HUGE STUDENT MEET-UP
Check out page 1 for details!

SOCIETIES
New societies for winter - we bring you stories from emerging and existing societies

A PRESIDENT’S DIARY
Association President Chris shares a bit of what he’s been up to...
Welcome...

to your OU Students Association magazine, a place to share your stories, connect with others and find out more about your Association.

Happy holidays to all OU students! Welcome to our winter edition of the OU Students mag. It has been a busy few months for the Students Association; we have been working with various university departments to have them hear the Student Voice loud and clear!

On pages 19 and 20 we have insight into what the Central Executive Committee has been up to since September with summaries and a feature on Group Tuition. We also have the best of 2016 from the Students Association.

We have another bumper edition for you to read; with the content sourced from OU Students such as Colin’s beautiful Astrophotography on page 14 and Paulette’s scary tech experience on page 15!

As always there is too much to list and this editorial shouldn’t look like a dreaded reference list! So go grab the tub of Celebrations you were saving for Christmas day, a warm cuppa and sit down to enjoy this edition of OU Students magazine!

Rachel Hughes
Vice President Communications

Holiday closure date...
...the OU Students Association Office will be closed from 12pm on December 23 until January 3 2017.
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# 2016: A year to remember...

This has been a busy and successful year for the Students Association. Here are just some of the ways in which we have helped and supported students over the past 12 months. Get ready for more exciting developments next year!

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<td>Our social media channels have been very busy this year with Facebook Likes up 25% Twitter followers up 20% and Instagram followers up 20%</td>
<td>Students have been able to listen to new live radio broadcasts throughout the year. Highlights are available on demand to listen back at any time on our audioboom page, along with additional podcasts.</td>
<td>We opened a new, improved OU Students Shop, selling OU branded merchandise such as clothing, stationery and mugs. Past exam papers are available free-of-charge.</td>
<td>The Association put together a team for the 23rd series of the legendary television quiz show University Challenge. Over 700 students applied and the final team of four tasted victory in their first programme!</td>
<td>There are now over 5,000 members of 23 student societies which are developed and supported by the Association. This year’s newcomers were Robotics, Opera and Ballet, Philosophers, Technology &amp; Innovation and Engineering for Humanity.</td>
<td>We have welcomed over 75,000 new students through our online events programme - otherwise known as ‘Freshers week’. The February and October intakes enjoyed radio broadcasts, Facebook chats and website content to help them find their feet.</td>
<td>The Nightline service became a core part of our regular services for students. Four OU students are now part of the team which answer calls and communications from students needing someone to listen.</td>
<td>A new voting process allowed more students than ever to vote in person or online as we ran our elections for the Central Executive Committee. The newly elected team will shape the Association’s strategy over the next two years.</td>
<td>We continued to support and develop the Disabled Students Group and administered their elections. We were pleased to see the beginnings of a new group, Plexus, which provides a supportive community for LGBT+ students.</td>
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<td>A friendly face for freshers...</td>
<td>Read all about it</td>
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<td>We have welcomed over 75,000 new students through our online events programme - otherwise known as ‘Freshers week’. The February and October intakes enjoyed radio broadcasts, Facebook chats and website content to help them find their feet.</td>
<td>Our quarterly OU Students magazine (you’re reading it now!) continues to prove very popular. We’re proud of the ever-increasing number of articles submitted and written by students, student leaders, representatives and societies.</td>
<td>Our biennial Conference took place in June at the OU campus in Milton Keynes. Attendees – both in person and watching online – enjoyed a varied programme of presentations, workshops, seminars, speeches and social events.</td>
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Strong performance on University Challenge

Thanks #TeamOpen, you did us proud!

We're proud to say that the OU team, put together by the Students Association, flexed their quiz muscles brilliantly again on 7th November. We knew it wasn't going to be an easy match, as they faced Edinburgh University, who had beaten Durham in the previous round.

Words can't describe the tension in the studio when, with a minute and a half to go, Edinburgh led 185 points to Team Open's 175. Our team then won a crucial starter for ten, which led to questions on food additives. Our team had just equalised and it felt like time for us to take the lead. Although our fantastic Team Captain, Sarah Banks gave the correct answer to the final question the gong had begun to ring out. It was almost too close to call!

At the end of the quiz, the teams were neck and neck at 185 points apiece. It turned to ‘Sudden Death’ and surprise, surprise the final question was a tricky one.

After a tense pause, Edinburgh spoke up with the answer, ‘Tolkien’ and took the win. That moment marked the end of our team’s University Challenge journey, but we're sure you'd agree that their performance has been a delight to watch, and even merited praise from Jeremy Paxman himself.

Well done Team Open! We've enjoyed cheering you on!

Since the quiz was aired the selection panel, which includes Vice President Administration, Peter Cowan have been putting students through their paces in order to form the next team. To all of you who took part in the selection process, thank you and we hope you enjoyed all the quizzes! We’ve been blown away by how brainy OU students are and it certainly hasn’t been an easy decision!

"You played brilliantly [...] a very impressive team too.”
- Jeremy Paxman

Hear more from your Students Association...

To receive information about the Students Association, be the first to hear about up and coming events, local meet-ups, chances to come to campus and to get your opinions heard, just...

...subscribe to our newsletter!
Student Voice Spotlight!

Your Student Voice Team is busy getting your voice heard across the OU! Here are a few recent highlights:

A new opportunity...
We have launched our brand new Learning Experience Reporter volunteer role, and a massive 59 of you have signed up! Learning Experience Reporters are the eyes and ears of your Students Association, picking up on academic and learning-related issues everywhere OU students are. To find out how you can be involved visit our website here. This is a very flexible role and a great opportunity if you’d like to be involved but you don’t have much time.

Spreading the word...
There are more places for student members on OU committees than ever before. We now have a team of 58 Central Reps filling many of those places and hope another 6 will join the team very soon. All this means great opportunities for the Student Voice to be heard!

Congratulations...
One of our most experienced Central Reps, Barbara Tarling, is now part of the new national Teaching Excellence Framework panel - we’re delighted for her!

Making a difference...
The OU regularly review their Teaching and Learning Provision to ensure quality standards are not only being reached but are enhanced whenever possible. Student reviewers are now an integral part of the panel of each Institutional Periodic Quality Review and we have recently helped recruit an additional three students to join the bank of student reviewers.

Observers...
Five students have visited campus for the day to attend Faculty Assembly meetings as observers and there are more waiting to be confirmed for future meetings. If you would be interested in attending, check out the information on our website here.

Helping you have your say...
The Academic Quality and Governance Committee included the Annual Effectiveness Review for the Consultative Process. A survey for 2015/16 found that 75% of respondents were aware that they are able to volunteer within the governance structure, which is up from 49% the previous year. This huge success has been due to a combination of the Student Voice session at Conference, the website, the improved paperwork and good relationships with committee secretaries.

An invitation...
Student Consultative meetings are now being planned for March 2017. Look out for an invite in your mail box early in the New Year.

Keep in touch...
We are also identifying which aspects of the student experience we’ll explore next with our research projects, so keep an eye out for further updates via social media and the Students Association Research Forum!

Coming up...
Student Voice Week is planned for 11th - 17th March 2017. Watch this space!

Lorraine Adams
VP Education

Caroline Poppenga
VP Representation & Research

Best overheard #OUstudent comment: ‘You don’t fail by getting a bad mark. You fail by not trying to do your best’
Tell us about your VIP tutor...

Has an OU tutor gone that extra mile to support you in your studies? Does your tutor demonstrate excellence in both teaching and the help and encouragement that you receive? Does s/he have an outstanding impact on your learning experience and has been the difference between you staying the course and your eventual success? If so we’d like to hear all about it.

OU students know that a Very Important Person in any OU student’s life is an OU tutor. That’s why in the Students Association we want to recognise the outstanding contribution that they make and to do this we’re creating our own Teaching Award for ‘Outstanding Tutor.’

Nominations are open now and to nominate your tutor you need to tell us in your own 300 words the following:

Why you feel your tutor demonstrates excellence in teaching – how has s/he gone above and beyond your expectations?

What is special about the way your tutor teaches and supports you? The impact of your tutor’s work on you and if applicable, on other students

Send your nominations to ousa@open.ac.uk marked Outstanding Tutor by 10th January. Entries will be judged by a student panel and the award will be presented at The Open University’s Charter Day in April.

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Save the date!

The Student Consultation Office has arranged five face-to-face student consultative meetings in England for spring 2017 (further meetings, including in other locations, are planned for the autumn):

- Saturday 4 March: Jury’s Inn Hotel, Exeter
- Saturday 11 March: Student Central, London
- Friday 17 March: The OU, Milton Keynes
- Saturday 25 March: MacDonald Hotel, Manchester
- Saturday 1 April: Jury’s Inn Hotel, Newcastle

There will also be face-to-face student consultative meetings in Ireland, Scotland and Wales, with details to follow:

- Saturday 8 April, Dublin
- Saturday 6 May, Edinburgh
- TBC, Cardiff

All international students will be invited to take part in the Online International Students Consultative Meeting which in response to student demand will now take place over two weeks rather than one: 13–27 March 2017.

Registration for all meetings will open after the Christmas break on 9 January 2017 via our website here. These meetings are a great chance for students to get together to talk about issues that affect the student experience and make suggestions on how the University could improve. OU staff also attend to chat with students and get first-hand feedback on where we are getting things right, and where (and how!) we could do better. Places at the meetings are limited, and students are expected to attend their nearest or most accessible meeting in their home nation.

Thanks to everyone who nominated a topic for these meetings through our forum. We are now looking at all proposed topics, together with the Students Association, and the discussion topics will be advertised when registration opens in January. Although nomination for face-to-face topics is now closed, you can still nominate a topic for consultation on our online forums, via this open forum.

If you are interested in student consultation and March next year seems like a long time to wait, you can keep up-to-date with the latest information and opportunities via our mailing list, which you can join here.

We wish you all a stress-free holiday, and look forward to hearing more of your views (whether through online or face-to-face meetings) in the new year!

Alice Mansfield
Student Consultation Office
Hello everyone, Beth here, head of the “NEW” Association Student Volunteering Team based in Milton Keynes.

Although this is a new team, we have always had volunteers at the Association, and our volunteers are dedicated to getting your voices heard by the OU. They arrange local meet ups to reduce isolation and to provide support to fellow students. They’ve been dressing up, selling raffle tickets, and working the OU Shop at graduations to raise money. They’ve been out and about and online; offering kind words to students in TMA hell and motivating each other to keep going!

Without our student volunteers, the Association would not be able to achieve such a wonderful community feel and we are so grateful to have such a great bunch of inspiring, altruistic individuals. This is why we have created the Student Volunteering team; to provide support and opportunities to our volunteers as well as to grow the OU volunteer family!

It’s been a busy few months for all of our volunteers, just take a look at what they have been up to….

The Central Executive Committee had their Group Induction weekend and have had their first official CEC meeting. Business is well underway and many of them can be seem all over campus attending meetings, initiating change and working to make positive changes for students!

The Trustees have also had their first meeting and attended finance training in London. We celebrated what a great job they are doing during #trusteewisweek.

The new Learning Experience Reporters are starting to find their feet, having had their OU Live Induction in November and you’ll start seeing them cropping up everywhere! We are still looking for more people to sign up so if you have a minimum half an hour a month which you could volunteer online for, why not apply here.

Our Peer supporters and VP Student Support have launched their new “Through the Gate” service, offering support to students who have previously studied in secure environments.

The Central Representative team is growing after their recent round of recruitment and they are busy making sure your voice is heard by the OU in all the new faculties! If you are interested in joining this busy team, email the Student Voice team for more information.

The moderators have also been busy, with a whole new suite of forums needing their support to help the Learning Experience Reporters, Central Reps and Faculty Reps.

We also have more meet-ups going on than ever before with loads of meet-up co-ordinators arranging stepping forward to get involved… since the last magazine 26 events were held all over the UK! Find an event near you here.

And at this time of year… who could forget our amazing Graduation Ceremony Volunteers? Who have attended 21 ceremonies since September, generating over £38,500 for the OU Student Shop (OSL). From which year-end profits are donated directly to the OU Students Educational Trust (OUSET) to support students in financial hardship.

We love sharing what all of our volunteers are up to in the student community so why not share a photo or a status with us on Twitter or Facebook using #teamOUstudents.

Beth Metcalf
Head of Student Volunteering
Having recently stepped down from my role as VP Representation, I actually thought I had got out of being active within the Association. But then... a message came through:

‘Would I like to consider becoming a Trustee?’

I considered it for 30 seconds. I wasn't studying at the time so that would be my get out clause, I had an escape route (Ye ha)! I sent off my sorry response feeling smug, but faster than a message can feasibly ping to the satellite and back I had a reply; not currently studying was not an adequate excuse; this particular role didn’t require that (Drat and double drat!!). Now I had to seriously consider the role and all that it entailed. Did I have the time, inclination and drive to help through volunteering again? Would I even have the internet access?

I needed help making my decision. What time did I need to set aside? Would it be face to face or online? Would it require a quick turnaround of decisions? How long would I be doing the role? Also... did I actually want to volunteer? After all, I had been volunteering for the majority of my student life. Sometimes you do wonder what you will be putting into a role and what you can gain from it (friends always ask me WHY I do these things).

So after all of that deliberation, my current role as a Trustee is online for the next two years. With a few initial face to face training days and an annual face to face meeting of the Trustees too (apparently). So that fits with me, the training was informative but I knew that I would need support in the early days. I love asking questions and thankfully they all get answered either by the other Trustees or the OU Students Association office staff who support my role.

I have to say, in the early days I did question my decision to be a Trustee. It does have its own legal importance and protocols. But that didn’t faze me, I was more worried about my own decision making. But the paperwork winged its way through the internet into special forums that I have access to. Anyway I logged in, read the papers, made my decisions, asked more questions and became pleased with my decision making. I was becoming more confident. I felt like a Trustee. I felt that I was making a difference! But I was still left questioning whether I was doing the right thing...

Previously, my roles of volunteering had been out there; meeting people, chatting and travelling - it seemed exciting! This was behind the scenes. I didn’t seem to really talk to anyone, except through the forums. But it closed a loop to elements of volunteering I had done in the early days. I was now part of the process that makes a difference to student’s lives. Was this enough?

But life has a strange way of lifting you up when you need it... recently I was out walking and I got speaking to a person walking a dog. Well actually I spoke to the dog first. A fluffy little thing about a foot high. I thought it was about to piddle over my bags on the floor actually.

Anyway... I talked to the dog and then to the owner, jabbering on about being an OU Student and an active member as a Trustee for the Students Association. I spoke about how I had had an active role in front of house and now I was more behind the scenes. I told of my decisions and how this affected students’ lives. It turned out I was speaking to a governor of a prison who had huge respect and admiration for the OU and what study with the OU can do for offenders. I went on to explain that I was a Trustee and helped with the decision making around supporting students with our Students Educational Trust (OUSET), which funds many students in secure environments. Suffice to say our brief walk and talk inspired us both. I knew as we parted company (the dog had turned towards home at this point) that I had made the
right decision to be a Trustee.
So, would I ask you to consider becoming a Trustee?

YES.
Will you be as nervous (like I was) about trying to do something new?

YES!
Will these nerves start to fade as you gain confidence in yourself and your decision making?

YES.
Is it just as good to volunteer behind the scenes and maybe not have others know that you are doing something that makes a difference?

YES it is – there is a role for everyone!
So what does the future hold? I think it will be exciting as more students realise that they can play a part in their Students Association either during or even after their studies.

One of the words used by the Students Association is community. And I am still part of the community. Perhaps like me you have finished your studies and there is a small void in your life with all things OU and Students Association? Why not volunteer? Trustees have responsibilities... Trustees are working away behind the scenes... But Trustees are making a difference... Why not you?

I am a Trustee of OUSET the Open University Students Educational Trust. I make decisions on awarding funds to students for their module fees. They come from all over the world. They come from all walks of life. When previously volunteering at Degree Ceremonies I would say to the student customers at the merchandise stall "the profits go towards supporting students who fall between funding gaps, each case is judged on its own merits." I would buy raffle tickets or sell them at Residential schools and other events and repeat the same info. Now I can see from the other side what happens as we Trustees of OUSET make our decisions. Changing students’ lives by giving them the opportunities they would not have been able to afford otherwise.

Sue Goodyear
OUSET Trustee

The Students Association recently celebrated Trustee’s week, thanking all our brilliant Trustees for the important work that they do. You can find out a bit more about what Trustees do by watching this video.

Group Tuition Policy...

In late September, many OU students began to experience issues with ‘Group Tuition’ – the allocation of tutors and the timetabling of tutorials, and started to discuss it on social media. Your Students Association took notice, and immediately entered into a dialogue with the Open University, sharing students’ experiences and frustration. Following our conversations, the University released statements on StudentHome. They focussed on resolving the issue but also planned a review of the process to make sure that lessons were learned from the problems that students had encountered.

The OU Students Association’s Central Executive Committee (the group of students elected to represent you) invited the University’s Vice Chancellor and new Director of Academic Services to their meeting on 15 October 2016 to answer questions tweeted to us by students about implementation, communication and future improvements to Group Tuition.

“I apologise unreservedly for the problems with tutorial allocation this year. The delivery to students was not satisfactory and I am deeply upset, and very sorry.” Peter Horrocks, OU Vice Chancellor

Our Reps made a strong case that the University should not step back from all of the positive parts of the Group Tuition policy, in particular the intended early notification to students of their tutorial dates and the provision of greater choice and more flexibility. The Executive called on the University to recognise that our concerns expressed earlier in the year following the initial pilot had not been addressed and we also stated that we were deeply concerned at the seemingly random geographical allocation of many students which was a departure from the agreed policy.

Since then, we have kept in constant communication with the University and several student representatives are taking part in a series of reviews conducted by an external consultant to find out what went wrong with the process, and what can be done to ensure that it doesn’t happen again. We are pleased to see that remedial action has been taken to deal with the issues and would like to praise the effort of front-line staff and senior officials for their tireless work to put the situation right. We’re especially proud of our student leadership team for collecting feedback from as many affected students as possible and sharing updates with the wider student body quickly and openly. The Students Association exists to promote your interests and we will continue to be vigilant in being the voice for OU students.

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Best overheard #OUstudent comment: ‘I now have more use for my laptop than just Facebook and Twitter’
Local Communities
Vice President Community fills us in on everything student meet-ups...

The Local Communities project aims to encourage students to attend local meet-ups or host their own social gatherings, either face-to-face or online. The project was launched after conference, supplying students who pledged to start a new meet-up event with a local community support packs which included: a meet-up checklist, tips on how to arrange local meet-ups, table-top signs, name badges, pens, and OU Students Association leaflets. Support packs were sent out in October to existing organisers to ensure they have same support in place.

Anyone who wants to become a meet-up host can fill in a ‘OU students meet-up form’ which will inform the community team when they are setting up the event and where it is will be held; the OU Students Association will then promote their event on the website and in social media areas, to inform OU students about local meet-ups in their area.

Even though at your first gathering there may be only one or two students who turn up, with support from OU Students Association word can spread and they can become regular social events for students in your area.

I have hosted student meet-ups in the past in Kent (Chatham, Maidstone, Canterbury and Rochester) and in Surrey (Crawley). I have always found meeting other like-minded students on similar study journeys very rewarding and have also attended other student’s gatherings when I can.

The Student Community Team is looking forward to the next batch of support packs going out soon to new meet-up organisers who have not been involved previously. So, if you’re interested in hosting or attending a meet-up in your area, go ahead and visit our meet-ups page for further details.

Got any further questions on how it works? Feel free to contact the Student Community team directly by email or you’d be welcome to contact me directly at my email address.

I hope you will get involved with the Local Community Project, it can be so much fun, whether you’re attending a student gathering near you or creating one yourself. Either way the OU Students Association is here to support you within your OU student community.

Stephanie Stubbins
Vice President Community

We love to see your pictures from meet-ups! Make sure to use #meetOUstudents when sharing them on social media!
Anca

In 2011, I was at a crossroads in my OU journey. After starting with a clear goal in mind, the BSC Hons IT and Computing, and completing some of the relevant modules, I realised the level 3 offer was not quite to my taste. I tried a very quick dip into the Humanities side, but apart from gaining a much deeper understanding of the English Language, its history and uses, that particular period can only be described as annus horribilis.

I slowly turned my attention to Sciences, having previously experience University-level education in Chemistry. All good and proper, but what could I do with an Open Degree comprising of IT and Chemistry? Hmm, that is when one of the Careers Service's forums stepped in. I think it was a forum dedicated to people doing IT courses and wanting a job in that particular field. I posted my question in there and, lo and behold, got an answer from somebody who seemed to know quite a lot about Chemistry. It was Cath Brown. I liked her response, but I wanted more information, so, after finding her email address on her VLE profile, I emailed her privately.

The rest, they say, is history. No, I haven't graduated yet. Real life sometime gets in the way. I am still dreaming of walking across the stage, in floods of tears and a state of complete happiness. But what actually happened exceeded my wildest expectations. The Careers Service helped me gain a friend. They say OU is known and praised for its lifelong learning ethos. But what about lifelong friendships we make along the way?

Cath

Some people might say we are joined at the hip. I can assure you we’re not. We have common interests and support each other. I don’t know what I can help Cath with, but she’s my sounding board, the person I go to when I need advice or have something to discuss. Sometimes I got the feeling she was like a pushy parent, giving me the encouragement and the kick up the back side to do things I never thought I was capable of doing. On a lighter note, I might be responsible for her recent addiction to Kipling bags. ;)

Now, 4 years after the forum ‘incident’, helping one society being set up (Alchemy), getting involved with the Students Association and spending countless hours and days volunteering, I can honestly say that the Careers Service helped me better myself, gain skills, learn new things, kickstart my social life, got me elected as a student representative and, last but not least, help other people along the way.

How did I find the Careers Service’s forum? From an item of news on my StudentHome.

For more information about the Careers Service and how they can help us, you can find them on StudentHome, top right hand side under ‘Careers’.

Who knew my tendency to sound off on every forum that exists would be so hugely productive? I was used to it getting me a reputation as ‘the notorious Cath’ – but getting so good a friend too was a massive bonus.

I’ve not used the Careers Service as a
consumer’ – although I fell into my teaching career by accident, I (mainly) love it and have no desire to change. But I do lurk around on the careers forums sometimes as lots of OU students seem to fancy teaching, and it’s nice to be able to help (the Careers Service also started me off doing my teaching blog ‘The Accidental Teacher www.teacherposts.wordpress.com’ – which is not only another way to procrastinate, but actually got me an offer of a local paper column!)

I remember that first forum exchange with Anca very well – not least because it was so nice to come across someone on there who sounded enthusiastic about chemistry! I’d just been looking into getting people together to set up the OU’s chemistry society, Alchemy, so hearing from another enthusiast was very exciting.

One of the first times we actually met was at a West Midlands area social in Coventry; I remember we bonded over our mutual hatred of incorrect apostrophes! (I did get her a mug with the slogan ‘I’m silently correcting your grammar’).

Anca says she doesn’t know what she can help me with – I hope she does really! She’s a sounding board for me too – someone I can moan and bitch to without being judged for it. She was there for me when I went through a very difficult time in the last year or so – I’m not really one for letting it all out, but it was good to be able to talk to someone when I needed to. She’s much more of a ‘people person’ than I am, so when I have the sense to ask her, she’ll tell me if I’m being too in-your-face in what I’m planning to say or post.

We enjoy exchanging ideas and plotting random schemes together – for example, the activities at the Alchemy stand at conference (as shown in that picture of us with the sherbet)! And of course there are a lot of random chats, both face to face and online. Anca’s undoubtedly encouraged me in a few bad habits – not just the Kipling bags, but would you believe I never used social media before she got me into it? Look at all that procrastination that wouldn’t have happened otherwise!

We have plenty of common interests, but we’re very different as people; I think that’s at least in part why we’re such good friends (I think another copy of me would drive me to distraction!).

Thank you, Careers Service, for a lifelong friend!

Anca Seaton
Area Association Representative for England

Cath Brown
Faculty Association Representative

What the Students Association gave me...

I guess I would say that the five years I did centrally with the Students Association has given me many, many skills which would prove useful when I get myself into meaningful employment! I suppose what is has done is given me the confidence to stand up in front of people and present - something which I would have never attempted before! I was your classic quiet mouse in the corner who wouldn’t say boo to a goose! Now I stand up in front of a class of 20+ adults every week and teach, plus I have presented twice at Council. I also was asked by Belinda Tynan who was the then PVC Learning, Teaching and Innovation to go to Paris and present twice at a Global Conference on Distance Learning. It was full of policy makers from all over the world who wanted to hear what it was like straight from the horse’s mouth! Belinda and I weren’t sure how it would go but with her help a presentation was put together and before I knew it I was on a train to Paris to talk in front of this people and became the star of the show - I have no idea how but if it hadn’t been for my volunteering with the Association I would never have done it!

That ability to stand up in front of folk (something that terrifies me) got my teaching job. All the skills I have learnt and developed through my time with the Association have definitely secured my employment and taken me places in my role as a childcare worker that I never thought possible. The ability to act confident, even when I don’t feel it (I can bluff for Scotland!!), to not be too overwhelmed by the task in front of me, to have the drive and determination to succeed and know I can do anything if I put my mind to it and to dissect reports. The report writing skills I have picked up mean I have been able to support my dyslexic manager, I am able to write comprehensive but concise communication sheets for work. These are probably all skills I would have developed over time but they have definitely been developed faster because of my involvement with the Association. I have also taken part in a good few events at the OU where I have had to stand up and speak. I am told I am inspirational speaker, again something I could and would never have done without the time I spent with OU Students Association.

Ruth Tudor
Immediate Past President

Best overheard #OUstudent comment: ‘Studying in bed because it’s cold out there…’
My name is Cathy and I am a careers adviser with the OU. In my time with the OU, I have noticed that sometimes students aren’t aware there is a careers and employability service, so I am writing this article as part of putting this right. I have been an OU student, so I understand the challenge of juggling many commitments at once. Because I know the challenges, it is important to me to support students in developing career plans and making all that hard work pay off.

I am particularly concerned, as I know a high number of OU students have a disability or health issue, depression/anxiety, or have a specific learning difficulty such as dyslexia or autism. If this applies to you, then you are in good company with many other OU students, and we in the careers team, want to develop resources to support you in all aspects of career planning and job seeking.

If you have a disability, learning difficulty or health issue, the careers team have an action packed autumn programme for you.

The key starting point is to explore career areas that are relevant to your interests and skills, and then to make sure you understand your rights, how to help yourself in the job market and knowing where to look for opportunities. It will also be helpful to consider whether to tell a prospective employer about your disability and if so, how you want to do this.

We want to support you with all these issues and are developing resources to help you every step of the way.

Take a look at resources already on our website, which can be found in the Help Centre on Student Home.

Once on our pages, scroll down and select ‘attend a webinar’ or ‘join a forum’ and you will find:

**Alternative Ways of Working**: If 9-5 is not for you

Many more items are being added this Autumn, and more resources are being added in the New Year:

**Opening Doors**: job seeking and internships for students with disabilities

**Mind the Gap**: how to present a gap in your employment record

**Homeworking**: opportunities working from home

**October 25th**: Never Let Your Fear Decide Your Future: Career planning if you have low self confidence

**November 30th**: Strengths & Options: Career planning for students with autism

**December 7th**: Pain & Gain: Career planning for students with long-term pain

Coming soon...

**Podcasts**: Telling Prospective Employers about your Disability, Mindfulness and Careers and Job Seeking with Dyslexia

**Ebook**: Job Seeking with a Disability. This includes links to live vacancies and internships as well as information and advice.

We also have a Career Planning and Job Seeking Workbook which you can order from our website, or you can contact the Careers Team for one to one guidance. So, when you have submitted your first TMA, take time to look at what we have to offer – it’s never too early to start thinking about your career plans!

Cathy Lovell
Careers Adviser

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**The National Students Survey...**

As a member of the OU’s student family you’re a part of the UK’s largest university, and one of more than 200,000 people currently studying with us worldwide. You often tell us how much you enjoy your time studying with us, but we’re always looking for ways to make your experience even better - that’s why the National Student Survey is so important.

This nationwide survey gives you the chance to tell us what you enjoyed about your time with us, as well as anything you think could be improved. The survey opens in January, and if you’re contacted by Ipsos MORI and invited to take part, I strongly encourage you to do so. Although anonymous, we review all feedback and make changes as a result, and it takes just five or ten minutes to complete.

From all of us here at The Open University, thanks in advance for participating, and best wishes for all your future studies.
So, I shared a couple of astronomy photographs, that I had taken, on a student support group page and was overwhelmed by the response that they got.

I think that genetics has a lot to do with my passion for astronomy. My father worked at the Jodrell Bank Radio Astronomy Observatory all his working life. I grew up to have a fascination with space and the wonders of the night sky.

I live somewhere that has dark skies and very little light pollution and I love to take my camera out to capture the beauty of the universe above our heads.

Astrophotography either requires, or develops, great levels of patience. There is endless waiting for a clear night, then, if it is the stars, or galaxies that you want, a moonless night is required.

As it goes dark I set up my equipment then I select my target and set the camera going, taking long exposure frames of an apparently blank piece of the sky. If all is going well I can now just sit back for a few hours in the dark, quiet, cold night.

By the end of the night (usually the early hours of the morning) I put all my equipment away. The next day or so is spent processing the images.

I was asked by another student, 'how does it make you feel?'. When I look at the photograph that I captured it reminds me of just how small and insignificant we really are, but it also fills me with awe and wonder at what is right there above our heads. I was also asked if it was a release from study? I replied that it was sometimes just a release from ‘life’.

I think that it is essential to remember what is important to us and to make the time amongst our study, work and family commitments to pursue our hobbies and passions. These are the things that we can turn to when we need a release from the stresses and anxiety of life. Some people like to immerse themselves in a good book or a series on the television. For others, it might be sport or going out for a drink. For me, I just like to sit outside in the dark, quiet, cold, fresh air ‘staring into space’.

Colin Pritchard
OU student
My computer went haywire. Unwanted and disturbing pop-ups started appearing, filling the screen. Messages bordering on pornographic, offering cash prizes or, most sinister of all, that my computer had been hijacked and would not be operative unless I telephoned a number provided. My studies had taken a dramatic turn. 

I had settled down to an evening of studying for the first week of my Masters in Creative Writing when this occurred. I immediately switched off my computer and froze in fear and panic. Would this always happen whenever I switched on my computer? All I wanted to do was to study in peace without distraction. 

I have heard about computers being hijacked by unscrupulous hackers but I never thought it could happen to me. I am not a heavy Internet user, and even when I did have home Internet access a couple of years ago, I never experienced this problem. I thought how pointless it would be to be awarded the OU’s discretionary funding for Internet costs, only to ignore it in preference for the daily trudge to my local library to use their internet in relative safety and avoid sudden and disturbing internet pages appearing over my study pages. 

The next morning I had put last night’s disaster to the back of my mind while I tackled other reading tasks, but I knew I could not avoid what had happened. I remembered how helpful the OU pages are, they encourage you not to hesitate to phone them if you have a problem, so I gave them a call. 

I must have still been in shock because I could not get my words out to describe what had happened to me, but I managed to give the listener the gist of what had happened. She took my fragmented description light-heartedly and said she would send me a link which I could use to download and cure my problem. I could hear a reassuring smile in her voice to indicate matters were not as disastrous as I thought and that smile reassured me immensely. 

I still feared switching on my computer - the thought of accessing my email while fearing more unsavoury pop-up pages almost put me off logging onto the Internet for good. However I forged on and managed to access my email account without any distractions. Seeing a padlock symbol on the browser window also gave me a sense of peace. This website was
safe. I clicked the link and an anti-malware programme started loading onto my computer. Sitting transfixed I watched as it scanned the contents of my hard drive. I watched in horror as the malware detection rate soared from zero to 350. I clicked through some options and finally onto the one that allowed me to delete them. I have never felt such relief from pressing a delete button.

I felt reassured when logging onto the Internet, but that feeling was short-lived. The same horrific pop up pages appeared again. It was almost as if they were saying you can’t get rid of us that easily. I hit my computers off button in horror. I logged back on and the disgusting pictures had gone. I was determined not to let these intrusions affect my studying. I carried on viewing my course work pages but every so often when attempting to go back a page, I noticed the web page address box change from the padlock sign and authentic OU address to a mixture of letters and numbers.

I continued looking at my course work pages, wondering, is it happening again? I felt that as long as I did not hit the back button I would be safe. This method only worked for so long and then a familiar pop-up appeared. Once again I switched off my computer and switched it on again. My computer’s original start up page flickered on, then the same locked message appeared. Again, I switched off immediately and switched on again. I could hear the hard drive whirring into life and I hoped it was trying to fight this invasion. Almost at once I got a sense of what novice computer users’ experience could be - total helplessness and a willingness to do anything to get my computer working again. But I was determined not to be another victim to this scam because that is what it was: a scam.

Luckily I had my phone to search for a way to unlock my computer from a frozen page demanding money. I thank goodness for the person who wrote that I should not phone and pay any money because it is a scam. Instead, it showed ways to unlock my computer and I saw there was hope that my situation was not totally hopeless. I was instructed to turn off my computer, turn it on again and then simultaneously hit the shift key and F8, but this did not work. Still resolute, I remembered my computer had a reboot feature which was activated by holding down the on/off key. I pressed for all my life was worth then after a few seconds I let go of the button and my computer came back on. That ghastly message was gone. I had finally defeated it.

I set to work to make changes to make sure this did not happen again. I uninstalled the anti-malware I had downloaded and my original protection miraculously appeared. It was now on and protecting my computer. I ran a fully computer scan and after 40 minutes the results

were ready. I viewed them and to my horror the software had quarantined a Trojan that was dangerous to my computer. I looked through available options and hit the delete button and felt a sense of satisfaction that I was back in charge of ridding my computer of these dangerous pests.

Then it dawned on me that every time I went online those horrible pages popped up. That meant that there was a virus somewhere in that process and I was unknowingly re-infecting my computer every time. So once again I used my phone to search for how to delete viruses from my search bar. Once again I was grateful for instructions guiding me on how to reset it and I did so easily and immediately.

I logged onto the OU homepage with a sense of protection and I zoomed around my study pages, pressing the back button and clicking on random tabs, all the while my confidence was increasing that my virus protection was doing its job and keeping the nasties out. I carried on like this for about half an hour before logging off, safe in the knowledge that when I next switched on my computer and logged onto the Internet, I would be safe to carry on my studies without unwanted and threatening invasions.

Paulette Myrie

Need to talk?

OU student life can be tough and if it all gets a bit too much, don’t forget Nightline is there for all OU students wherever they are. Student volunteers are on the hotlines from 6pm each evening waiting to take calls. No topic is off bounds and they’ll listen as long as you need. It could really help to talk your problems through, whatever they’re about and however difficult they feel right now.

Hundreds of OU students have already made that call so you’ll be in good company.

Call: 020 7631 0101
Instant message (Skype): chat.nightline
Skype Phone: londonnightline
Text: 07717 989 900
You can email the team at any time on: listening@nightline.org.uk
My name is Chantelle and I began studying with the OU, for the first time, in October. In truth, I came to the OU with many misconceptions about what it would entail. Registering with the OU initially felt like a failure, not returning to my ‘brick’ university felt like an admission of defeat and I felt like I was settling for something less academic and without the community feeling of a campus. Needless to say that as quickly proven wrong and I have developed a profound respect and empathy with those, like myself, who have chosen to study this way. From the very beginning, searching for inductions and fresher’s events and desperately trying to attend as many as possible, to study itself, staring blankly at your study materials and bullying your brain into submission, being an OU student has been more challenging and yet more rewarding than I could possibly have envisioned.

My first real interactions with the OU were through the Student Hub Live Events. Although, at times, it could be a little intimidating to suddenly be introduced to the enormous world of the OU, it was a relief to know that I was not navigating it alone. Trying to retain all the information and advice was impossible, of course, I did my best to remember and act on as much as possible, emailing an introduction to my tutor and adding bookmarks to webpages that I still have not viewed. It is comforting, however, to know that the information is there waiting, if and when I should need it. More importantly, the Student Hub brought the campus to me, the random conversations and jokes, the introductions to the different services available and the chance to share your anxieties and excitement with others who are in a similar position. If you have not yet watched any of their events, I strongly recommend that you check out the catch-up videos available.

Starting study was an incredibly lonely experience at first. There is just you and your work or, if like me you have pets, perhaps the cat walking across your laptop or nudging your pen out of your grip. In a lecture, if your mind wanders, the information can still be absorbed through your hearing but, with OU study, you need to be actively engaged at all times. If you can avoid becoming overwhelmed by it all, the depth of the information available for your OU studies is truly extraordinary. Sometimes you come across a point that you would like to discuss or need clarified and it feels like there is no-one there to answer you and you have to remind yourself to email your tutor or post in a forum and you realise that there is someone to answer you after all.

When you are sat at home, constantly moving things around in your diary, trying to get to a point where you can place that little tick next to a task in your study planner and avoid interruptions from those friends and family members that fail to understand that flexible study still requires you to take time to work, it is really important to have people who can understand. There are so many ways to get involved with the OU that it can be difficult to know where to start, especially when you are already trying to juggle so much. I guess there are no right answers in how to get involved and that it is just important to do something, whatever that may be. Maybe attend your local Association meet-up or even log in to Facebook for one of their events with your tea in your lap. Post study questions in your tutorial and module forums or vent about your studies on one of the area Facebook groups. If you are really feeling brave, check out the volunteering opportunities. They don’t all require substantial time commitments, there are opportunities for you to just offer your time for the day. I’m still trying to find my way through my studies and I hope that all my fellow freshers will find their way too. Good luck!

Chantelle Minchin

PLEXUS is the Open University Students Association LGBT+ Group and is open to all current students and alumni. If you want more information please visit our website www.ouplexus.co.uk

We also have some places on our Committee. If you want to become more involved in the development of Group contact Graham Rimmer the Chair of PLEXUS via email chair@ouplexus.co.uk
Learning on the go...

I completed my Diploma of Higher Education in Adult Nursing in September 2007 and just two months later, at the age of 21, I joined Princess Mary’s Royal Air Force Nursing Service. The next seven years of my career literally flew by in a blur of basic training, preceptorship, flight nurse training and two operational deployments of Afghanistan. In 2014, while working as a Flight Nurse on Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron, I decided the time was right to finally ‘top-up’ my diploma.

In 2009 the Department of Health announced that all new nurses in England will be educated to degree level from 2013. The move was a positive response to the increased responsibilities nurses face today in maintaining quality and patient safety; however, for many ‘diploma nurses’ who want to complete a degree course, study has to fit in with working schedules. RAF Flight Nurses are no exception to this! Flexibility to study while on the move was an absolute necessity for me, which led me to choose the Open University BSc (Hons) Nursing Practice.

The Open University’s wide implementation of technology made a big difference to completing my studies while serving as a Flight Nurse on Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron. Using the downloadable textbook, I was able to complete course reading while 35,000 feet in the air, without having to carry a 2Kg textbook in my hand luggage. When delayed in various airports around the world I was able to access my study planner using the OU Anywhere App and keep up with the week’s learning activities. With the eTMA system I did not have to be in the country to submit my work. All of these technological options enabled me to stay on track and keep motivated throughout the course.

Undertaking the course not only improved my academic skills but also enhanced my operational military effectiveness. While completing the module K313 Leadership and Management in Health and Social Care I compiled a report on the organisational culture of Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron. Three positive outcomes came from that report: a communication tool to provide a framework for giving and receiving flight information between patient and Flight Nurse was developed and implemented, a case for implementation of a portable privacy screen for the use of maintaining confidentiality and dignity when conducting pre-flight assessments was submitted based on critical analysis of the patient satisfaction survey results, and a case for developing patient focus groups for service improvement was put forward.

There are many positive qualities that are associated with serving personnel in the armed forces, such as: discipline, ability to prioritise, organisation and determination. I would award these qualities to all distance learners also. With the support of the Open University I have been able to reach my goal of achieving an honours degree, while fulfilling my military duties, and have developed skills that have seen me promote from corporal to sergeant.

Demelza Dachtler

Peer Support

Experienced OU students, here for you

Studying getting you down? Don’t know where to turn? Then please contact Peer Support.

Our Peer Supporters are current and past OU students who understand the difficulties of studying alone. We understand how lonely and overwhelming it can be, trying to balance study with a busy life and coping with other problems such as disability.

Don’t struggle on alone. Send us a message on the Peer Support Forum, and one of us will contact you within a few hours."

You can find more information about Peer Support on our website, or on the special confidential forums.

Peer Support will be open throughout the holiday season although on occasions, with restricted staff cover, as a result some replies may take a little longer than usual to answer.

Best overheard #OUstudent comment: ‘TMAs are so skilled in approaching stealthily and causing consternation’
Reporting back...

It’s been a busy few months for our new Central Executive Committee (CEC) since taking up their roles on the 1st August. As a team, they’ve attended both Handover and Induction weekends and then in October their first full CEC meeting. As part of this meeting, the CEC report back to students on what they’ve been up to. Over the next few pages, we’ve handpicked some highlights reported by the Officer Team...

Chris Pane, President

I have had multiple talks with individuals online and face-to-face around campus and events, which has helped maintain a grassroots perspective. This has helped during decision making and representing the student voice, in areas such as our virtual learning environment, forums, tuition fees and during talks with Parliament around the higher education and research bill.

As part of my inductions, I have been in communication with many members of the University and have had meetings with the Vice Chancellor’s Executive and other members of staff. I have also attended an extraordinary Council meeting where we discussed the Council governance review report, building better communications with council and membership committee diversity policy.

But my highlight so far was being invited to the All Party Parliamentary Group on Students to speak on the research and higher education bill that is currently progressing through Parliament. I represented students by highlighting the missing student representation and decision-making powers in the office for students. I recommended they add students to the highest position possible, such as in the Teaching and Excellence Framework panel and Office for Students board.

Nicola Simpson, Deputy President

Since taking up the role I have attended several meetings on campus in Milton Keynes, kept in regular contact with members of the Central Executive Committee and continued to engage with the wider membership of the Association through the Association forums and social media.

I have played a key role in many implementation and working groups, including the Student Association Regions Review where we discussed the next steps for Local Communities, Groups and Societies which provide a popular way for students to get engaged with the Association. We also considered the new volunteer role ‘Learning Experience Reporter’ including the responsibilities of the role and how they might communicate with other student volunteers. I was also involved in a Volunteer Steering Group, to look at the ways to reward and recognise the contribution volunteers make to the Association, as well as the University’s Students Consultative Executive and Student Engagement Project.

One highlight has been attending the National Diversity Awards. The Open University sponsored the Positive Role Model Award for LGBT, which was won by Moira Smyth. It was
an inspiring evening and a great privilege to be invited to attend!

Peter Cowan, Vice President Administration

Since taking office I have found this role to be both challenging and rewarding in equal measure. As my predecessor remarked in his first report, August and to some extent September is a fairly quiet time in the annual cycle of University meetings. However, for VP Administration the change of the Financial Year on August 1st means that it can be anything but that!

Notable events relating to this are:

- Signing off on Society Accounts (these are in progress as Societies submit them) and approving the constitutions of societies wishing to affiliate with the Association.
- The annual audit and the ensuing Audit Meeting to ensure the Association’s accounts (as well as those of OSL and OUSET) are correct and comply with necessary legislation and regulations.
- Setting the Association’s budget for the financial year 2016-17.

I also have responsibility for keeping the Bye-laws in good order and these need some minor alterations to reflect changes in structure since August 1st. These will be presented to this CEC meeting for approval and forwarding to the Trustees for final approval.

Rachel Hughes, Vice President Communications

Since taking my role on in August 2016, I have hit the ground running. I have had several meetings with the communications team, which have been beneficial to the beginning of my term. I am continuously involved in promoting the Students Association and sharing information across our communication channels.

One of my responsibilities is to be editor-in-chief of this magazine. This involves working with the editorial team in content sourcing from both the wider student body and student reps. I have also been busy reviewing existing social media spaces and bringing consistency to their names, so they are easier to find. I’m also working on new social media guidelines, which will help students who want to use social media to promote their role, group or society.

I have also put forward recommendations for making changes to the Association’s website, including a separate news and events page, a dedicated student community page with information about meet-ups and resources for students hosting these events, a photo gallery, and improvements to the way papers are displayed.

Stephanie Stubbsins, Vice President Community

The pledge drive from Conference resulted in 99 students pledging either to stay in touch with students in their area via a local Facebook group or through meeting face to face. Support packs were sent out to 81 students in time for the August Bank Holiday. This included various items to help support students meeting up including tips from experienced meet-up organisers. We have helped to advertise 15 meet-ups taking place in September.

As part of my induction, I attended the Bath residential school where I learnt valuable information on our volunteer and coordinator roles. I also attended my first societies meeting and have been part of the regions review implementation working group. I have also been working behind the scenes with the staff team to develop Freshers, with a programme full of events and activities!

Lorraine Adams, Vice President Education

My most pressing business to start with was helping to set up the new Central Representatives Appointments Committee. There was a lot of interest and it’s great to have new voices, but with that comes the challenge of a new team working together. The Committee members are in the process of looking at application forms and appointing Central Reps to OU committees. The huge change in the way the OU now runs its system of governance means we have had to adapt to a new committee structure, including a new Faculties structure.

As well as this, I have also played an active role in the Regions Review implementation working group, Academic Progress group and the Group Tuition steering group.
Cherry Day, Vice President Equal Opportunities

I have been involved with various introductory meetings with OU staff, including the Chair of the Securing Greater Accessibility group, Widening Access and Success Services, Offender Learning Academic Services, the Head of Equality, as well as the Black and Ethnic Minority Network.

These sessions were all introductory/for information meetings with some of the key people I will be dealing with in my role over the next two years. The people I met told me about their areas of responsibility; current/on-going/future projects and how the Association is/ could be involved. Future reports from me will therefore contain much more specific subject detail. Everyone I’ve met to date have been more than welcoming and willing to engage with me personally and the Association as a whole. Therefore, although I can see some ‘challenges’ ahead, I’m hoping this good start bodes well for the future.

Caroline Poppenga, Vice President Representation & Research

I was actively involved in the Learning Experience Reporter project where we discussed how the new voluntary role would help collect information for the Faculty Association Representatives – according to the motto of being their “eyes and ears”.

As part of my induction, I met with the Association’s Research & Information Officer, to talk about the possibility of new research projects. I am in favour of a project on what students expect from their Association, which would consequently enable to raise awareness and engagement in line with these expectations. I have also joined the Survey Management Working Group, which I anticipate will lead to a discussion on what questions might be asked as part of a future student consultation.

In late March the OU found out that certain restrictions which had originally been proposed for Postgraduate Loans would be relaxed meaning our students in England would be eligible for Postgraduate Loans. Unfortunately, some students will still not be able to make use of these loans because they are paid to the students in instalments rather than at the beginning of their study. This conflicts with the OU process, which requires module fees to be paid in full at the start, or via an OUSBA loan. Potential students who cannot successfully apply to OUSBA nor pay the module fee up front will not be able to study a Postgraduate module or qualification with the OU. However, the OU is exploring ways to ensure that students who are eligible for a Postgraduate student loan can use it to pay for their OU Postgraduate module fees.

The OU, alongside the Students Association, is considering how the OU can improve its responses to early signs of students’ concerns and in publicising how it has used student feedback. We are continuing to work with the OU to provide a website that is student friendly, has useful information, and will be used.

Alison Kingan, Vice President Student Support

I am excited to announce an addition to the Association’s Peer Support service, ‘Peer Support Through The Gate’. This service is aimed at students who have been released from a secure unit and are likely to encounter additional problems to those which many students face.

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Barbara Tarling, Student OU Council Member

As reports go I’m afraid this one is rather light on actions and achievements. Most of my time has been spent reading the vast quantities of background information that have been helpfully passed my way. I have also attended a training course on ‘Students as Governors’ run by the LFHE (Leadership Foundation for Higher Education), although I had to leave before the final session in order to talk to HEFCE (Higher Education Funding Council for England) about my appointment as a member of the TEF (Teaching Excellence Framework) Panel - which was tricky, because the news was still embargoed at that point.

I will also be attending the first meeting of Council, the first of the 2016-17 academic year. The only items on the Agenda concern the Council Governance Review, which proposes major changes to the membership of Council (though not to the student membership) and the way its committees are organised. Many of the changes focus on defining the relative roles of Senate and Council and strengthening the relationship between them, so my experience as a member of Senate will be particularly valuable.

Read the full reports…

The full reports can be downloaded from the Association’s website.

Area Association Representatives (AARs) and Faculty Association Representatives (FARs) also play a key role in the CEC. Their reports can be downloaded by following these links – AARs reports and FARs reports.
Societies

Hi everyone and welcome to the Societies’ section of OU Students Magazine.

As at any university, societies can be an important part of life for OU students! There are societies focused around academic areas (such as OUPS, the Psychology Society), societies offering an outlet for your creative side (such as Write Club) and societies about your interests (such as Central Region Arts Club or Mountaineering Society). There’s a full list of affiliated societies on the OU Students Association website here.

So why join a society? Societies offer all sorts of different things - from support for your academic work (revision events, specimen answers), to newsletters, to day visits and longer trips away. Most of all, they put you in touch with other students who share some of your interests.

Societies can help make your OU journey easier and more enjoyable.

If you’d like to join a society, just use the details on the link to get in touch! All the societies love to have new members. You can often go along to an event without joining, just to get a “feel” for it, if you like. Later on, you might want to help out in some way, or join the committee; that’s another way to make new friends and can even enhance your CV.

Cath Brown
Societies Committee Chair

Join a society!

Joining or starting a society is a great way to meet other OU students, have fun and enrich your OU study. We have so many diverse societies that you’ll want to join a few...

http://www.open.ac.uk/ousa/societies

The views and opinions of the authors who have submitted articles to OU Students Magazine belong to them alone and do not necessarily reflect the views of the OU Students Association or all of its members.
Interested in TableTop gaming?

With the many advances with online communication that have allowed education to become more accessible, it also allows for other experiences to be shared, one of which being tabletop gaming.

From classic board games like chess and scrabble, to more specialist games like Zombicide, trading card games, and even role-playing games, people can now connect to play and experience a wide array of tabletop games despite possibly being thousands of miles apart.

Due to these facts, I am starting up a new student group, allowing students, staff, and alumni of the Open University to play, socialise, and try a variety of new games. If you are interested, you can find the group on facebook under ‘Open Tabletop Society’.

We look forward to seeing new faces, and having many an adventure.

Charlie Pearson

OU Video Games society seeks members!

The Open University Video Games Society is a new society open to anyone in the OU community who wants to meet others who share their love of the wonderful world of computer and video games.

We believe that video games can and should be a social pursuit, and are creating an inclusive and friendly society where anyone associated with the OU can meet new friends to play with online or in person. We support all platforms and types of electronic gaming from the old to the new, from computers of all shapes and sizes to consoles of all vintages.

As an emerging society seeking affiliation with the OU Students Association, we need members! Currently membership is completely free of charge and we encourage anyone with an interest in gaming to sign up. No matter what your skill level or what you like playing, everyone is welcome.

Please email to get involved.

James Brierley
**FUSION: OU Physics and Astronomy society**

Fusion was well represented at the Students Association conference and we were able to attract a range of interest at the Fusion market stall as part of the Societies Showcase over the weekend in June. It was great to welcome both Monica Grady and Sally Jordan (former and current heads, respectively, of the Department of Physical Sciences) who kindly gave their time speaking to students and offering their advice in 1-1 informal conversations to people. I also developed new skills in selling T-Shirts!

We now have over 600 members in our Facebook Group which is great – hello and welcome! Future real events are planned: an informal get together at the Science Museum, London on Saturday 10 December and the annual Fusion Physics Weekend which will at the Open University campus, Milton Keynes on Saturday 11 March 2017. Further details will be shared on the Facebook group page.

Fusion welcomes news of external opportunities; indeed one has been led by one of Fusion’s very own members which might of wider interest: www.hostaphysicist.org: a number of student university physic societies would welcome Open University students – there may be one close to you! Another way to network, go to events, and make new friends.

As I can’t think how to end this article other than by wishing everyone a good festive break I’d like to share my favourite photo of the year…

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**Open University Students for Ethical Science**

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

As an OU student society affiliated to the Association, we aim to persuade the OU peacefully to replace its harmful use of animals in Life Sciences with academically equivalent or superior non-harmful alternatives. We have been instrumental in bringing about OU Students Association policy to support this aim, promote transparency in the university’s animal use and enable students to opt-out of harmful animal experiments without compromising their academic progress.

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

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

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

To find out more and how to join us please visit: The Ethical Science forum on the Virtual Learning Environment www.ouses.org.uk

Contact details: ses.membership@blueyonder.co.uk
Well as some of you already know, Write Club the creative writing society, is coming up to its second birthday in the New Year and we are finally starting to feel like a proper established society. Two of the committee members spent the day mixing with some of the older, and more established societies as well as some newer ones at the society’s day meeting at Walton Hall in November and it felt good to see what we were a part of. We are now finding ourselves in a position where we are helping to support other fledgling societies as they take their first steps towards affiliation.

It was so interesting getting to meet members of the other OU Students Association societies and learning from them about how we can move Write Club forward. It was also really great meeting face-to-face with people that we have had online friendships with over our time with the OU.

What was particularly gratifying to me was the sheer number of people in the room that were actually Write Club members. It is great to see that the love of creative writing cuts across all modules and disciplines to bring us all together in a safe place to share our work and get feedback and critique in a supportive atmosphere. I think it is a credit to the committee that they keep the page and forums running in such a way as to welcome everyone.

Did you know that we have daily prompts and discussion points of the Facebook group? And we run weekly activities in the OUSA-LIVE forums over the summer break between modules so that we can keep writing. Write Club also runs an annual Halloween competition, which is for stories and poems with a spooky theme. This year was amazing for the sheer volume of submissions; the only bad point being that we only had a limited number of prizes donated, so we had to work hard to narrow the winners down. All the winning entries will be published in the Winter Issue of the magazine that goes out to all registered members.

We are currently accepting submissions for the next issue on the theme of Winter. So if you feel you have a story, play or poem that hits our theme please consider submitting to us. Full submissions guidance can be found on the Facebook group wall, or in the pinned post in the Write Club forum.

If you have any queries about Write Club or about the magazine, how to submit your work, membership, or any other thing, please email us at WriteClub@gmx.co.uk and someone will get back to you to help out. We are free to join, you don’t have to have done a creative writing module, but you do have to be a past or present student or staff member of the Open University. Lastly, having a love of creative writing is the thing that links all of us here at Write Club, so if you have that, you are more than welcome.

Cin McGuigan
Write Club: Deputy Chair

How does your garden grow..?

The OU Gardening and Allotment society is a group just starting out and we are looking to become an affiliated society in the near future. This is for anyone with an interest in gardening and any past, present or future allotment owners. It will be a place to meet like-minded people and to share gardening experiences whilst hopefully gaining some new ones along the way.

We are hoping to arrange guest speakers and trips in the future along with some social media related projects and a website. For now you can find us on:

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Twitter: @OU_GAS
Facebook: Open University Gardening & Allotment Society (currently being created, keep checking back)

We are currently looking for enthusiastic people to fill various roles on the committee and really help this group to grow. If you are interested, feel that you can dedicate a few hours a month and can communicate with fellow members via social media, Skype etc, then please email k.hanson@my.open.ac.uk stating your interest or for more information.

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Best overheard #OUstudent comment: “Mummy you need to get sticky stars to put on the important bits”
Are you struggling to get a full understanding of those key issues in the course? 
Would you like some help in understanding how the whole course fits together?

Many students find that when they get about halfway through their course the amount of course material starts to get a little overwhelming: different topics, different perspectives, difficult concepts and all those research studies..... There seems to be so much to take in, you feel you are never going to get to grips with it in time for the exam. The OUPS Consolidation & Inspiration Weekends can provide the understanding and knowledge of the course that will help you gain the confidence to move forward in the course at this midway stage, giving you the skills to complete the module and help you prepare yourself for tackling the final EMA or exam more effectively.

- **DE100**: The weekend offers an overview of the module material, looking at the key issues that arise in DE100, examining general themes that run through the course and developing effective study skills and understanding of research methods.

- **D240**: The weekend looks in-depth at mental health and therapy. It will help you understand critical evaluation and how to apply this to the various techniques of psychotherapy.

- **ED219**: An in-depth look at some of the main topics featured in the course, providing an overview of the course, exploring difficult concepts and examining key themes and links as well as covering methods and study skills.

- **DD307**: The weekend will help you understand how to use critical evaluation, which is so important for TMAs and the exam. It will look at the interrogative themes and the key perspectives.

**Fully inclusive** price of £290 for OUPS members or £310 for non members includes:

- All meals, including dinner on Friday and Saturday, as well as social events including a welcome drink on Friday night
- Ensuite room in management conference facilities
- A great central location with excellent transport links and free parking and free sports facilities
- Extensive lecture handouts for delegates

To book your place, or for any further enquiries contact:

Irene Baumgartl, PO Box 986, Bromley, BR1 9LN
Tel: 020 8315 0049 (answerphone if not available)
Email: info@oups.org.uk

See www.oups.org.uk for more details on events or to book online

OUPS is a not for profit registered charity: number 282744
We are affiliated to the OU Students Association
Find us at www.oups.org.uk and on Facebook
Meet your student leadership team!

Make sure to check out the next edition to learn more about the rest of the Central Executive Committee!

Cath Brown
Faculty Association Rep - STEM
Right now I’m signed up for some physics (electromagnetism), but in the past I’ve done a lot of chemistry, some engineering, a bit of IT and some other odds and ends, including history and English language.
I’m an Essex Girl originally (Southend on Sea) but have been living in Birmingham for over 20 years
My favourite thing about being an OU student has to be the friends I have made - whether through studying with them, meeting them through societies, or via forums or Facebook, or through the Students Association. My OU friends have added so much to my life - different perspectives, laughter and good times, opportunities and support.

Jan Thompson
Faculty Association Rep - WELS
At the moment I’m studying Education and childhood studies research.
If I could have any super power, it would be the ability to fly!
I enjoy listening to all genres of music.
I chose the OU because of the flexibility of study.
My perfect pizza topping is pepperoni!

Amelia Gackowska
Area Association Rep - Continental Europe
I’m currently studying a maths module named, ‘Developing Statistical Thinking.’
I live in Linköping in Sweden, but I’ve actually lived in eight countries across Europe.
After a bad experience at a brick university (which I won’t name!), I was drawn to how flexible the OU is, and how I really noticed how the OU wants students to succeed as individuals, and not just as numbers and fee payers.
I once cycled the 60km Isle of Mann TT motorbike course on a pushbike in one day. Hard work, but worth it for the views of the sea and the chance to literally be in the clouds!

Sarah Couling
Area Association Rep - England
I am studying towards my LLB Hons degree.
I was born in Holland when my Dad was working over there. We moved back to the UK when I was couple of months old and I lived there until I was five years old. After that we packed up and moved to Sunny, hot Phoenix, Arizona where I grew up. In 2008 I moved back to the UK and have stayed here in Bristol ever since.
Normal brick university wasn’t an option for me as a mum of two young children, so I found the Open University and was immediately excited and enrolled the same day. The Open University made it possible for me to pursue my dreams and I am forever grateful.
Anca Seaton  
*Area Association Rep - England*

I am Romanian born and bred, and moved to the UK in 2004. I always wanted a formal qualification to reflect my love of computers. When I moved to the UK my then future husband was an OU student, and I did not want to feel left out.

If helping people is your thing, or if you would like to give something back, then volunteering is the way. It’s not always easy, but the thought that somehow, maybe in a very little way, you made a difference to an OU student’s academic life and, why not, social life, is something to be proud of.

I am a full time local government officer who likes to knit, cross stitch and read. I am also the webmaster for OU Alchemy, the Open University Chemistry Society.

Victoria Crawford  
*Area Association Rep - England*

I’m from Grimsby in North East Lincolnshire. I chose the Open University for its flexibility. Without distance learning I may never have returned to education.

I completed the Great East Swim in a very cold lake in Ipswich in the wind and rain.

My favourite thing about the OU is definitely the connections I have made with other OU students. Only other OU students truly know how challenging and equally brilliant being an OU student can be.

Patricia Gray  
*Area Association Rep - Scotland*

I am studying for a BA/BSC in Health and Social Care.

I chose the Open University because I am a mature student, I would not have felt confident in a brick university, because I had not studied for over 37 years. And I wanted to study while working.

I have enjoyed meeting so many students since becoming a member of the Students Association. I have enjoyed being a representative and attending Open University, QAA and SPARQS events and conferences in Scotland and England, and attending committee meetings. I have gained a lot of self-confidence, and also a lot of skills, and met a lot of interesting people.

Claire Smith  
*Area Association Rep - Wales*

I’m from the Cynon Valley, South Wales but have lived in Cardiff for the last five years.

I worked in the building where Peter Capaldi filmed his debut episode of Doctor Who while the filming took place and could hear him shouting about being Scottish when I was sat at my desk. (Not much work got done that day).

My favourite thing about the OU is meeting other students from all walks of life and getting to hear some of the unique stories that led them to the Open University.

Cinnomen McGuigan  
*Area Association Rep - Northern Ireland*

I’m originally from Manchester, but I have lived in Irvinestown in County Fermanagh for the last five years.

I joined the Open University back in 1999, because it was the only place I could get my BSc and still be able to hold down a full time job and bring up my two kids.

My favourite thing about being an OU student is becoming Deputy Chair of an OU Students Association Society (Write Club) and having 700 other students, who love the same things as I do, to chat to about writing.
Hello! My name is Amelia Gackowska and having been inspired by the successful OU Students’ social media event on World Mental Health Day, I’d like to talk about studying when one doesn’t quite fit the mental ‘norm.’

I’ve been a student with the OU since 2011, and I have to admit that whilst the flexibility of my courses was the major factor in me choosing this university, the fact that little interaction with other students and teachers was initially extremely attractive to me. That might sound strange, as I know many students are looking for interaction and face to face meetings, so let me backtrack and explain.

When I was 15, having experienced symptoms for at least five years, I was finally diagnosed with depression, and my way of coping was to throw myself into studies. Other teenagers at my school were planning parties in the breaks, but I was studying. I even completed an apprenticeship by the age of 17 alongside my school leaving certificates. I do not say that to be arrogant, but to show that study was my main, actually only, way of escape. When studying, I wasn’t thinking of the issues behind my depression.

I became very good at planning my own time, and arranging my studies around work so that I had control of my thoughts and feelings; imagine my shock when my first experiences at brick universities involved having everything arranged with no flexibility, plus a lot of group work. Oh, the group work. Why was that a problem? Because I’ve always been a bit, well, I did say socially awkward, but after reading a novel called The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time, I recognised a lot of aspects of my personality and upon talking to a nurse was referred for an Asperger’s Syndrome assessment. I recognised that these aspects were related to my depression, and by acknowledging and addressing them, things got better.

But then they got worse. And so when I decided to do another degree, I jumped at the chance to join the OU. Distance learning, little interaction, and the chance to manage my own time; being also self-employed, my life, and coping mechanisms were complete. Except they weren’t, because this time round, rather than throwing myself into study, I just couldn’t concentrate. I was always reluctant to ask my tutors for advice, as I didn’t know how to word the e-mails, and am pretty much terrified of telephones, so I’ve ended up pulling lots of all-nighters doing last-minute TMA. However, I’ve managed, and am now working towards my fourth OU qualification. To students like me, all I can say is, don’t give up! Even if there are days when you can’t get out of bed, when meds make you feel in-human, or those around you are dismissing you as unsuccessful, you are not! You are worth it, and you deserve your qualifications. Try to break up study into manageable chunks, and remember to reward yourself when you accomplish something, however small it may seem, it is an important step. Take a break and contact the Student Support Team if need be; they are there for you. Whilst I initially dismissed the Disabled Students Group (DSG) on principle as a supporter of the mental-disability-as-natural-variation school of thought (hoping I don’t sound to arrogant there!), I’ve since met two of the group’s organisers, and they are unbelievably understanding and welcoming. I’m not in the DSG myself, nor have I personally elected to use the OU’s disability support services, but they are there, non-judgemental and accessible, for students to access as much or as little as they like. If you are comfortable using a phone, Nightline and the innovative new Through The Gate support services are there to support you through your study and personal journeys too.

A year ago, that’s where I would have finished. However, the increased self-esteem I gained from being a successful(ish!) OU student, which led me to do longer be ashamed of having depression, encouraged me to get involved with the Students Association, and just as I started researching possibilities, the election nominations opened. Despite my experience as a brick union rep being rather muted; the extroverts dominated there, I felt encouraged to stand as the Area Rep for Europe, and was lucky enough to be elected. Thanks voters!

Always a passionate supported of volunteer work, (no, volunteers don’t just make tea!), I was enthusiastic to start, and my work ethic...
almost hit 15-year-old levels again. Never would I have imagined to have such empowering co-volunteers, who I know would support me if I ever need a quiet moment, and not only am I representing Europe-based students on issues that are important to me, but I’m loving hearing their comments, answering their questions with confidence, and having interesting live chats; thanks to a Greek student I now understand the supermoon! So even if you aren’t a student who craves meet-ups and who doesn’t feel isolated by the distance aspect of OU study, the Association still nevertheless has experiences to offer :) To all students who identify with the topic of mental health, whether or not you agree with diagnostic criteria or society’s labels, know that you won’t be judged at the OU or by the Association. You can speak out or not disclose, you can look for help, with studies or careers, and choose whether or not to accept it. You can join social events or work independently and you can mix and match all these factors up. You’re in control, but there’s a community and support network available at every corner. And that can only be a good thing.

Amelia Gackowska
Area Association Representative for Continental Europe

Through the Gate Peer Support

If you’ve been released from a secure unit but are finding continuing to study more problematic than you thought – your Students Association might have something to help you. We have recently launched our new Through the Gate (TTG) Peer Support service which was established for this reason. You can contact a Through the Gate Peer Supporter here. TTG volunteer Peer Supporters have received specific training to help students who are no longer in secure units and may need support with time management, concentration and motivation, amongst other things. Using the Association’s dedicated forum, and email, our Peer Supporters provide a listening ear, and a helping hand. It is run entirely online, so is only open to students with internet access. The service is almost entirely confidential (with the exception of extreme circumstances). You would be redirected to appropriate people for specific study, or academic related questions. TTG complements and enhances our existing Peer Support service and both services answer one off questions or possibly offer longer support via emails. Our Supporters have been supporting all OU students for many years. Any OU student wanting to contact a Supporter on the existing service can click here. We have other means to support students; if you would like to discover what’s available please visit our website or email ousa@open.ac.uk. We are also affiliated to Nightline which is available to any student at an affiliated University, not just OU students. We are delighted that there are four OU students who volunteer for Nightline. More information is available on our website. Please don’t sit at home tearing your hair out. What have you got to lose by posting a message to a Supporter or looking at the support section of our website? A Supporter is looking at their computer screen at this very moment hoping a student will talk to them – make their day and hopefully yours, by asking a question. Peer Support will be open throughout the holiday season although on occasions, with restricted staff cover, as a result some replies may take a little longer than usual to answer.
A President’s diary...

A quick look at some of what Chris Pane, Association President, has been up to over the last few months!

And the winner is...

Over 700 OU students entered our radio competition, each sending in suggestions for a brand new name for the show. There were some really brilliant entries - it was incredibly hard to pick!

The new name of the show is... **Studio**. We love the name as it’s simple, easy to remember and is ‘student radio’ combined.

Quite a few students suggested ‘Studio’ - we can’t give all of them a hoody, but instead decided to do a prize draw. The winning students have been contacted, so if you suggested ‘Studio’, check your inbox!