s hundreds of other OU students that feel exactly the same as you do and you can do it. So that’s my take home request for everybody in this room.

And that’s really all I want to say at this point. I can see Peter is getting set up. I want to introduce Peter. Peter Bell is one of our trustees and he came to conference steering committee with an idea…

Rob  Do that. We have got one more thank you that we want to make sure as well. So, conference, can we just recognise Nicky Simpson as President please? Can you give her a massive round of applause? ((applause)) So conference, as I’m sure many of you know, Nicky has been an absolutely fantastic president. She has worked tirelessly and selflessly on behalf of the Association and on behalf of all of you as OU students everywhere. This has been a really, really difficult term.
Many of the other members of the Central Executive Committee will tell you that, they have not had an easy experience all the way through, there has been lots of difficulties to fight their way through. Nicky has been a sterling leader all the way through that. She took on the role in really difficult circumstances, she dealt with all the challenges she needed to take forward and she’s done all the amazing things that we celebrated yesterday that you saw in the video and that we’ve heard about today as well. So she’s been absolutely fantastic on all of those fronts.

Nicky’s very good at giving praise and credit to others and sometimes less so to accept it herself in terms of what she’s actually capable of and what’s she done and how she’s grown in this role during the last 12 months and beyond. She’s going to be hugely missed by everyone that’s come into contact with her in the role. And as we move forward it’s going to be really exciting times and all the other things, but we’re also going to miss those that we lose, those that come towards the end of their terms. So thank you also to those people as well.

But thank you, Nicky, for all that you’ve done and we wish you all the very best for what you go on to do next. And we’ve got a little gift to say thank you. ((applause))

Nicky

Rob’s made me a wee bit emotional now so I’m going to find it hard to do the next bit that I was going to do. So I’ll go back to where I was. So I was just about to introduce Peter. Peter Bell is a trustee in the Student Association and some of us were here yesterday as we did the pop up choir activity. Peter came to steering committee and made a suggestion that a choir that he’s a member of and works with called Harmonious, which has been established now for just a few months.

It’s a community choir bringing people together. He suggested that we could have a pop up choir here at conference and actually create our own version, an OU students pop up choir, and what I planned to do was actually invite the CEC up on stage, the current CEC, and then I was going to give my thanks to the CEC. And I was being a wee bit cheeky, I was going to try and invite them up on stage and then have them stay on stage so that they would be part of the singing experience. Because what Peter really needs is some people to demonstrate to everybody else here just how this next exercise would work.

So while our current CEC hopefully are willing to come up here I can share my thanks for what they have done, just as you’re assembling. I’m not seeing a lot of movement.
Peter  Don’t worry, this is supposed to be a therapeutic, fun event. So only if you’re happy to come up here, you don’t have to join us.

Nicky  The Board of Trustees are also welcome to join us. And Peter, can I just say a few words then before we go into your piece?

Peter  Of course.

Nicky  So Rob’s already said, and people here know this team of people behind me have had a really difficult task over the last two years. The university has created this massive change programme that has absolutely changed how we need to work and we have had to work at such a pace. So of all the people here standing behind me every one of them has put in a phenomenal amount of hours attending meetings, representing student views, on really, really difficult issues. And one of the challenging things about it for us is that it’s very, very hard to share with the student body quite what that’s like and quite what those experiences are like. It’s a hugely committed role for people to take on, and they have to do a lot of this without being able to talk to the wider student body about what feedback they’re giving to the university, because the university expects us to maintain a certain level of confidentiality about what we’re discussing.

And the reality of that is it’s quite a harsh personal reality. It has consequences for students not being able to fully engage in all of those processes but it also has consequences for us because it means that people don’t know what this team have achieved. And I can never tell you what this team have achieved. I can never tell you the type of ideas that the university were proposing two years ago, and a year ago when the transformation was first coming into being. But every single one of these people up here has had conversations that have absolutely changed what has happened in the university. And if people in the audience think that the ideas that are being proposed now aren’t to our liking, if you heard what they were a year ago you would have been absolutely terrified.

And that’s really, really difficult, so I just want to applaud everybody for the massive efforts that they’ve had in shaping those discussions and changing things and getting us to where we are now. I really sincerely hope that Cath coming in as president is going to have a really positive relationship with the university. We have spent a lot of time trying to open doors within the last year and I think finally they are open to us and I really, really am optimistic about what can be achieved and how the Student Association can take student issues forward. I know it’s going to be a really, really challenging time, Cath, for you taking everybody else forward,
but I also know that the people here on the stage who aren’t continuing in roles are still going to be around supporting people.

I certainly had that with the previous team and other people who’d held different roles and it’ll be the same for those now here going on and supporting the next team coming in. So please everybody show your absolute support and appreciation for all the massive amount of work that has gone in. I can see it written over their faces, you know, everybody’s just standing here with this sense of well, it’s awe in some ways isn’t it…

F    It’s fear that we’ve got to sing.

Nicky  Fear that they have to sing. But they really have, and made my time as I attempt to navigate through all of this all that easier. It’s so much more easier when you have a supportive team behind you. So thank you very much to all of you from me and thank you from everybody here.  
 ((applause)) That was a little bit cheeky wasn’t it, getting you on stage. So if you feel comfortable to stay I can say Peter will make this a really enjoyable experience. People who took part in the pop up choir yesterday, Peter, are we inviting them also to come and join us up here?

Peter    Yes, if you want to there’s no problem, or if you want to stay in your seats. And in fact, anybody up on the stage, if you’d be more comfortable sat down then please. So this, for me, it’s a bit of a challenge. I joined the Open University, I think I did my first course in 1989, but I haven’t been studying until about 2010 I started studying again, and I’m still studying the same course. We’ll hand the words out, don’t worry. Can we not hand them out just for a second, because we’re actually going to do some…? So don’t hand the words out yet please, wait until instructed. So what we did yesterday was we did some physical warm up. Now I hadn’t sung in a choir until 12 weeks ago and I’ve led a choir or something like this, I’ve only done it nine times before, so this is the tenth time. So bear with me.

What we do before we start singing is actually try and exercise our bodies a bit, just to relax. So if you want to join in what we’re going to do is ask you, if you want to, stand up and we’re just going to do some very gentle exercise just to start. So anybody that’s going to sing, if you want to try, just stand up as we’ve done here. And so just shake a leg, shake another leg. Just relax. And if you’ve got some space around you just gently move the body. And you’re welcome just to sit and watch the choir. And we’re just going to roll then shoulders back, just roll them. And then roll forwards. Now if you just put your hands by your side, clench your fists and just put your shoulders up to your ears. And one of the things about
singing is you have to remember to breathe. So if you breathe in, count to four. That's probably about four by now, and then just relax. And we'll do that one more time. Clench your fists. Up to your ears. And if anything hurts don't do it. Breathe in, and relax.

What's the next bit? Oh yes. Arms in the air. Clasp your hands together and don't go up on your toes or anything like that but just ease up, we're just trying to open the chest muscles up so we're breathing. And I always say, bend to your left, and then bend to the other left. ((laughter)) And straighten up again. Breathe in. Stretch. And relax.

So, what we're trying to do is we're trying to relax the muscles, because when you're singing you want just to be open. So shoulders back and we're breathing into the stomach. So breathing into here, into this part of the body. So just try that, just breathing in, keeping your shoulders relaxed, and breathe out. And what we're going to do in a second as well, we'll just relax all the muscles around the face, because to sing you've got this cavity in here which is where the sound comes from. So if you just tap on your head. Believe you me there is some scientific background to this, I've no idea what it is, but it's fun anyway. On to your forehead and your eyebrows, down the side of the face, across your chin. And then here, just on the side, you've got the pivot point where your jaw pivots. So just feel it and just open the jaw up and down.

And then the bit everybody loves is we're going to stick our tongues out to the left, to the right, up, down, and put it back in again. Now I have to tell you that because when I'm doing it you won't understand a word I say. So are you ready? Out. ((makes noises)) And in. And I always have to wipe my mouth after that. And then as if you're chewing a toffee, just try and ((makes noise)).

F The best thing you've said all day.

Peter So what we're trying to do here is, all the muscles that are involved in singing, we're trying to just relax them and exercise them and get them ready. So now we'll just do some breathing. So you take a breath in, and then just breathe out. And remember we're trying to keep the shoulders back, so actually you can always put your hands behind your back. Trying to keep the shoulders back, chest open. Breathe in. And when you breathe out, just go ah ((exhales)). Say it like you mean it. Ah.

Shall we do the counting exercise do you reckon? Do you reckon we're up to it? So what we're going to do is we're going to go one. One two one.
One, two three two one. Okay? Three four. One. One two one. One two three two, one. One two three four three four three two one. Mathematicians. One two three four five four three two one. One two three four five six five four three two one. One two three four five six seven six five four three two one. From the top. Eight. Eight seven eight. Eight seven six seven eight. Eight seven six five six seven eight. Eight seven six five four three four five six seven eight. Eight seven six five four three two four five six seven eight. Eight seven six five four three two one two three four five six seven eight. ((applause)) So you should all now be warmed up.

So we sang something called Banaha and we've got some song sheets so if we can just hand round the song sheets for Banaha to everybody, and while that's being handed round just concentrate on your breathing because singing is all about breathing. And could I have a copy as well please? Thank you very much. Okay, now this can be sung as a round but we're not going to do that, we're just going to do this maybe a couple of times through. And this is a Congolese folk song and the translation of the word means something about a banana in a cocked hat or aunt's hat or something. But we won't worry about that, we'll just sing it. So it goes, ((singing)). ((applause))

M  What's the meaning of the words?

Peter  The meaning? It's something about a banana into an aunt's hat, but you'll have to ask somebody from the Congo to explain. So we've got another song we'd like to try and it's Sway, which I think it's Dean Martin. And you'll all know the song, the words to Sway, but actually this morning before breakfast I got up and I wrote some new words. And so if you could hand them round. So you probably know this song, it's 'When marimba rhythms start to play, dance with me, make me sway'. So that's the tune. And on the other side we've got the OU Study Song. So this is a premiere of the OU Study Song. We'll give it a try. Now the thing about this is of course you've never seen these words before so it's going to be fun. Yeah? I sang it in the bath this morning and it seems to work. We'll find out when we actually do it. So it's the OU Study Song on the back of Sway by Dean Martin, so we're doing it to that tune. ((music)) ((applause))

Now lunch obviously is waiting, so rather than have you wait for lunch if you turn over to the other side you'll find the original words and I'll ask them to put the music up just slightly louder, I'll replay that and you can
sing as we process to lunch. Thank you conference for giving me this opportunity.