Verity Good morning Cath, good morning Steph, how are you both today?

Cath Fine thank you. A bit warm here on campus isn’t it?

Verity It certainly is isn’t it and I wonder if it’s warm where all our viewers are today. Good morning everybody out there in the OU ether and we’re here this morning on the first day, Day 1, of President and Deputy President for 2018 – 2020. Very exciting time for the Students Association, very exciting time I’m sure for themselves and I hope it’s a really exciting time for you at home there as well, or wherever you are watching. Whether you’re watching it live or watching it back, welcome, thank you so much for being here. We’re going to get to know our President and Deputy President a little bit better over the next few minutes, ten minutes, however long; we’ll just see how we go shall we?

We’ve got some quick-fire questions for you and then we’re going to ask some more in depth questions about your roles themselves and what that means for the students out there but first of all can you please tell me, we’ll start with Cath first, what was your role in the last term and what is your role now?

Cath In the last term I was the Faculty Rep for STEM, that’s science, technology, engineering and mathematics – I might as well get in there with my acronyms – and I’m now the President.

Verity And Steph.

Steph So my previous role was Vice President Community which was Freshers and meet-ups, societies, clubs, all friendly student-y stuff and now I am Deputy President, a bit more serious.

Verity And very exciting. So I’m sure you’ve seen on social media we do some of the hashtag type questions.

Cath Tough questions.

Verity Tough questions, very tough, very, very tough and viewers at home can play along if you’d like. Let’s go straight in with cooked or continental breakfast? I can only take your first answer.

Cath Cooked – provided there are enough veggie options.
Steph          Cooked – same I like veggie options.
Verity         Really! Bit of the veggie sausage, bit of Linda McCartney?
Cath           Bit of a veggie.
Steph          Mushrooms.
Verity         Mushrooms, oh no.
Cath           Hash browns.
Verity         Oh yeah I’ll give you the hash browns I’m not sure on the mushrooms.
Cath           Tomatoes everything.
Verity         And what about with that breakfast tea or coffee?
Cath           Ooo.
Steph          Cup of tea, just got into tea.
Cath           Depends how late a night I had last night.
Verity         And what’s your favourite biscuit to dunk in said tea or coffee?
Steph          A nice ginger nut,
Cath           Can’t beat a dark chocolate digestive.
Verity         Dark chocolate digestive ooo okay. So a bit about you as people. Are you adventurous or cautious?
Cath           I wouldn’t be doing this if I was cautious.
Steph          Adventurous. I’m spur of the moment, I like to see how things go and jump into things.
Verity         Nice, nice, we’ve got a couple of adventurous. All right I’ll just get in a little bit scared here.
Cath           We’re going for an adventure now.
Steph  Oh we are.

Verity  There certainly is, there’s definitely an adventure. And are you night owls or early risers?

Steph  Night owl.

Cath  I’m a bit of both. In fact Steph and I are often the first people at breakfast so I think we’re both a bit of both actually.

Steph  Yes, yes and the last people at night.

Verity  Just don’t sleep!

Cath  Four or five hours sleep.

Verity  And when it comes to your studies are you into the handwritten or the typed notes?

Cath  Typed always, no one can read my handwriting.

Steph  Neither. I underline, I highlight, I annotate on printed material and on the books all over, so it cuts down on the time notetaking.

Cath  Yes I should have mentioned I don’t really do notes but if I do do notes they’re typed because I like to read them.

Steph  I’ve also started practising using flashcards but I do that typed on free software.

Verity  Nice little plug there, we like it. And are you last minute crammers or do you plan ahead?

Cath  Neither in fact. I’m definitely am not last minute, I hate last minute, but I’m not a planner, I just work ahead.

Steph  I plan everything. I have to-do lists, I’m on bullet journaling now, that’s a new thing I’ve got into.

Verity  Bullet journaling? What is that?

Steph  Yes. So it’s a way of creatively being able to plan everything and you get trackers and targets and you can move things forward, you tick things off
and you feel like you’re cheating a bit. It’s creating loads of glittery, washy type and stencilling.

Cath
Oh good grief I mean I just study what I feel like studying on the spur of the moment.

Verity
I think we need a crash course in bullet journaling.

Steph
I’ve planned this degree and the next degree and two modules I want to do one off, so I’m quite well sorted now.

Cath
I think Steph and I have agreed we’re going to still be studying with the OU when we’re in our 90s. We’re the same age within ten days of each other so we can schedule this very nicely.

Verity
Well I feel exceptionally out of my depth now having my one lowly degree post grad.

Cath
Never too late though is it?

Verity
Oh I don't know. I don't know if I could cope. You obviously spent a lot of time in Milton Keynes, you had done previously, you will probably spend even more time, maybe more time than you’d like in Milton Keynes from now on but is it a good place to visit yes or no?

Steph
There’s lots of roundabouts yes, there’s loads of them.

Cath
I only tend to come here for OU things so I think the OU campus is lovely. There are some quite nice pubs and a nice curry house I’ve discovered nearabouts but if I was choosing a holiday destination I’m afraid it wouldn’t quite hit the top slot.

Verity
Oh no. No we haven’t really got any…probably.

Steph
It feels more like a second home rather than a place to visit now doesn’t it.?

Verity
Second home, well I'm not surprised, the amount of time you both spend here. So let’s get down to business shall we – that's the fun out of the way I'm afraid. Cath why is it such an important time at the Open University?

Cath
Well we’ve got so many changes happening. I mean the one that I think most students are aware about is the curriculum review and people are
usually seeing that as quite a few modules being cut but there are also some new qualifications being brought in. So although it’s a bit of a worrying time in some respects it can also be quite exciting with the new options.

We’ve also got new things coming in like degree apprenticeships and the OU are really, really keen as well to be looking to do more to support students to succeed and to promote having an academic community. So I think we’re seeing lots and lots of changes – change is always worrying but I think it could be a very exciting time as well.

Verity And why is the role of President so important?

Cath I think the first thing I have to say is it isn’t the President in isolation. I mean Steph’s going to talk a little bit more I think about our Central Executive Committee. We work as a team. We’ve obviously got the staff team in the office like you and all the other lovely people here. We’ve got loads of other people. There are representatives, our Central Committee Representatives, Learner Experience Representatives. I’m not going to try and list them all because I’ll undoubtedly miss some out and then offend someone. So it is a big team effort. None of us would work on their own.

But the idea with the President obviously is that the President’s responsible for taking the lead, leading and representing the student views to the University, looking at external engagement and so on. As with any team the leader is an important part of it but the whole team together is really what gets things done.

Verity And that leads us on nicely actually to a question for Steph about how you see the role of Deputy President.

Steph So I see the role of deputy president as more of a supportive role. So I deputise for the President when needed. I sit on certain OU committees. There’s the volunteering aspects, the volunteering now falls within that remit and representation of research students and students that are based on campus. But I see it as not only supporting the president but supporting CEC as a whole as well. And I’m hoping that I can make this role quite student-facing as well and it would help students to feel that the CEC are more approachable.

Verity And actually you’re both pros at this because the next question is about the CEC, so can you tell us a little bit more about this CEC and who they are and what they do?
Steph: So it consists of a President and Deputy President, OU Council Member and there's Vice Presidents, for example: Equal Opportunities, Student Support, we've got a new Student Voice one, Media and Campaigns, Education, Administration. I've probably forgotten one.

Cath: You've forgotten Community Steph.

Steph: Community is really important. And then you've also got the Area Association Reps that represent the students in the nations, the Republic of Ireland and Europe and then you've got the Faculty Association Representatives, which Cath was one, that cover all the different faculties. But we all have got different remits but some of them at certain times overlap so we all support each other in different ways.

Verity: And CEC very quickly what's that stand for, for people out there that might not know.

Steph: Central Executive Committee.

Verity: Thank you very much. Right let's get on to talking a bit about the student involvement, first one for Cath. What are some of the key issues that the new team will be concentrating on?

Cath: Well I think one of the most important things is getting the student voice really embedded within the OU. There are some aspects of very, very good practice where they're very keen to actually work with students as part of the team and consult them genuinely and they really want to hear what they have to say. But we want that across the University and otherwise how on earth are they actually going to know how to do what’s best for students?

For us I think we're very keen to try and increase our engagement with our members, again we want to hear what you have to say because otherwise how can we represent you? So they're probably my top two at the moment, plus also there are some general issues that are coming up that are very important.

There's a big awareness overall of mental health as an issue within the university sector. That's something that I'm very keen that we'd be getting involved in and I know that our VP Equality and Diversity, Cherry, is interested in that now. And our VP Student Support is as well. So those are a few highlights. A lot of the work is inevitably you deal with what happens when it happens as well.
Verity So a little bit of fire-fighting along the way.

Cath Yeah a bit of fire-fighting.

Verity And Steph what are some of the key issues that you've picked up in your previous role and some of those issues that you're going to take in to concentrate on?

Steph Issues around consistency of marking and especially when it comes to the EMAs and tutors might have their personal preferences, students panic thinking, am I going to be marked down? Challenging an EMA result there isn't a proper set up to be able to do that.

Cath Or an exam result.

Steph And exam results. And 120 credit modules it's a lot for a student, it's supposed to be supporting part-time learning but there are now 120 credit modules.

Cath At post grad that is isn't it?

Steph Yes at post grad. So that's concerning students at the moment.

Cath The other one we meant picked up with post grad as well, there was the way that the masters loan works, unfortunately OU students often have to pay their fees to the OU up front before they got all of the loan in and that does seem a bit rotten really on them. It makes it really hard.

Steph It's stopping some students actually going to post grad because they can't find that money up front.

Verity So clearly stuff to get our teeth into and we will from today. And last question on this Cath how can students input to yourselves? So how do they feedback to us? How can they share their views?

Cath Well we've got lots of ways of doing that and we've got things like our forums like the Talk to Your Students Association forum. We do research within the Association, we might actually directly contact people for that, work with specific forums to ask questions about specific things. We're quite easy to get in touch with on social media. We've got the Association's page. Both Steph and I have long been quite, how shall I say, loud on Facebook! In my case follow the duck. You can certainly get in touch with me on my Facebook page which I think we'll be adding to our
information here. We might look in the future and doing our own consultations in addition to the ones that the OU do.

Another big one of course is if you want to get yourselves a little bit involved. That makes it even easier to feed in. But apart from that you can always contact any rep you come across, doesn’t have to be just people like us, if you know someone who’s a Learner Experience Rep, a Community Champion, a Central Committee Representative, you can always feed things into there. And of course, very straightforwardly, you can email us.

Verity Absolutely and anybody that’s watching right now and has something that they want to feed back to us you can just pop it in the comments section on this video and we’ll pick that up and pass it on to the relevant rep and get back to you as soon as we can. Now you've talked about some of the things already, some of the student issues that really grind your gears, what makes you mad, sad and glad? And I will go to Steph first.

Steph So what makes me mad? One of the issues is over alternative formats, so the printed material that gets sent out to students that need that sort of format often unfortunately comes three or four weeks after the module has started. So students that are already disadvantaged because of health reasons they’re struggling to start their modules because the printed material arrives late. And I’ve had a personal experience with that but heard a lot form other students.

What makes me sad? I don't know what makes me sad really. I think seeing that some students are concerned about curriculum cuts and they’re worried about whether the OU is going to be around because of the media footage earlier in the year about Save the OU. There’s still students out there that are worried that they’re not going to have their studies in a few years’ time. So we need to reassure students out there.

What makes me glad? We end on the positives.

Steph Oh there’s a whole list but I think the main things is having the opportunity to study, so seeing people that are studying and it’s made such a difference, a life-changing experience, and having that opportunity to do something you might have put off or for personal reasons want to do it to stretch your mind but seeing the results of achieving each module pass
and that's what has been happening recently. Also the degree ceremonies
which are coming up, or should be starting soon.

Verity  And Cath same question, mad, sad and glad.

Cath  Mad. I’d have to say it’s when the powers that be don’t listen. And the big
one has always been students are saying time and time again they don’t
like online-only delivery, they want books and we have people time and
time again thinking they know what’s best for us. And that’s one that’s
made me pretty mad and I’ve been going on about this for a while.

Sad. I think the fact that a number of the lifelong learners can’t actually
study anymore because of the changes in government funding in England
has meant that it’s very, very expensive to do as a hobby if you’re not
getting a student loan. And I think lifelong learning is so important.

Glad. Well Steph’s actually said quite a lot of the one I was going to have.
Cheat always one like that! I think another thing I would say I was glad
about as well as that then is that I think the fact that the OU is looking at
how it can support more students to succeed now. I think that’s a very
welcome innovation.

Verity  Okay brilliant. And as Cath mentioned earlier we are going to pop onto the
bottom of this video, very, very soon, by the powers, the ultimate digital
powers that be, you should see all their contact details for Cath and for
Steph somewhere down here-ish, somewhere here, it’s a very ‘vote for me
I don’t want to leave Strictly’ but their information is all here. We’ll also put
it in the comments section, or at least on the description of this video as
well. If you do want to get in touch with the Students Association who
better than to get in touch with the Deputy President and the President.
They want to hear from you.

Please do look out for more of these videos. Please get in touch with us.
Follow us on social media. We’re your friends and we want to do what we
can to help you.

I’m Verity Robinson, I’m the Head of Student Support here at the Students
Association, just in case anybody was wondering who this person here
was. Who’s she asking all these questions? But the important people are
here to my left and we’re very much looking forward to working with all the
new and existing CEC members but also we’re looking forward to hearing
from you students. So thank you very much for watching and we’ll see you
soon.
Cath  Bye.

Steph  Bye

Verity  Nice one.