Welcome to your Students Association magazine

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S P R I N G  2 0 1 8

Conference 2018
Countdown to the biggest event of the year!

President Speech
Find out what your President had to say on stage

Incorporation
What could it mean for the Students Association?

University Mental Health Day
Find out what's going on!

The NSS
National Students Survey: what is it and who can take part?

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Highlights from our Freshers Fortnight back in January

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Welcome to this edition of OU Students magazine…

It’s March already?!

Welcome back to OU Students magazine – we’re excited to catch you up with all the great work that’s gone on over the last month… and share a sneak peek at upcoming projects!

In this edition we look at some of the recent work to get to the bottom of what the ‘OU redesign’ really means for students, and how we’ll ensure students have a say on the future of their university. Check out Association President Nicola Simpson’s fantastic speech on the matter on page 24. Along the same vein, we’ve got some brilliant recaps of both our Student Voice Symposium and induction day for Central Committee Representatives from page 20.

We also take a closer look at the National Student Survey – what it is, who is asked to fill it in, and most importantly what is done with your feedback. Find the article on page 16. Make sure to have a look at the Conference article on page 4 for more information on our upcoming event, and how to register your interest.

We hope you enjoy this edition!

All the best,

The Editorial team

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COUNTDOWN TO

CONFERENCE

2018

22 – 24 June
Open University Campus
Milton Keynes
Just what is ‘Conference’ anyway?

Every two years the OU Students Association organises Conference, the biggest event in its schedule. Part annual general meeting, part jamboree, it offers students the best opportunity to see the workings of the Students Association, meet their peers and most importantly get onto campus.

Conference is programmed to reflect the changing of the guard, it is where the new Students Association leadership team are anointed, debates are held and important votes are cast shaping the future of the organisation for the years ahead. It is the very proof that the OU Students Association is run for students by students.

There is representation at Conference by many of the Association’s societies, giving demonstrations and talks, showing off their great work, trips, socials and study sessions they run and bids to recruit new members.

The Open University also gets a look-in with senior staff and faculty representatives invited to speak, give presentations and run workshops.

Conference is a great time for students to meet and share the common experiences that all distance learners face and above all, it’s a time to socialise. It wouldn’t be Conference without a dance and a bit of fun.

As you can imagine, bringing 400 students to Milton Keynes from all over the UK, Europe and the world can sometimes seem like a logistical nightmare, but one that is well worth it. Students are encouraged to come to Conference from as diverse locations and backgrounds as possible, this enables the Association to reflect the massive breadth of diversity among the student populous. There’s also a full programme of events made available online for students attending Conference from the comfort of their own home.

With change in the air across the University Conference 2018 looks to be the liveliest yet - why not get involved?

Register interest

Sign up to the interested in Conference list to be one of the first to know information about the event!

Best overheard #OUstudent comment: ‘Shall I write my assignment or just chill in front of the TV?’
A look back at what went on during Freshers Fortnight 2018...

From 22 January to 2 February we celebrated all things OU with our first Freshers Fortnight of 2018! Freshers is all about settling in as an OU student, finding out more about the University, the Association and what support and activities you can access and get involved in during your studies.

It’s also a great opportunity to meet and talk with other OU students who are going through the same process as you, as well as look for useful pointers, study skills and tips!

OU students new and returning took part in a variety of events and activities both online and at The Open University campus in Milton Keynes.

Don’t worry if you missed any parts of Freshers Fortnight, we’ve included highlights from the two weeks, as well as links to our live events so can watch them again.

Online chats

The OU Students Association held a number of Facebook chats throughout Freshers Fortnight, hosted by Association staff and student volunteers.

These are great events for new and returning students alike to find out more about the Association, and a good opportunity to chat with our OU students.

The chats might be over but you can still see what was talked about by checking out the links on our facebook page:

- Welcome to the OU Students Association
- Societies Freshers Fair
- OU Students Association Support Chat
- OU Students Association Groups Chat

Watch it back

Throughout Freshers we had students out and about around campus. See what our students got up to when we caught them in front of the camera...

What is the OU Students Association?

Watch student volunteers Anca Seaton and Steph Stubbins on Student Hub Live.

An introduction to the Association’s Groups

Watch Disabled Students Group Chair, Sheila Cameron, and staff officer Sammi Wright on Student Hub Live.

Best overheard #OUstudent comment: 'Just believe that you can do it and you will'
The Freshers Fornight schedule was jam packed with a number of Association events going on throughout the fortnight.

You can watch these events back, but also find out about them later in the magazine...

Live Events

From the moment the gong was struck it was an exciting and tense evening for everyone involved, the staff team and 2017 team put up a great fight but in the end the University Challenge 2018 student team were crowned the winners of the warm-up event.

The 2018 student team wowed everyone with their knowledge on some peculiar subjects. Who would have thought that the 2018 student team would be such experts on ice-skating?

University Challenge warm-up event

Could you have taken on the 2018 student team? Well here are a few questions that quiz master, Monica Grady, asked the teams on the night. Let us know how you got on by hashtagging #OUstudents.

Q1) Similar to Spanish paella, which Creole dish has a Louisiana French name that is derived from the Provencal word for ‘chicken and rice stew’?

Q2) You can have two per cent either way. The University Boat Race course of 4 miles 375 yards represents what percentage of a standard marathon race?

Q3) Baal, man Equals man, Mother Courage and Her Children and The Life of Galileo are works by which playwright, born in Bavaria in 1898?

Fingers on buzzers!

Test yourself with more University Challenge questions by watching our warm-up event, and see how you fair against the teams!

Best overheard #OUstudent comment: ‘just relax... you have plenty of time...!’
Prize draws

We asked OU students throughout Freshers two questions depending on whether they were #new2OU or #back2OU for a chance to win an OU Students Association bundle.

Here are some of your lovely answers below, including winners Cinnomen McGuigan and Wendy Philips:

Tell us how you’re getting ready to start your studies at the OU with #new2OU

It’s all new and exciting, interested in hearing from any fellow newbies, looking for possible study buddy’s #new2OU

Getting ready to start studies by turning our little spare room into a study space and putting all of my books and laptop into a comfy little set up for cozy, colourful learning! #new2OU

Started to look around the student home website and library so it’s not so daunting when my module starts! #new2OU!

Tutorials are booked, desk is set up, got all the books... ready and raring to go! #new2OU!

Preparing by doing online research into online courses and finding the best tips for studying, as well as writing down all my due dates and reading the course materials. #new2OU!

Tell us what one thing you couldn’t have lived without during your OU journey so far with #back2OU

#PostItNotes without a doubt, the most used items in any of my OU degrees #back2OU

Definitely chocolate and stationery #back2OU

For me it would be the wonderful, awesome, student-centred staff tutors. They are truly saints and hugely undervalued. #back2OU

My fellow OU students! Their support is amazing! It’s like an exclusive club, where only they know exactly what you’re going through and how badly you want to achieve your goals. #back2OU

Couldn’t have lived without my workspace. I’m learning all about me and my study area, so have become very organised and it’s all with much gratitude to The Open University. Thank you! #back2OU

Prize draws

Best overheard OU student comment: ‘The essential study aid today is my onesie #freezing’
Governance befitting for today

What is incorporation and why are we talking about it?
At the OU Students Association, we are currently looking into the best way of structuring our organisation to make it secure, easy to run well and best suited to meet the current and future needs of our members. Currently, we are classified as an unincorporated charity. This means that the Association is properly recognised by the Charity Commission as a charity with a set of charitable objectives as set out in our Constitution and Bye-laws.

It also means that we must have a set of Trustees whose collective and individual responsibility is to ensure that the Association is run in line with its charitable objectives, manages its finances well, operates under its agreed Constitution and Bye-Laws, and complies with all relevant statutory obligations and regulatory requirements.

However, in fulfilling the role of Trustee of the OU Students Association, each Trustee, strictly speaking in law: -

- has personal responsibility for the debts and liabilities of the Association;
- has a share in the legal title to the Association’s Assets;
- is named in contractual documentation (e.g. employment contracts) of the Association.
- can be sued in the event of any litigation against the Association;

We do not feel that this is an appropriate way for our Association to be set up; in particular, it does not seem fair on our Trustees (most of whom are elected students). Particularly in light of our recent growth as an organisation representing all OU students it would seem much more sensible for us to exist as a legal entity in our own right. We are therefore looking to change our Governance vehicle (setup) to something more suitable and relevant to our needs, bearing in mind that it is important for us to retain our charitable status.

We have taken appropriate external legal advice and have concluded that the best way to do this is for the Association to incorporate – i.e. to form a Charitable Company Limited by Guarantee (CLG).

Because this is a legal entity in its own right, it can assume all the responsibilities that currently rest with each individual Trustee, so avoiding the personal risk to them as individuals. This structure is fully recognised by the Charity Commission as being suitable for non-profit organisations like our Association.

Profit-making limited companies have shareholders; the equivalent for a non-profit organisation like us would be Guarantors. The role of these “Guarantors” is broadly equivalent to the role of our current Trustees; they “guarantee” that the Association follows its charitable objectives and its Constitution and Bye laws but without the threat of any personal liability except in the case of negligence or failing to follow regulatory requirements. We intend that the Guarantors would be selected in the same way as our current Trustees – a combination of elected students and appointed externals, chosen for their specific expertise.

The OU Students Association would still continue to have all students as the members of the Students Association, and all students’ rights will be completely unaffected by this change. All students will still be able to stand for election for Students Association roles, to volunteer, to vote in elections and to be represented and supported by us.

We believe this new structure for the Association provides enhanced clarity on responsibility and accountability, is completely transparent, statutorily regulated and is fit for our purpose in 2018 and beyond. The proposed change will be brought to Conference in June. Students attending Conference (whether face to face or online) will be able to vote on whether they approve this change.

In the meantime, if you have any questions or comments we'd like to hear from you at oussa-general-manager@open.ac.uk. Visit www.oustudents.com/incorporation for more information - we'll be adding to this page as we receive feedback.

Best overheard #OUstudent comment: ‘Use your lucky pen - then I'm sure everything will be just fine!’
Late last year, the Department for Education conducted a consultation on behalf of the Office for Students, the new regulatory body for Higher Education in England. While the Students Association always submits formal responses to government consultations, we decided that now – a time of radical change in the Higher Education Sector – was the time to offer something more impactful, and introduce the Association, and our students, to the new Office for Students team. We wanted to show the Office for Students and the government how important part-time and distance education is, both to our students, and to the wider community. And so the ‘We are #OUstudents’ campaign was born!

Working alongside students, we created a short video to submit as part of our alternative consultation response, offering the government some insight into the life of an OU student.

As we know, no OU story is the same - we are a vast and diverse community. Our video is a great example of this, and we urge you to watch it and share your story with us.

On Tuesday, 23 January, the OU Students Association President, Nicola Simpson, held a roundtable event at the OU Office in Camden alongside Nicola Dandridge, the Office for Students Chief Executive.

12 students attended this meeting, including some new Degree Apprentices and postgraduate students, to share their study stories with Nicola. This was the first time Nicola had met with any distance learners, and she was inspired to hear their stories, and of how they came to study with the OU parents and carers, students with disabilities, students looking to change career-path, students who have to, or chose to work whilst studying.

We know that there are many more stories to tell and we believe it is important that they are heard.

With our biennial conference fast approaching, the Students Association Steering Committee has decided to adopt the ‘We are #OUstudents’ campaign as the theme for conference this year, where we hope to build on this campaign and strengthen our collective voice as part-time, distance learners in order to protect this alternative form of learning.

Watch the video ...on our website.

Best overheard #OUstudent comment: ‘I should be studying, but why can I not stop eating?’
[An] email landed in my inbox informing us of the fact that the OU Students Association was looking for new radio hosts. As a now ‘seasoned’ commentator on my local radio, I felt this was too good of an opportunity to miss! We had to fill in an application form detailing why we felt we would be right for this volunteering role, along with sending an audio recording to give the panel of flavour of what they could expect. I remember feeling excited and nervous at the same time. I knew the competition was going to be tough, but one of my motto being ‘if you never try, you’ll never know’, I just had to go for it.

To my delight and surprise, I was selected and subsequently invited to a day’s training on campus in Milton Keynes in May. The room was full of new recruits and the atmosphere was jovial throughout the day connecting and getting more of an understanding of what we had let ourselves in for. We also had an inspiring talk by Freelance broadcast journalist Adam Lindsay who shared valuable tips of the trade with us. This along with a very interesting exchange with him enabled me to see the role of hosting with a much more professional perspective than I had envisaged before coming along.

Following the training, the team of gurus at the Students Association office gave us access to our very own online forum where we exchange regularly and discuss things such as content, show dates, general chat and anything to do with STUDIO. The level of commitment expected is according to what each of us can do but if my memory serves me right (which is not a given thing these days!), each host has to commit to do a couple of shows a year. I thought I would be able to achieve that, considering that I have to juggle full time work in a school, family life as a mother of two and my own study now at level 3.

The shows are generally on a Friday night and we start broadcasting live at 7pm with a finish time of 8:30pm. This gives me time to drive down straight after work from Norfolk. We generally need to arrive around 6 pm to be able to have a pre-show briefing and a bite to eat. The Association makes sure students aren’t out of pocket by covering some expenses - including overnight accommodation for those travelling long distances (which many of us do!). You really couldn’t ask for more!

Being part of the student radio team is an amazing thing. We come up with all the content, exchange ideas and support each others. I was honoured to hosts on the first two shows with the new team and I genuinely feel that we have a fabulous chemistry which makes hosting the show a very organic and natural thing. What you hear is what it is like between us student hosts and the team of gurus organising us – who also deserve a big shout out for being so amazing behind the scenes: a common passion for talking about topics that matter to our student community, broad and diverse life experiences and a great sense of humour. All of these things unite us and above all, I feel that we share a common sense of understanding that it is okay not to be perfect.

To sum up, all the above makes the experience hosting and interacting with our student community a very special privilege and I couldn’t be more honoured to be part of such a great team. I look forward to collaborating a lot more with my fellow hosts and our Student Association staff. Finally, I can’t wait to engage with you all more and more in the future. Thank you all for listening to us for we wouldn’t be able to have the honour to host without you!

Malika Steed
STUDIO radio host
As I stood at the bottom of the steps gazing up at the imposing building I began to regret bringing so many pairs of shoes. The sunshine glanced off the portico and columns above as I began the steep climb, bumping my heavy suitcase on each step. Reaching the front door I took a much-needed deep breath, squared my shoulders and pressed the doorbell.

The British School at Rome (BSR) was established in 1901 to facilitate research in archaeology and Italian studies. Each year the BSR holds an undergraduate summer school to give second year students of classics, art history and archaeology the opportunity to learn about the history, topography and culture of ancient Rome. Spread over twelve days the programme gives an intensive view of the monuments, sites and museums of the city. I’d read about the BSR while studying on the A276 course Classical Latin: the language of Ancient Rome and after encouragement from my wonderful tutor, decided to apply for the summer school. Being a mature student and studying with The Open University, I was somewhat different from the usual applicant, but put my reservations...
aside and took a chance.

If you are in any doubt about applying, I heartily encourage you to do so. The short essay gave me scope to explain why I wanted to attend and how passionate I am about Roman history, and while it remains a mystery as to what exactly my tutor (thanks again!) put in my academic reference – it resulted in an email offering me a place and the chance of a lifetime.

After unpacking and settling in the students and staff met in the courtyard for afternoon tea – the BSR is quintessentially British by name and by nature! – followed by an introductory lecture setting out the programme for the next twelve days. The course is incredibly intense and requires quite a lot of physical exertion, and the weather in early September in Rome can be unforgiving. Led commendably by Dr Robert Coates-Stephens and Dr Ed Bisham, we quickly fell into a routine. Each evening there was a lecture detailing the theme for the following day – ‘Tiber’, ‘Cities of the Dead and Living’, ‘Panis et Circenses’ (Bread and Circuses) for example – leaving immediately after breakfast at around 8.15am. This was to be no gentle guided tour.

It is impossible to put into words quite how much ground we covered and the incredible sights we saw. One of the remarkable points about the summer school is the access that being a student at the BSR affords; we were given special permits to sites that people don’t normally get to see, including the Curia Julia in the Forum. In imagining the secrets the building has borne witness to, the feet that trod its mosaic floors, the speeches and intrigue that took place – I found tears rolling down my face. There was so much information that I still have yet to process it all – we learned about Mithraeums, walked the Appian Way, experienced rush hour on the Roman subway, listened to a lecture from an Italian archaeologist, wore hard hats a-plenty, marvelled and dreamed.

Other highlights included the amphorae mound of Monte Testaccio, the houses of Livia and Augustus where the painted colours and patterns on the walls remain luminous, a daytrip to Ostia Antica and a visit to Nero’s ‘golden palace’ Domus Aurea – where we emerged blinking in the bright sunshine from the subterranean wonders. Even a trip to Tivoli to see the remains of Hadrian’s villa and gardens – cut short by what can only be described as a biblical deluge of rain – became an experience we bonded over. The steep streets turned into rivers, and after huddling with sixteen others under a garage archway (Vespa included) we waded through ankle-deep water to the other side of town. I have never been as drenched in my life, but by the evening we were dry, fed and laughing at an unforgettable experience.

A word of thanks to my fellow students: I was incredibly nervous that they might think I was old or weird, but each one was welcoming, friendly and interested, and I have made some friends for life – without them it would not have been such an amazing adventure.

The last day came all too quickly and as well as visiting other sites we returned to the Forum Romanum. I stood on the worn pavement where Cicero, Julius Caesar, Augustus had walked and looked down at my shoes, caked in the dust and grime of Rome, streaked where the dye had run in Tivoli and faded by the sun. My footprints would forever mingle with those of the past, and Rome’s imprint would be forever on my heart.

Frances Breen
OU student
The National Student Survey

What is the NSS?

The NSS is a survey of mainly final-year undergraduates which aims to gather opinion about their experience of their course and what it’s been like to study at their institution in general. There are 27 questions relating to eight aspects of the learning experience, including teaching quality, assessment and feedback, organisation and management, and student voice. The survey is an important part of the academic calendar as its results feed into elements of public university 'league tables', and Universities use their results to influence their focus for the year ahead.

Using the results

What are the issues at hand? Are they being reported consistently by a substantial number of students, or is the issue something more specific or personal? Are there differences in feedback between faculties? How has satisfaction changed since last year?

Consider the solutions

What could be done to improve the score(s)? Is it something simple to overcome or not? What else has happened this year that could have influenced the result?

Instigate the changes

Think about the best way to bring this up in your Committee Meeting. Who do you need to build a relationship with in order to instigate conversation about resolving the issue? How would you go about collecting more detailed information?
Every year the National Student Survey asks university students about their experience studying at their institution. So, what does the survey involve? How can you have your say? And how can you still ensure the student voice is heard even if you’re not eligible to complete the survey this time around?

**What is the Survey all about?**

The National Student Survey is a nationwide survey which aims to gather opinion about students’ experience of their course and what it’s been like to study at their institution. The survey is an important part of the academic calendar as its results feed into university league tables. Universities and student unions often use the results to influence their focus for the year ahead.

Students are asked to respond to questions relating to eight aspects of the learning experience, including teaching quality, assessment and feedback, organisation and management, and student voice including questions that are specifically about the Students Association.

In 2017 53% of eligible OU students took part in the survey - that’s around 14,800 students!

**Who is invited to take part?**

Usually students in their final year are invited to complete the survey, however at The Open University it’s not straightforward to work out who is considered a final year undergraduate, so you may be invited to take part even if you are studying at level 1 or level 2. If you are invited to take the survey this will be through an email or a phone call sometime between January and the end of April.

**What can I do if I’m not eligible?**

If you aren’t invited to take part in the National Student Survey there are other ways to feed your views back to the University – for example providing feedback on your modules and taking part in Consultation events. Opportunities are advertised via the [OU Student Voice website](#).

All students are automatically members of the OU Students Association and can get involved with our Student Voice activities. Find out more about Student Voice and what we mean by [Academic Representation](#) and check out our volunteer page to find opportunities to get involved.

**Student Voice 2017**

Just under 56% of OU students who took part in the survey indicated that they either agreed or strongly agreed with the statements about student voice, as listed below.

**What are students being asked?**

- **23** 'I have had the right opportunities to provide feedback on my course.'
- **24** 'Staff value students’ views and opinions about the course.'
- **25** 'It is clear how students’ feedback on the course has been acted on.'
- **26** 'The students’ union (association or guild) effectively represents students’ academic interests.'

Your Area Association Representative for Northern Ireland, [Cinnomen McGuigan](#) reflects on her experience of the NSS survey:

"Last year an email appeared in my already overflowing inbox which really made me think.

The message was that I was on the list of students who were being asked to complete a survey on how I had found studying with the OU so far. I flagged it to read later on, and went to get myself a big cup of fruit tea as I had a big chunk of reading ahead that I really wanted to get through that day."
The next day I was still intrigued by the email and honestly just needed some time to procrastinate, so there I was opening it again. I read the instructions and actually took a look at the questions this time. There were around 30 there so, I knew I’d have to take some time if I was going to complete it. There are bits of my course I’ve really enjoyed so far, so if they were asking me, I wanted to mention those things, but flag up some other bits I’d found difficult too.

The questions varied from ‘Staff are good at explaining things’ to ‘I have received sufficient advice and guidance in relation to my course’ and I wondered which module they wanted to know about. I’ve studied quite a few and my tutor hasn’t always been the same and the study style can really vary too. After chewing my pen in deep thought I concluded I’d try to give a bit of a mixture of how I’d found things so far – a bit of this and a bit of that.

It took me a few hours to get back to it, but when I logged back in the email was still there staring at me. I took a deep breath and I used it as an opportunity to give my views. I can remember thinking ‘I hope the OU take my feedback on board.’ I thought about it a week later and wondered when I’d hear what other students had said. I’m glad I did my bit, hopefully the OU will keep doing the best bits I wanted to give credit to and work on the bits I thought needed improving.”

What happens to my feedback?

After students have completed the survey, your answers are shared with the university for analysis. This process can help the university make decisions about what it does in the future. The main results of the survey are usually published at the end of the summer, allowing students to see how their university compares to others.

There are a number of questions which relate directly to the Students Association and we use these to directly inform our work.

Find out how the University and your OU Students Association shaped up in last year’s survey on our website.

What has the Students Association done in response to the 2017 results?

Last year the following question was included for the first time: ‘The students’ union (association or guild) effectively represents students’ academic interests.’ The Association received 44% positive responses, which really highlighted the need for us to get the word out there to students that their voice was being heard and it was easy to get involved.

Unsurprisingly different students have their own views on what academic representation could mean. The Students Association have been working to raise the profile of our students who represent you on academic matters over the last twelve months and have taken a number of actions in response to your feedback.

In September 2017 we launched our new website which aims to make it easier find out who your student leadership team are and what Student Voice activities are going on. As part of regional and online consultations with students, we’ve asked students what academic representation means to them and we’ve illustrated our view of what it can mean to students on a dedicated website page.

More recently, we’ve launched @OUstudentsVoice - a new student voice Twitter account for students who want to know more about how their voice is being heard. We’ve also been hosting Facebook Live interviews with members of our student leadership team, the Central Executive Committee, and they’ve taken this opportunity to spread the word about what their roles entail.

When the NSS results are released later this year we will endeavour to take feedback on board, continue to improve our services and hold the University to account for the responses they receive from OU students.
The Open University Students Association is the community and voice for around 170,000 students throughout the UK, the Republic of Ireland and worldwide. As part of our charitable objectives we aim to act as a channel between students and the Open University in order to make sure students have their views heard and acknowledged by the University, and that we provide personal development through discussion and debate and through social activity.

The Students Association feels it is really important to have contact with students where they are gathering and, as social media is a big part of many people’s lives, it is a great place for meeting students and gathering their opinions. Our new supplementary Twitter account will work to engage students on all things connected with Student Voice.

We would like to create an account where Student Voice has its own place, where old and new students can congregate and get more focussed information on Student Voice issues, events and achievements. The new Twitter account will help us to achieve this goal by informing our followers about what we have been doing in the Student Voice team, such as the work carried out by the Faculty Association Representatives and the communication and recruitment of Central Committee Representatives and Learner Experience Representatives.

We will update students on news which is of interest to them, such as the results from Student Consultations or the latest proposals under OU Redesign. Reports from the Senate Reference Group, the National Students Survey and any other relevant research reports will help students keep up to date with their own university and its place in the wider higher education context. As we approach this summer’s election of new student representatives for the 2018-2020 term, we will help keep students updated with the news during the electoral process. There will also be retweets which highlight Student Voice information from other Higher Education accounts.

We would like the account to be a place where interested students can get information on how to become involved in Student Voice events by sharing new opportunities that are open to OU students. We will also signpost to the OU Student Forums so students are who not on Twitter can join the discussions.

There will also be lots of space fun too! We will involve students by asking them for student-led content for the page such as blogs and videos. We will create polls and join in with all the usual enjoyable Twitter events. We would love to see student takeovers at training and induction days to give this account a real student experience feel.

Finally, we would like to introduce the new hashtag #OUstudentsVoice - we hope that this will grow and that those students who want to read about Student Voice will quickly be able to access the information, opportunities, debates and fun activities that are of interest to them.

Victoria Crawford
Area Association Representative for England and project sponsor
Celebrating the student voice

Nigel shares his perspective of our Student Voice Symposium event...

It was a cold, dark morning when I set off from home on Monday, 29 January, 2018. Way before the crack of dawn. Okay, so Halifax isn’t quite the frozen North. But it is pretty northerly and it gets blooming cold up here! And there is no direct train from Halifax to Milton Keynes.

So what on earth possessed me to leave my nice, warm bed and so unearthly an hour? I saw the Student Voice Symposium advertised on the OU Students Association website. It looked interesting and so I decided to attend. It was well worth the effort of attending. The theme of the day was to do with different aspects of Student Engagement, Voice and Representation and it consisted of a number of presentations given alternately by the University and the Students Association.

The day was divided into three sessions each containing three presentations. There were two breaks between sessions, to give attendees the opportunity for a bit of lunch or other refreshment. And refreshment vouchers were helpfully provided by the Students Association.

You can get a quick overview of the day by downloading the agenda and outline of the themes of the presentations here: And you can find much more information, and watch videos of each of the presentations, by heading over to Stadium and signing in with your OU log in.

I guess I already knew something about maybe half of the presentations. I have been a Student Representative and also involved in the Student Consultation process for some time. Both of these give access to all sorts of information. And I have participated in the Association’s own Research in different ways and am a regular user of the OU’s fantastic Library. And over the years I have been involved in the Student Community in all sorts of different ways. But there was also quite a lot that was new to me. And about which I knew nowt. It was good to hear about the Library’s Student Partnerships, which has resulted in all sorts of different projects intended to improve the support it provides for students. That model has also been adopted by Learning Innovation team, who are part of Learning and Teaching Innovation (LTI) where the focus has been on Engaging Students in Innovation. I knew nothing at all about eSTEeM – the STEM Faculty’s (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) centre for pedagogy, and where the recent projects have been to do with Engaging Students within Scholarship. And then there is the Student Engagement Project. This a relatively new, and overarching, initiative. Potentially it could be very useful, but as yet it is still work in progress. And, in fairness, the Project Manager has only been in post for a few weeks.

I wouldn’t say that everything is rosy within the OU. It isn’t. And you will read some significant concerns about where things are not going well below. Nor I am entirely happy with how the Students Association does everything. There will be various people involved in the Student Leadership Team who know some of my concerns. But the University and the Students Association are both involved in a variety of different initiatives that are all to do with involving and engaging students in the development of their University and Students Association. And there are lots of people involved in these different initiatives who are committed to improving Student...
Engagement and the Student Experience. Of course it is possible to do that by taking part in the event remotely, or even by watching a video of the presentations. There are many things that you can do online. But meeting people, and talking with them, is much better done face-to-face! It was good to get to meet some of the people I have previously only known by name. And it is always good to get meet fellow students as well as some of the people who work for the Association.

The penultimate presentation was given by Nicci Simpson (Students Association President) and was on the Student Transformation Programme. It was originally intended to be given jointly with Barbara Tarling (Student Council Member). Unfortunately Barbara was one of the casualties of the flu – my flu finally caught up with later that afternoon – and so Nicci had to give the presentation on her own. It may be helpful to say something about the Transformation Programme. In a nutshell it is a complete reinvention of the Open University and how it delivers its courses. It will involve making significant cuts. This includes cuts to the curriculum. Roughly half of the money saved will be reinvested. In future modules will be developed to be Digital by Design. And there will be job cuts.

I expect that Nicci’s presentation would have been a little different had she delivered it together with Barbara. As it was she spoke from notes and without any slides. After giving an outline of the Transformation Programme she then raised a number of serious questions and concerns.

The University has been good at engaging students in some activities. Unfortunately there are too many aspects of the Transformation Programme the University’s engagement with students has either been minimal or it has failed to engage at all. The problem is compounded by the fact that students who have access to particular papers or sit on OU Committees are required to sign confidentiality agreements which prohibit them from talking with each or the wider student body about some of the fundamental developments taking place within the University.

Nicci’s critique of the way in which the University had been carrying out various aspects of the Transformation Programme, and her positive suggestions for better engaging with students, was made all the more powerful by the measured way in which it was delivered. Very impressed! If you didn’t get the chance to attend the Symposium in person or online – and even if you did – do check out the links that I gave above. And do watch out for the next Symposium or similar event. It is well worth attending. And remember – it is your university and your Students Association.

Nigel Patterson
Central Committee Representative

Best overheard #OUstudent comment: 'The OU has become a part of life. Withdrawal symptoms starting to surface!!!
A day of great benefit

Richard was one of the brilliant OU student representatives that attended our recent Student Voice Induction day on campus in Milton Keynes...

I had the recent pleasure of attending the Student Voice Induction Day on Campus in Milton Keynes in my position as a member of the Senate Reference Group and a Central Committee Representative on the Computing and Communications Board of Studies. The aim of the induction day was to introduce newly appointed student voice volunteers to their role and offer semi-formal training.

The day began with introductions from the Association office staff and elected student representatives. The morning session was very useful as we had the chance to introduce ourselves to one another and to learn about the work of the Association. The most sub-session of the morning was learning how to navigate ourselves through the maze of the OU Intranet and the relevant forums. The morning session concluded with an informal discussion and questions session, which was of great use as it lent us the opportunity to ask questions and discuss our various roles.

The afternoon session was comprised of a couple of selective workshops. I chose to attend the Governance workshop, led by Helen Janes (Education Policy Officer) and Lorraine Adams (Vice President Education). This workshop enabled us to somewhat understand the governance structure of the OU. Secondly, I attended the workshop on Using Research, led by Pooja Sinha (Research and Information Officer). This workshop informed us how we can best use research undertaken by the Association when expressing the student voice on our various committees. The afternoon session was concluded with a summarising discussion on ways in which we could apply our newly acquired training. I was fortunate enough to be able to stay for the additional activities. This included a talk by Jerard Bretts on Student Consultation, a staff and student networking event, and finally the University Challenge warm-up.

In summary, this induction day was of great benefit. It enabled me to learn skills that will undoubtedly help me in my various student voice roles and to discuss questions and concerns with relevant staff and fellow representatives. I would now firstly like to take this opportunity to thank the staff for organising this student voice induction day. Secondly, I’d like to wish the OU University Challenge Team a great deal off success in their upcoming programmes.

Richard Duffy
Central Committee Representative
Best overheard #OUstudent comment: 'So much to read, so little time!'
“For those who don’t know me, I’m Nicci – an OU graduate, an OU student and the President of the Students Association. Earlier today you will have heard from some of my colleagues on the student leadership team and many of you will already know a great deal about our work. For me – everyday in my role is different, juggling a lot of different tasks and issues but over the past year, the transformation of the university has obviously been a major focus of my work. [...] 

A lot of my work is University facing, representing students within the University but I also spend time representing students interests in Higher Education more generally and working with the Students Association team on many aspects of our work – from Freshers events to our student Conference. When I spoke to some of my fellow reps about what I might do or say here today I was encouraged to stand up on stage with a placard and a loudhailer and repeat the mantra ‘Listen to Students’ for 20 minutes. Alternative suggestions included doing an interpretive dance and letting you figure out what it all means or to record my presentation to be played on the big screen and keep all my fingers crossed that the technology would work. As I progress through this presentation I hope you will understand why students have made those suggestions.

So what do Students know about the transformation? Very little!

Way back in June 2017 – which feels like a lifetime ago. The Vice Chancellor announced that the University would be conducting a ‘root and branch review of every aspect of its operations’. ‘A major savings and reinvestment plan will recreate the university so that it is digital by design and places the needs of students and the wider economy at the centre of all it does’

We were told that over a period of two years, the university would deliver world leading part time distance learning with digital innovation at its heart, a streamlined curriculum, high quality research focused closely on the teaching curriculum, close links to employers and a University free from duplications. Students would have greater choice over when they start courses and the pace of their study. [...] 

The Students Association have been working to keep students informed that changes are coming with articles in our OU Students Magazine, our executive reports and through our dedicated OU Redesign forum. Though we do have some challenges in what we can report – as student representatives are bound by strict confidentiality agreements which we must
sign before taking up positions within OU Committees and working groups where detailed planning is underway.

Given that there is little information about the transformation being sent directly from the University to students it isn’t surprising that students have found the recent reports in the news media about the university interesting. These have sparked students interest in issues related to curriculum cuts, digital delivery and the tuition model adopted by the OU. [...] 

Where are Students in the Transformation
Student representatives have been involved in the work of some of the different workstreams which have emerged as part of the transformation. We have been involved in the work of the Academic excellence, Enhanced employability and career progression, teaching excellence and innovation, student experience, technology and the operating model workstreams. For some of these, we have been active participants in regular meetings of the groups, for others our involvement has been more limited. Senior members of the university have themselves acknowledged that there needs to be a much more joined up approach in how student representatives and the wider student body are engaged in the work of the redesign and we have recently been involved in a number of conversations to improve engagement opportunities. We want to have the opportunity to shape the thinking and decision making at the university but for many of us – we worry that our voice is not heard and at times our views are misrepresented by others in the University.

Taking digital as an example – there are many occasions where student reps have talked about the importance of digital platforms in our learning and in building communities. We know that the digital experience needs to improve. What we oppose is an online only university, where students have few or no opportunities to interact with their tutors and other students face to face or where all learning material is delivered online or onscreen. Its not uncommon to hear this reflected back to us as if we are anti digital – dinosaurs stuck in the past, unable to move on.

At countless meetings students talk about how such a move to digital would (or already has) impact upon their studies. Often when we raise these issues, members of university senior team attempt to reassure us that hard copy learning materials and face to face tutorials will still be available in the future, however when it comes to written policy we see references to digital pedagogy, print materials (where appropriate), print on demand being available for the next five years. We can’t help but wonder who gets to decide when it is appropriate to have hard copy materials and what does the university have panned for print on demand after those five years have passed?

There is an assumption that new, and younger students have digital skills that enable them to learn in new and innovative ways but from talking to students we know that many people are struggling to keep up with the pace of change and that students whatever their age have problems in accessing material online for a range of reasons. If we go back to the information that students have been given on the transformation on the student voice website – and in particular the FAQ document - in response to the question ‘Couldn’t digital by design exclude some students – some being the very ones who the OU was set up to serve?’ The University demonstrates how little they seem to understand about the challenges we face.

[At] University we are learning to think critically – let us apply that to our own university and the challenges it faces.”
Reporting back...

The Central Executive Committee, your elected student leadership team, have had a very busy few months! Read on for a small glimpse at some of their activities and achievements over the last three months...

You can download full versions of these reports here.

President
Nicola Simpson has been busy attending many different meetings and workshops regarding The Open University Redesign/Transformation project. The extra workshops have given committee members the opportunity to give feedback on the proposals. Nicola has also taken part in other meetings across the University, including those with the Director Academic Services, Student Consultation Office, Government and External Affairs team. The President is also involved in ongoing discussions with the University about The National Student Survey and how the University can address the falling satisfaction rates among students.

Deputy President
Since elected as Deputy President Julia Davis has been gaining an insight and understanding of the Students Association. Julia is currently looking into more creative ways to communicate complex ideas and information about the University restructuring and redesign to OU students. Julia has also been identifying areas where she can contribute ideas and support other members, for example in Student Consultation Management, Student Volunteering, Anti Bullying and looking into the Association’s current approach to social media.

Vice President Administration
Peter has been busy contributing to discussions regarding Conference 2018. Beyond Conference, Peter has also approved society accounts and changes to society constitutions following advice from legal advisors. Subvention negotiations have begun and meetings have been arranged in February and March to put forward a package to Council for the year 2018/2019. Peter is a member of the student leadership team and has been playing a part in making contributions to the discussions surrounding OU Redesign. While not strictly a VP Admin role, Peter had the

Rest of the team
Our fantastic Area Association Representatives and Faculty Association Representatives also submit reports about their work. You can read those here.

Best overheard #OUstudent comment: 'Think it's time for the standard TMA nap!'
pleasure of helping to select the OU team for University Challenge 2018.

Vice President Community

Steph was involved in the planning of Freshers Fortnight. This was a great opportunity to showcase the Students Association, e.g. archive project, Student Voice Symposium and the University Challenge Warm-Up event. Community Drop-in Sessions have been held regularly since May 2017, there are now several Community Hosts and Steph is looking to make these a permanent fixture on the Community event calendar. Face to face meet-ups continue to be hosted by students and recently the Big Feb Meet-up took place. Steph has also attended a student fee workshop with student representatives from Universities around the UK and members of the House of Lords Economic Committee.

Vice President Education

Lorraine was invited to attend the Student Voice Steering Committee and the Sustainable Academic Communities Steering Committee. Both explore how to engage with more students in order to improve progression and retention. Lorraine was also involved in the Student Induction Day for new reps and the Student Voice Symposium, which focused on student engagement.

Vice President Equal Opportunities

Cherry has attended various events on campus, she was invited as a guest speaker at the OU’s Disabled Veterans Scholarship Fund. This included a reception and dinner to celebrate the launch of the OU’s Disabled Veterans Scholarship Fund earlier in the year. Cherry is delighted to report that on the evening the event exceeded all expectations and raised enough money for two scholarships. Cherry has also created a new (closed) Facebook group for OU students who have carers or are carers themselves. It's called ‘Caring and Dependency’.

Vice President Representation & Research

Caroline has been involved in the Anti-Bullying steering group, the outcomes of this group where presented at the CEC meeting in January. Caroline has also attended meetings on campus which include the OU Kite Mark project, Student Voice day and Volunteering research project focus group meeting.

Vice President Student Support

In December Alison was involved in the OU’s Transforming Student Policy Steering Group as the Students Association’s representative member. Alison continues to be a Trustee of OUSET and recently attended the Rules Revision weekend. Along with Steph, Alison took part in the student fee workshop with student representatives from universities around the UK and members of the House of Lords Economic Committee. Alison also attended the service review meetings to meet staff from OU Academic Services and IT.

Student Council Member

As well as student leadership team and Senate Reference Group meetings, as part of Barbara’s role she attended various Committee meetings. This included Council, Governance and Nominations Committee and the Strategic Planning and Resources Committee. Barbara has also been involved in the Charter and Statutes Review Working Group meetings where work has started on detailed drafting. Council is taking place on the 6 March 2018 which Barbara will be attending.

Meet the team

Find out more about your elected student leadership team on our new website.

Best overheard #OUstudent comment: 'Nothing like a buzz of registering for a new module!'
University Mental Health Day

DATE  1 March 2018

THEME  Community
University Mental Health Day
2018

Promoting a positive mental health community at university

The aim of University Mental Health Day 2018 is to focus efforts on promoting the mental health of people who live, work and study in Higher Education settings. The theme is community. (Could this be in a stand-alone colourful box?)

Whether you’re a student, a member of support staff, an academic, or a senior university leader, we all have a part to play to cultivate a positive mental health community at university.

Here are five ways that #OUstudents can get involved in #UniMentalHealthDay

• Using the hashtag - Get involved in the discussion on social media by sharing how you make your communities more supportive?

• Join us for our #UniMentalHealthDay podcast where we will be discussing how various initiatives can have a positive impact on our mental health.

• Did you know that volunteering can support someone's mental health? Keeping active, connecting with others and giving up one's own time can feel rewarding so take a look at the opportunities available to OU students at oustudents.com/volunteer

• Not already part of a student group or society? Take a look at the Associations website to browse through a variety of different groups that you can get involved in at oustudents.com/full-list-of-societies

• For some OU students the exam period will soon be upon us – why not revisit our resource area on mental health to gather some tips on remaining mentally healthy during busy and stressful periods?

oustudents.com/world-mental-health-day

Best overheard #OUstudent comment: 'Remember, it's never too late to learn'
Meet the new committees of PLEXUS and the Disabled Students Group

See below for the results of the elections that took place over December and January...

**Officers**
Graham Rimmer, Chair of PLEXUS
Calum Lucas, Secretary of PLEXUS
Becky Eaton-Garrett, Campaigns Officer
Kelly Robinson, Women's Officer
Sean Goodman, Equalities & Support

**Caucus Representatives**
Sheila Cameron, Disabled Students
Aimee Challenor, Trans Students
Jessica Thompson, Young Students
Krystyna Elliot-Nowobilska, Bisexual Students

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**Officers**
Sheila Cameron, Chair of DSG
Natalie Pope, Secretary of DSG
Colin Pritchard, PR & Comms
Megan Brown, Web Controller

**Committee Representatives**
Stephanie Stubbins
Hannah Burns
Felicity Burgess
Lucy Richardson

www.oustudents.com/support
Welcome to the new Disabled Students Group website!

www.oustudents.com/disabled-students-group
Inspiring stories from OU Alumni

The Careers & Employability Services talk to OU alumni to discover how OU study has impacted their careers.

No one said it was going to be easy! Juggling conflicting commitments and deadlines, late night and early mornings completing TMAs, will it really make a difference in the end? To help inspire you, we recently asked our alumni to share their own stories and offer a piece of advice for current students who may be studying to change, develop or embark on a new career. Whether you already have career ideas or plans or are just starting to work them out, remember the OU Careers & Employability Services are here to help and support you.

Science Teacher Ralph started his journey with one ‘O’ level

Having left school with one ‘O’ Level, I am now a science teacher with a Master’s Degree in Education.

I started studying with the Open University in 2002, aged 40, choosing a first-year science course primarily because the content looked interesting. At the time I was a swimming teacher and wanted to move into mainstream education (…).

Studying, then gaining the degree, allowed me to teach in various educational establishments from private education to secure estate; currently I teach science in a middle school. Ensuring that 9-year-olds with long hair don’t set their hair on fire when using Bunsen burners keeps me on my toes!

I started studying again in 2013, this time a Master’s degree in Education, to enable me to support trainee teachers and established members of staff in their daily practice. I hope to use it to move into teacher training.

My top career tip would be to have a plan and network, reflect on your plan, adapt it, take opportunities, and have a go at new things.

How Carol’s Open Degree paved the way to career progression

My OU path started out in 2012 when I was 52 and my youngest had recently left home. It just happened to be the right time and the right place. An email popped into my Inbox asking “do you have….?” and I thought “yes I do!”. I will never forget opening my first study pack and thinking “Oh my, what have I done” (…) When I started my OU journey I was a Band 3 within the NHS and have now been promoted to Band 5. The research skills I learned for TMA gave me the skills to look at problem solving in a different way and helped me prepare for my interview. Indeed when I met with my new manager I was informed that the OU degree and time management skills had earned me more points. The panel was impressed with the commitment and completion of a degree.

Nothing is wasted when you are on the OU path. My degree was not geared towards my career but it did get me a promotion. When the OU adverts appear on TV, my grandchildren all shout out “that is Gran’s school”. My thoughts when walking across the stage...
ranged from “OMG” to “I DID IT”. Thank you OU for the opportunity.

How Colin overcame health challenges to achieve IT success

I studied initially for a BSc in Physical Science but due to the OU moving away from named degrees (in science) this became a BSc (Hons) in Natural Science. I began my OU journey in 2007, I had just turned 32, had recently married but felt I had some unfinished business with my education. I have always loved Physics but was not sure whether I could balance home life, work and study. I took some 10pt courses in Astronomy and Planetary Science and I was hooked (...). 2012 was a rough year, I suffered a major depressive episode and I was diagnosed with Bipolar 2. This put substantial strain on both my work and family life. The medication I was on at the time made it very difficult to concentrate and I had to modify my study techniques to try complete TMAs as efficiently as possible as well as passing the final exam. The module that year was on Quantum Mechanics and luckily I came out with a distinction at the end.

I am currently an Enterprise Architect for the largest privately owned global IT organisation. Studying with the OU has taught me to be disciplined with my time and allows me to see problems from different angles. Overall it had enriched me personally and has allowed me to be more confident in work.

My advice for new students - do not underestimate the level of commitment and sacrifice you will need to make. As you progress and the modules get more challenging expect early mornings and late nights. My top tip would be to break your degree or study path in to bite size chunks. Break each module down into deliverables. Don’t look to far ahead. Most importantly celebrate every success and learn from every defeat.

Martin’s MBA led to silver lining following redundancy

I started my MBA in 2011 at the age of 46 after several years of trying to get funding from my employer. I knew I wanted and needed to do it to create options for career development/promotion/change after 20 years in the same company with a technical background (BSc, MSc). Most MBA students are over 35, and experience makes the studying easier, so I never felt age was an issue except when it came to exams!

The impact on my career was immediate because within a year of starting the MBA I was promoted and became part of our European management team, a good fit for applying the MBA (...). I had hoped to get promoted after graduation, but it was not to be and less than 2 years later was made redundant. Nevertheless, the silver lining was that the MBA positioned me well for finding a better paid job quickly where I can now use all my skills.

My advice for current students is to start looking at your personal brand and plan your next move as early as possible. Don’t assume that you will automatically walk into a better job after graduation or stay in your current company, as you may no longer fit. However, never doubt your decision, the career move does eventually happen and the sense of personal achievement and the new network of student friends is the real legacy.
Societies

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

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

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

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

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

Affiliated and Emerging Societies

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

- **Professor Frederick Toates** (Open University) - the biological background to stress; provisionally talking on “Lessons to be learned from the study of brain, motivation and behaviour”.

- **Dr Gillian Ragsdale** (Cambridge Institute of Continuing Education) - an evolutionary perspective; talking on transgenerational transmission of stress via epigenetic processes.

- **Professor Angela Clow** - health implications; talking about how health is affected by stress.

Work/occupation oriented strand:

- **Professor Andrew Oswald** (Warwick) - ‘Modern Research on Happiness and Mental Well-being’.

- **Dr Jim White**, an internationally-recognised expert in stress management, - talking about his intervention called Stress Control.

- **Professor Stephen Palmer** (City, University of London) - ‘How to reduce stress, enhance resilience and wellbeing’. (*Stephen is an ex-OU student and OUPS member*).

*Saturday evening session: Jim Handley - workshop on stress, resilience and coping in OU students.*

Price: £290 for OUPS members / £310 for non-members (en-suite room in management conference facilities; all meals included; excellent transport links; free sports facilities and free parking).

**To book your place**, or for any further enquiries contact info@oups.org.uk or visit our website.
Experiences of a mature student at the OU

Emel, an OU Graduate, shares their story...

I studied psychology in Turkey around the early 80s as a second degree. My first degree was in Applied Linguistics. One of the subjects of the Programme was Psycholinguistics* and I fell in love with the subject. Around that time I was working as a linguist at the National Language Authority preparing specialist dictionaries; among them were a Terminology of Psychiatry and a Terminology of Psychology. All these led to a growing interest in psychology, particularly Psycholinguistics. However, Psycholinguistics was a PhD Programme and I had to study Psychology to progress towards it. Following painful entry exams on six psychology subjects and methodology and statistics, I managed to get a place in a Clinical Psychology MSc Programme. I had to study harder than the others as they had studied psychology for four years at the university, whereas I self studied by reading text books in my free time, whilst working full time. This is how I gained the self-discipline and motivation, which is required for distance learning.

Also being an English Language teacher was very helpful as the language of the Programme was English. Many psychology graduates struggled with that. But we found a way out – we were a group of eight people. When we were given chapters and chapters of material to read, we would split the texts according to individual abilities; a couple of days later we would meet at one of the member’s house to exchange the knowledge we gained. This also allowed us to exchange views, discuss, debate, dispute, all of which led to an improved level of critical thinking.

When I got my degree as a Clinical Psychologist, I came to a crossroads; whether to continue on the path I started and apply for PhD in Psycholinguistics or accept the offer from the University Hospital where I had been practising for a year at the psychiatry department. Fate had other plans for me. For family reasons first I moved town, then moved country, settling in the United Kingdom.

I faced the same crossroads in the UK too; should I continue studying or work? As I had a one-year-old baby, I thought combining work and study wouldn’t do. I wasn’t aware of the Open University then, so opted for work. During my Master’s study, I worked part-time as a journalist. I had language skills. I was a teacher and translator. I could use those skills. On the other hand, psychology was always a driving force for me. Yet, I did not feel confident enough to pursue psychology. I was trained as a psychoanalyst and I felt my spoken language was not good enough to understand English native speakers during counseling. Also I had no clue of how the NHS or academia worked on the area of psychology or clinical psychology. So the choice was towards languages and journalism.

I got a job at the BBC and that was it. I was a researcher/monitor/journalist for 16 years. Is there such a thing as a 16-year-itch? There was one for me. I was volunteering for a charity at the foundation stage. Later I became one of its founders. Here, I found the opportunity to get back to psychology. It was obvious that I could not do this straight away. Firstly my degree was too dusty. Psychology had progressed a lot since 80s. Secondly, if I wanted a position anywhere as a psychologist, I had to get accreditation from the British Psychological Society.

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*Psycholinguistics: The interdisciplinary study of the relationship between language and the mind, often focusing on the structure and processing of language in the brain. It involves the use of techniques from linguistics, psychology, and neuroscience to study how people acquire, process, and produce language.
After 20 years in the UK, I was now a bit more informed about the education system and the field of psychology.

I was also aware of the Open University and I knew that I could do my accreditation through distance learning. I approached the OU and to my dismay, I learned they could only transfer 75 credits (out of 280) that I gained in Turkey and I had to take six compulsory modules. Well, that was that and in September 2011, at the age of 56, I enrolled in the BSc Honours, Psychology Programme at the OU, starting with two modules; Educational Psychology and Social Psychology. Student Services warned me that these might be a bit too ambitious to start with and advised to start with one Level 2 module. I was so overconfident. I thought that as I had done this before, I could do it again easily. I had my first shock when I got 45 per cent from my first TMA in Social Psychology. I knew the subject so well. So where did I go wrong? Well, first of all, my language was “too journalistic” according to my tutor. Twenty years of journalism both in English and Turkish language had to have some effect! Secondly, my over-confidence worked against me. I wrote the essays in short breaks, while others spent ages, in making draft after draft. Unfortunately, I did not have the time to write drafts. Working full-time and studying two modules worked against my study. The result was low marks. The exams were the worst with just 8 days in-between; I had to prepare for two exams. A horrible experience!

Still, this did not stop me doubling up my modules the following year, as the clock was ticking and I wanted to finish my studies before I was 60. But the work was too hard, as I had to do two residential weeks one after another - Exploring Psychology and Cognitive Psychology, which required writing two hefty reports following the residential weeks. It was the busiest time of my study, if not my life. But I had learnt my lesson from the first year. I was now able to use the invaluable tutor guidance; corresponding with them regularly, asking anything that I did not understand, as well as attending all tutorials. I also established friendships with fellow OU students both online and in real time. This allowed us to exchange information and meet to study together.

Best of all were the OUPS events. The first year I was overconfident and thought I could to without them. The second year the driving force was to learn well as well as improving my marks. To achieve this I knew that I had to try different ways. I saved for several Overview Days and Revision Weekends. These events were extremely useful in allowing me to acquire a much needed community spirit as well as an information gathering exercise. I met so many people who were from different backgrounds and had different experiences. These days also helped me to meet more tutors, some of whom were previous OU students and some were still studying at the OU. I became more and more proud of being part of a community like the OU.

I graduated in October 2013, received my degree in April 2014 and I am now accredited as a psychologist by the BPS, I can confidently say that if it wasn’t for the OU and its community (fellow students, tutors and the support workers), I could never have got this accreditation. I would also like to say to any new comers: Do not try to show off what you know, as you may intimidate those who don’t know as much as you do. Do not hesitate to show what you don’t know, as if you don’t ask, you won’t get the answers. And remember, all your fellow students are people like yourself, people who are trying to juggle their daily lives (work, children, care responsibilities etc.) and their study. We are all in the same boat, so please support each other and let others support you.

Emel Soylu
OU Graduate

* Psycholinguistics or psychology of language is the study of the psychological and neurobiological factors that enable humans to acquire, use, and understand (Science Daily, http://www.sciencedaily.com/articles/p/psycholinguistics.htm accessed on 12 May 2014).
Seven amazing Research Students!

The Association of Open University Graduates (AOUG) has its own charity, the AOUG Foundation for Education, which offers nine possible Awards for supervisors across all OU research departments to nominate final year students that they feel have excelled in their field, either with the innovation they have achieved or the dedication they have shown. 2017 was a special year for the AOUG as a total of seven of the nine Awards were approved, the highest number ever.

The 2017 Award winners were:

**AOUG Vic Finkelstein Award for Health and Social Care**
Rachel France

**AOUG Will Swann Award for Innovation and Knowledge Development**
Paul Greer

**AOUG Vice-Chancellor Lord Perry of Walton Award for Social Science**
Sarah Hutton

**AOUG Vice-Chancellor Sir John Daniel Award for Education and Language Studies**
Betul Khalil

**AOUG Chancellor Baroness Boothroyd Award for Citizenship, Identities and Governance**
Marie Paludan

**AOUG Vice-Chancellor Sir John Horlock Award for Science**
Pam Rowden

**AOUG Chancellor Lord Asa Briggs Award for Arts**
Jim Taylor

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Have a story to tell?
Want to share information with your fellow OU students?
We love hearing and sharing stories and news from students.
Send through your ideas and pieces to
oustudents-magazine@open.ac.uk
Best overheard #OUstudent comment: 'After 7 years with the OU, I now have a degree! Over the moon! Hard work defo pays off! Time to party.'
An OU student... gets ready for Conference

One day an OU student suddenly gets a notification from the Students Association...

Register now for Conference 2018! Your name:

Become a member of the Central Executive Committee

Some time later...

What’s their opinion about:

Nominations open for CEC* roles

The OU student discussed with the nominees and other OU students, then made their vote.

Some more time later...

... it was about Conference 2018! The OU student ready about it and decided to register.

The student is kept up to date, takes part in chats with other attendees, and receives their business pack.

The night before, the OU student excitedly packs makes sure they’ve read their business pack.

The OU student arrives at Milton Keynes campus and is ready for Conference...

... the OU student gets their invite to Conference and sends their RSVP

* Central Executive Committee

... find out what happens to our OU student when they attend their first Conference in the next edition of OU Students Magazine!

It’s a new year so why not visit the OU Students Shop and get some new stash for the next stage of your OU journey at ...

www.oustudentsshop.com