Malika: Thank you for joining us. I have the pleasure of being with Nicola Powell who is a volunteering officer.

Nicky: Hello.

Malika: Hello Nicola. Nicola I understand you are part of a volunteering team at the OU Students Association?

Nicky: I certainly am.

Malika: Excellent. I know that you are going to talk to me and talk to our audience about student-led projects and bright ideas coming up with the Students Association, so can you tell me what they are please?

Nicky: Yes indeed. What is a student-led project? Well student-led projects are a new initiative for us but they've been carried out very successfully by other student unions and associations, such as Nottingham Uni, Reading, UCL in London and Swansea. Student-led projects are set up and run by students and they're a great way to gain some volunteering experience and meet like-minded people. So this first tranche will be a year-long pilot and we're hoping it'll be a great success to allow us to continue the project long-term. I'll just give you a few ideas of what other universities have carried out. There's the Rucksack Project, which sounds absolutely brilliant. Students have gathered essential supplies into rucksacks and worked with the local homeless shelter to deliver these rucksacks to people living on the streets. And there's also a project Beach Clean which has allowed students to work with the big beach clean to get a team together to clear miles and miles of beaches of all the litter. And there's also Communitea, that tea, spelt t-e-a at the end. This is a new student-led project this year and it aims to run tea parties in care homes in the Nottingham area. And this project will provide a great opportunity to meet, socialise and interact with residents of local care homes and a chance to share experiences and actually just enjoy yourself.

Malika: That sounds absolutely fantastic. So for those of us, or those listening to us right now could you tell us why students should get involved with the student-led projects please?

Nicky: Absolutely. Well we've fairly recently celebrated Volunteers' Week and we know that many of our students and our staff do voluntary work in their communities and so this is a great way students can bring an idea to the Association, ask for a little bit of money if they need it, and we can support them throughout the whole process. We can then help students spread the word widely on our website, social media, forums and in the OU student's magazine and also in our many newsletters and help them find other student volunteers to join their projects if they need them. It's a way for our students to get involved in local charitable activities that will benefit their community and also of course meet fellow students at the same time.
Malika: That just sounds amazing, right up my street; I like to get involved with things like that.

Nicky: Excellent, excellent.

Malika: So can you tell me how can I get involved if I wanted to take part in this? Is it easy?

Nicky: Oh yes it certainly is student-led projects was launched over conference and at conference we held a bright ideas session. Students in groups of five or six came up with some ideas for a student-led project, chat around it, maybe dismissed some ideas and then run with a project, all quite quickly. We will take people through the process and direct them to the Association’s website where all details will be available, you just have to come up with an idea, maybe something you’re already aware of or something you may already do and want other people to get involved with, and then take it from there.

Malika: That is brilliant. So I’ve already got my thinking cap on so if I wanted to start something say in the Norwich area where I normally do my meet-ups and things like that, can you tell me who I should look to get involved with?

Nicky: Well anyone who’s a current OU student. One person may submit an idea and we can support them to find more project team members if they need them or any more volunteers. You can also find people by posting it into the forums and on social media. A group of students may get together to suggest a project too and we would encourage students to chat to others before submitting an idea as it’s the best way to test the water and find out if there’s any interest from others. So anyone, as long as you’re a current OU student.

Malika: Wonderful. That’s brilliant. I’ve got another year to go.

Nicky: Excellent.

Malika: So if I wanted to start something up as I said where specifically do I go? Where can I do this? Where can a student-led project take place exactly?

Nicky: Anywhere there’s an OU student ready to carry out a project. Our OU students are all over the world and there’s bound to be a potential project in any community and again as I keep saying we’re here to help and encourage anyone who’s a current OU student to get a project going. And we would also love the chance to visit students on projects to support their causes and meet students where we can.

Malika: Brilliant I’d love to welcome you on something and I hope people listening to us will get equally excited as I am. So tell us about timescales now Nicola if you wouldn’t mind, when can we get involved?

Nicky: Well as I said this is a year-long pilot to start off and this coming year there’ll be three windows when an application may be submitted. We’ve got the first
window open from 22nd July – 1st August 2018, and the first stage of submitting an idea is completing a very brief idea creation form which you should easily be able to fill in an hour or so to submit for approval. We can have a quick look at one now, you've got one in front of you there?

Malika Yeah absolutely.

Nicky Excellent.

Malika And scanning it actually this looks very much straightforward to me and I hope students at home will feel the same should they wish to get involved after listening to this.

Nicky I hope so.

Malika Let's run through this form if you don’t mind.

Nicky Certainly. Well there are one, two, three, four, five boxes, with our lovely eye-catching student-led projects logo in the top. The long box on the top, and you can see this online because this form is available online as it's your first stage replying for a student-led project.

Malika Right.

Nicky As you'll see at the top space for you to put your project name and a line or two, very, very brief, project description. And then underneath there's space to say who the project team is. It may just be you but if it’s a few other people just put their names in there. So if you would like to talk us through the next ones you'll see the first one is aims.

Malika Yes and that's actually quite clear, it's just telling you a straightforward question or asking you a question, which is what do you want to achieve?

Nicky Absolutely.

Malika Wonderful.

Nicky And then of course activities.

Malika Uh huh. Again I can see that's covering the what, the where, the when, the how and they why.

Nicky Just to direct people to think about it and put down a few works of what'll be going on. And then resources in the third big box.

Malika Yeah so in terms of resources as I can see, who does the project need? How many student volunteers, and an idea of a budget. But I think we'll talk about that in a little while won't we?

Nicky Yes we will. And the last box is along the bottom to think about the risks and benefits.
Malika: Yes that's quite important and I think that's something that I would think about perhaps if I was to be involved but it's very good because it's guiding you to identify as early in the project as possible any of these eventualities. So what could go wrong? Who will your project help etc. So I think looking at this, this should take no more than 45 minutes up to an hour I would say, I would confirm that.

Nicky: I think you're right because you'll have been thinking about your project all along, you'll have talked to other people, you may even have in your head a name for it. So just putting it down on paper and submitting it and once you've submitted this idea creation form the volunteer team and deputy president will have a quick look at it to check that it fits with, and supports our objectives and mission, again you can see the details of that on our website. And then we'll get back to you within a week. And then we will invite students to complete a formal application form, which gets a little bit more detailed. You'll then have to consider further things like risk and budget and so on.

Malika: Right.

Nicky: And with that will go a request for any funding. So this is a chance to think about more of the details for running your project. We hope it will be a successful project.

Malika: I do hope so. If at any point students wish to ask for any support in completing the actual formal process how do they go about it?

Nicky: We're here. The deputy president will definitely be here to help. We on the volunteering team, Beth, Tracy and I will be here to help and your application form will then, when we've all got it shipshape, will go to a panel of three of our student leadership team who'll be responsible for giving projects the go ahead, unless they may well have some queries. They might have the odd question to come back, a few emails may go backwards and forwards, a phone call might be made, and then hopefully they've got the go ahead.

Malika: Oh that sounds amazing. That really sounds like something we want to get our teeth into as a volunteering community doesn't it?

Nicky: Absolutely.

Malika: So in order to discuss the budget side of things are we aware of budget at the moment, or any money?

Nicky: Yes for this pilot year a decision has been made that there'll be a £250 cap, that'll be the limit, so if you needed materials, bits and bobs to carry out your project, it may be say for a beach clean, 50 buckets, something like that. It may be some t-shirts to identify you as OU Students Association going about your particular named project. So yes there'll be a small amount of money and again there'll be more details about that online.
Malika: That sounds wonderful. So I don’t think that this will be something very difficult to put together personally. I can’t wait getting my teeth into this.

Nicky: Absolutely I certainly hope it isn’t difficult and if along the way as this is a pilot, as I keep saying, along the way if you find any problems, anything that seems to be a bit of a stumbling block or a barrier or whatever then of course we can adjust it. And we are, as I’ve continually said, all the info is on our website, I keep saying this, there will be guides and other supporting docs and we are always here to help.

Malika: Fabulous, the website being www.oustudents.com

Nicky: Absolutely and you'll be led, via the volunteering pages to the student-led project tabs as well.

Malika: Fantastic. I think that's covering everything we needed to discuss.

Nicky: I hope so.

Malika: That's it. And I can't wait to get my thinking cap on and get my teeth into this. It sounds amazing.

Nicky: Excellent well keep an eye open for that window and start thinking about what projects to put in then.

Malika: Amazing. Thank you very much Nicola.


Malika: Bye everyone.