

**Andy Evans:** Hello and welcome to a new podcast from the Open University Students Association – The Association Conversation Station. This will be a monthly look at the Association, and the things that we do, and the things that inspire us. We hope you'll enjoy it.

Now, 2022 is the 50th anniversary of the Association. And for half a century, we've had a fruitful partnership with The Open University. So we thought that we'd look at this relationship in our first podcast. You'll be hearing from Rachel Garnham, from The Open University, and our very own Dan Moloney, Director of Engagement for the Students Association. It's a fascinating look at how the Association and the University work together very well, but remain as separate organisations. The podcast is presented by our President, Sarah Jones. Sarah. over to you.

**Sarah Jones:** Hi and welcome. I would like to introduce you to our two guests today. I'm Sarah Jones, and I'm President of the Students Association – and we've got Rachel Garnham and Dan Moloney with us. So Rachel, do you want to introduce yourself and tell us a little bit about what you do?

**Rachel Garnham:** Yeah – thanks, Sarah. My name is Rachel Garnham. I am a Senior Manager in the Open University's Office of the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for students. So our team looks at how we support our students to be more successful. And in particular, I lead the Student Voice team, looking at different ways of involving students in our work – and, of course, working really closely with colleagues and students, and the Students Association. I could say a bit more. I've worked at the OU for about 14 years and done eight years in Student Voice and Student Consultation. So, yeah, this is an area of work I'm really passionate about.

**Sarah:** And bit of an expert as well. Dan, would you like to tell us a bit about what you do?

**Dan Moloney:** Yeah, I'm Dan Moloney. I'm the Director of Engagement at the Open University Students Association. So I look after policy public affairs, our strategy and insights, and all the sort of engagement stuff that we do. Not all of the engaging stuff. Actually, we do a huge amount of engagement stuff all across our staff team. But I look after those teams within the staff team. I've come from a sort of policy and public affairs background, and was the Policy and Public Affairs Manager for the Students Association prior to this role, so lots of work around Student Voice in the sort of external environment.

**Sarah:** Thanks, Dan. So Dan, can you explain to any new students or people who might not be aware what the Association actually does?

**Dan:** Yes, I'll try and keep this as concise as possible because you could probably make a very long answer. But I'd probably say to people that the OU Students Association is the students' union for OU students, and kind of acts as the community and voice for all OU students. We estimate there are around 175,000 OU students, and all OU students are automatically members of the OU Students Association when they join the Open University. So, it's run on a kind of ... they have to choose to opt-out rather than opt-in, which means we have an enormous membership and enormous kind of capacity to influence. And it's kind of a huge population. And yeah, we provide resources to help students through their student journey, whether that's mental health, whether that's helping them engage with each other to have a sort of more fun student experience. And obviously, we're sort of advocating on behalf of students as well, and supporting elected student leaders to be effective in engaging with the University and with government and policy outside of the University as well.

**Sarah:** That makes sense and makes it really clear, which is helpful. Thank you. And again, to Dan, we can just differentiate the difference between the Association and the Open University. Can you talk just a little bit about how our work differs? And then I'll go to Rachel

and get her opinion on the same question.

**Dan:** Yeah. So the Students Association is an independent organisation – and the Education Act sets out that British universities have to have a student union or a student representative organisation. So we are independent, but we are kind of interdependent at the same time, so we co-exist in the same universe. We have a very good relationship with the Open University, and in general, lots of our agendas are aligned and we work together across lots of areas with the University, obviously – Student Voice being one that we'll talk about today, and that we worked very closely with Rachel and her team on. But yeah, we do have our own agendas, we are our own organisation, and we are the voice of students – and the University has a much kind of broader set of interests where it comes to the help of the institution more generally. But obviously, the Open University cares a lot about its students as well, so it likes to work closely with us as a Student Association to make sure that we get the best for our students, and that they have the best possible experience.

**Sarah:** That's great, Dan. And Rachel, what would be your take on that differentiation?

**Rachel:** Well, I like the way Dan put it actually, you know, independent, but interdependent, because, yes, we each individually have our own views and priorities. But actually having the Students Association as the people who are there to actually represent students and tell us what students think is absolutely vital for making the University a success – and it's really important that that is maintained independently. But we are all one Open University community, and that's staff, students, alumni and all those different staff categories, including our tutors obviously. So we and my team also look after the Student Charter, which I'm sure we'll talk about a bit as well because that's one of our sort of partnership projects really. But in the Student charter, we commit to actively support the Students Association to engage with all its members to foster a vibrant student community and to promote student interests. And that's all echoed in the relationship agreement that we have between the two organisations where it's very clear students are at the centre of the relationship. So in the OU, we've just got a new strategy where, once again, student success and enabling students to meet their study goals is absolutely at the heart of that strategy. And obviously, that's something that the Students Association fully support as well. So it's really important that we work together to make that happen, really, and to improve the student experience so that the students can meet their study goals.

**Sarah:** Yeah. You just touched on several things that we work in partnership on, and the things that students have been involved in. And there's, very definitely, that aspect of Student Voice in all of those things. So, thinking about some of the things that we've worked together on important areas and events etc, what have been your highlights, Rachel?

**Rachel:** Well, yeah, I mentioned the Student Charter, and I think that is one of the important aspects of co-ownership, really, where it's important that the people, the University management, all the staff in the University, and the Students Association, as well, as well as the sort of wider body of students, they sort of sign up to the values in the Student Charter, which are about treating each other with respect. We make our commitment to provide an environment in which students can successfully study and all the things that are needed for that. And students make their commitment to use the resources available and work together to make a successful learning community. And it was really important when we developed our new Student Charter a couple of years ago which you and I worked on directly, didn't we Sarah?

**Sarah:** Yeah.

**Rachel:** To get a wide range of students saying what the Student Charter meant to them, what they wanted to see from it, and in particular, how they would like to see it implemented

and practiced. So it's not just a dusty document that is only dug out to tick a box on occasions, but actually, we are all living those values on a day-to-day basis in our relationships with each other as an OU community. And I suppose the other one I want to flag, when I originally worked in Student Voice, I was directly managing the University student consultation processes. And that, I think, has become more and more of a partnership commitment. And it's something that we can only do in partnership, really. It's not about the university setting. We want to talk about this, that and the other, and please students – “Tell us what you think and then go away again” – it has to be about what the students want to talk about. What are the aspects of the student experience that need improving? How do we set an agenda for a lot of students to get involved in? And tell us how they can, what do you think about the future of exams? Or how do you think we should be taking forward our sustainability agenda? And then making sure we work really closely with the representatives of the Students Association on what do we do with those results. Students have told us this, that and the other. How is it really going to make a difference? How the University functions? Because there's literally no point in asking or getting students involved if it's not going to make a difference.

So I think the important role of the Students Association is basically holding the University to account, and saying students have said this, now what's going to be done about it?

**Sarah:** Yeah, it's being that critical friend. isn't it? Coming along, and it's supporting, but also kind of saying “When you say you're going to do something, have you done it? And if not, why not? And how can we help move that work along?” And I remember working on the Student Charter and it was indeed an incredibly collaborative feel to everything that we did. And I remember because this was when I was the Faculty Rep for Wellbeing, Education and Language Studies. And as that rep, I went to Faculty Assembly, and I spoke about the Student Charter to staff to encourage them to use that. How often do you do some reviews of things like the Student Charter? And how do you do that? And this, is that still the collaborative process that we talked about?

**Rachel:** Yeah, so the Student Charter has a light touch review every year. And then we'll do a major review every three years. But it's built into all our processes that all policy student-facing policies are reviewed regularly, and that students are part of that review. So, specifically the Student Charter, for example, we've talked about some changes this year to update it in line with the new OU strategy and will be going out to students again (sort of next year) to see “Is this the right thing? What does it mean to you? What can we do to raise awareness and make it more impactful?”

Likewise, this is where student consultation comes in. So if you've got a new student policy or a new student-facing strategy, making sure that the student consultation panel or other relevant bodies of students have a say. So we've done some really good consultations over the last few years on, for example, gender-based violence around our carer students policy; mental health and wellbeing, making sure students were really involved in setting the new strategy on that, and telling us what they want from the University. So, yeah, everything that student-facing should be – there should be consultation with the wider body of students. And then we would hope that representative from the Students Association, such as yourself (but also you and the volunteer colleagues) are involved in the day-to-day meetings that we have to actually sign off these things and make them a reality.

**Sarah:** Thanks, Rachel. So Dan, how do you think these things have helped our relationship with the Open University?

**Dan:** Probably in, probably in ways that are quite difficult to measure. But it's all about increasing our engagement generally with the University, having better relationships that lead to better outcomes for students. So the more work we do with the University, whether

that's with Rachel's team, with PBC students, whether it's with MarComms, and ensuring that we communicate better with more sort of coherent messaging, and making sure the information that students need gets to them, or whether it's developing apps or systems, processes, parts of the website that create a better student experience that works, not being duplicated and that the student experience isn't too complex.

All of these things kind of rely on us as working closely together and having a good understanding of where we can be effective, where we can kind of best spend our energy. Because the other thing, the other thing to consider in this is that obviously, the OU is absolutely enormous, and the Students Association is actually very small in comparison, which gives us great advantages in terms of being able to move quickly and be dynamic. But also, it means that our resources aren't as vast as the OU. So we do need to be more selective about how we resource things, how we use our energy. And so having good relationships within the OU across these areas where we want to impact the student journey means that we can do so much better than we could do on our own. So I hope that makes sense.

**Sarah:** I think talking about that impact with the student body kind of leads me to start thinking about the impact that we have in the nation because obviously, we are a four-nations university. We're not just based in England, we're also not just based in Scotland or Ireland, or Northern Ireland, or Wales, but we also have international students as well. We call ourselves the four-nations university – we are an international university as well. But thinking specifically about the four nations, how have these collaborations changed the relationship between the OU and our students. So, Dan, I know that you've had quite a lot to say about this as part of your previous role. And then I'll come to Rachel and get Rachel's take on it as well.

**Dan:** Yeah, absolutely – certainly in the policy and public affairs arena, where obviously I have more experience. Personally, the relationship with the OU – and it's appropriate that we're talking about it as we're recording this on the day of the Northern Ireland Assembly elections – we have developed Students Association manifestos or OU student manifestos for elections in Northern Ireland today, in Wales and Scotland this time last year. And that is much more effective when you do it in collaboration with the Open University, who – whilst we have our own kind of separate agendas – we can have a much bigger impact and a much bigger likelihood of actually influencing policy change if we coordinate our messaging and find the areas of crossover. So going into those elections, saying alongside the OU, saying that part-time distance-learning students should be eligible for maintenance loans – and that's much more powerful if we're saying it and the OU are saying it, than we just go and do our own thing and end up saying something totally different.

So we've had great relationships with the OU in Ireland, Scotland and Wales – and they've been incredibly supportive in helping us to kind of raise our profile in those areas throughout these kind of election periods. And they've helped us with their access to data sets and all of those things that can enable us to make our points more clearly and more effectively. So, yeah, it absolutely has a massive impact across this.

**Sarah:** Yeah. And I will say, I had the great privilege of been invited by the OU in Northern Ireland to go and speak at the launch of their manifesto at Stormont to give a student perspective. That was a massive privilege to be able to do that, and I can attest to those relationships being really strong and really, really important. Rachel, what would you like to say about this? Because I'm sure you've got your take on this as well.

**Rachel:** Yeah, I think the four-nation perspective is a real strength of our Student Voice work. So I mean, first of all, I guess I just say that making sure we get the perspectives of all our students, wherever they are, is really important. And it's often too easy based in Milton

Keynes to think that all students are paying the same fees or have the same framework. And making sure that all our Students Voice activities includes voices from Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland, and, of course, our international students and giving, bringing those perspectives to the table on how, what their experiences are, and their views on the student experience is really important.

And also think there's a quite a good, we're in a really healthy position as a four-nation university looking at the quality guidance from across the four nations. It means that we can go with the highest possible quality around your voice, for example. So in Scotland, for example, the funding council there will have a lot of best practice around how you involve students in your work. And that's something that we should be trying to implement across all our students. And just to go back to the student charter again, for example, we take all our guidance from the higher education funding council for Wales because they are very keen on student charters in Wales. So we can take all the best practice from there. And then all our students across the four nations and beyond can benefit from what I think of the best possible approach to student charters, for example.

But I think it works for Student Voice as well. And when we go to these quality events, we don't just go to the UK ones, we can attend things in Scotland and Wales. And I don't know if people, if either you or Dan wants to talk a bit about our Wales student volunteer panel, because that's, again, an example of best practice where students work directly with the OU in Wales via the Students Association to influence how the OU in Wales works. But in particular to influence the Welsh government, and it can only be done through that way. And that strengthens our work across the piece, really.

**Sarah:** Yeah, absolutely. Thanks, Rachel. And I'll come to Dan on that one, and then I'm going to come back to you, Rachel, because you've touched on something that we need to talk about which is Student Voice Week. So I'll just ask Dan about the Welsh panel. If you can tell us a little bit about that, and then I will start talking about some Students Voice Week stuff.

**Dan:** Yes. So, the Welsh panel, just by way of a bit of background, was something that was set up mainly with the objective of supporting the area rep for Wales in their responsibilities as an elected representative. But something that we engaged with the OU and Wales over and they were really interested in it as a kind of almost like a standing consultative panel of Welsh students that they could engage with over ideas that they had for areas of work that they were working on. And it was something that as it developed, it got real buy-in from some people at the OU and Wales who were in kind of the perfect position to link it to lots of other areas of work that they were doing. And, yeah, so it's something that we're hoping that we'll be able to kind of roll out more widely in the other nations as a result of the success that it had. So watch this space, I guess, is the phrase to leave that on.

**Sarah:** Fantastic. Thanks so much, Dan for explaining that. And it sounds like a really important part of our work with the nation offices. So brilliant. Rachel, you started talking a little bit about Student Voice. And I know that Student Voice is one of your massive passions. So can you tell us a bit about Student Voice Week and how students can get involved in the collaboration between the Students Association and the OU in this area?

**Rachel:** Yeah, the Student Voice Week, which is, I think coming up to its fourth Student Voice Week that we've had, which will be in the autumn that we've just sort of professionally set some dates for in November. It's absolutely one of our best examples of a partnership activity that couldn't work without the input of both the university and the Students Association. So Student Voice activities, either through surveys, panels, student reps on committees, consultations, and all sorts of other ways students are involved happen all year round. They don't just happen for one week.

But Student Voice Week is our opportunity to shine a spotlight on all those activities, and try and get new students involved and try new ways of engaging with students. And it happens November every year now. And last year, we had a huge array of activities organized from across the faculties and subject areas from career service, library, lots of events that you organized from Students Association perspective. Actually, going way beyond Student Voice, which is how we get input into decision-making. But also activities relating to mental health and well-being relating to equality, diversity, and inclusion, reaching out to particular groups of students to make sure that their voices are heard.

And I think, what we're hoping to do for November is have even more of a focus on the community side of Student Voice. So, actually, what we, what staff and students really like about Student Voice is not getting, not just getting the experts for you on what it's like to be a student and what needs to change and what works well at the moment. But actually getting together and recognizing, we're all part of one university community, trying to achieve the same things.

So I hope, I think one of the most successful events couple of years ago, was the quiz which had nothing really to do with Student Voice at all. But it was a really nice opportunity to get together outside of studies. And one of our, I think, a couple of sessions that went really well last year that I'd highlight. And I hope we'll have more of the same. One was around sustainability. So we happened to coincide with Top 26, was it called?

**Sarah:** Yeah.

**Rachel:** And so, a focus on talking to students about the OUs. And then that relates back to our previous conversation, doesn't it? About the OU in Scotland led that. But also one of the biggest events during Student Voice Week was around the universities, sort of commitment to become a university of sanctuary. And that's something that staff and students are interested in as much as each other. And it was a great opportunity to come together and talk about that. So we're at the early stages for 2022. So we're just looking at when and how we're going to bring it all together. But it will once again be an opportunity to spotlight some of our best activities and the changes that have been made as part of Student Voice over the last year. The real difference that having student engagement actually makes to the student experience. So, yeah, watch this space. And we're hoping to get students involved in setting the agenda for Student Voice Week, and create in some activities, and telling us what they want from Student Voice Week. So, yeah, please do watch this space and look out for opportunities to be involved.

**Sarah:** Yeah. And I know we've just talked quite a lot about Student Voice Week. And while we're talking, I was thinking there might be some people who are listening, who actually don't know what Student Voice is. And so, do you think you could just kind of, in its purest form, tell us what you think Student Voice actually is?

**Rachel:** Yeah. So at the OU, we, under the banner of Student Voice, we put all the ways in which students make a difference to the student experience at the OU. So it's really wide-ranging. So an array really is to get as many students involved in this in, at whatever level they're able to be involved. So we know that for some students, it will literally just be, can you complete your module survey, or can you just tell us whether you've had a good experience with the student support team or whether you found what you needed to find on your module website or in the help center. That is Student Voice, and it does make a difference.

But it also means the consultations, the panels, lots of students will be invited to take part in different activities. And please do keep a lookout for those emails because we really do want

to hear from you. And then sometimes we have really amazing opportunities for a smaller number of students, which are potentially paid opportunities to do a project with staff around particular areas of work or scholarship, and also we have the opportunity for students to sit on a whole range of committees where all the decisions are made. So there is something for everyone. And, yeah, we call it Student Voice. And expect everyone to know what we're talking about. But so thank you for the opportunity to explain a bit more about what we mean by that.

**Sarah:** I think it's, I think it's always good to kind of explain what Student Voice is. And we've touched actually on something that I think would be good to kind of cover as this is one of the ways that we work in partnership is, yeah, we helped to recruit and train students that sit on governance committees throughout the university. So there's lots of volunteer opportunities that you, if you go to our website, you'll be able to see the different ways that you can get involved. And also one of the things, as Rachel has just mentioned, is being able to fill in surveys on your, on your modules. And what I'm at, one of the ways that I'm using my Student Voice as a student rather than as a student representative is on my module, and we get together. There's about five of us that get together every six weeks. And we talked about how our modules going. And the people who have created the module are there and listening and asking questions. And it's really nice as a student just to be able to feed in that way. And because I know that it's making a difference to not just my student journey, but other people's student journey as well. So that's really great. Thank you for that. Rachel.

**Rachel:** Can I just chip in with something else on that cause I feel like it's a little bit like, please do this for us. Hopefully, the feedback we get from students and I hope you'll agree with this, Sarah, as an actual student yourself. It's not, we really benefit from it. And future students will benefit from people being involved because changes are made to make the student experience better. But the feedback we get is that students, those of you who are involved actually benefit from it as well in number of ways around confidence, around developing new skills, especially with sitting on some of these more formal committees. It's quite a learning curve.

And then around the whole being part of meeting other students, meeting staff, finding out a bit more about the university, being able to just have a chat about your student experience in a forum that isn't directly related to your studies.

**Sarah:** It's about, it's about kind of feeling part of something bigger and feeling part of that community. And, I mean, I know that I've gained loads of skills from being involved. And just stepping out from behind my computer almost to kind of being involved in things that go on in the university. Some, I personally, I've got a lot out of it. And I know the university got a lot out of me saying things. And it's good to see some of those changes. You say something and you see what the university of done about what you've said. And I think that's a really important part of that partnership working, isn't it? If students, it's that partnership, not just between the Students Association, but it's between the students and the university. If the university asks for an opinion and you take the time to give your opinion, you expect them to do something with it, and it's really nice to see things change because of students' opinions. So I get a lot of pleasure just knowing that what I've said has made a difference. That's a really good point, Rachel. Thank you.

So, we just kind of moving into the final minutes of this. And I just want to touch on a little bit what, about why it's so important for the university and the Students Association to work closely together. So I'd come to you first, Dan, and then I'll come to you, Rachel, because I want to just have a little bit of a talk about the partnership agreement that we have between us as well. So Dan first, and then we'll come to Rachel.

**Dan:** Yeah, I think I'm probably at risk of repeating what I said earlier. But I think there's a thing about synergy and are kind of combined voice being, and our combined energy and effort being more effective to influence the student journey positively than if we work separately. And, yeah, that would be kind of that my main argument for why it's important for us to work together. I just think we, through those relationships and through understanding each other's objectives and priorities better, we can better resource our own efforts. And most effectively kind of decide where to place our energy. And I just think through those things, we'll be able to kind of really positively influence the student experience. And I think if we're kind of trying to do, certainly, as an, from an association perspective, if we're trying to do these things without bringing the university and the journey with us, then I'm not sure how far we'll really get.

**Sarah:** I agree. Brilliant. Thank you, Dan. Rachel.

**Rachel:** Yeah, well I think the university is nothing without its students. So it makes total sense for me that I have a relationship with the official representatives of students, which is what the Students Association is. It has to be a good one. Has to be a partnership. And that's not just our traditional undergraduate students at a distance. It's also postgraduate research students, some of whom, with us on campus. Some of [inaudible]. But we have a huge diversity of students. Very, very lucky at the OU to work with many of them. And we want those students to meet their study goals and to be successful. And to, and we all know that success comes in many forms. Sometimes it's just making a star and accessing your module website, and learning a few things, even if you don't quite get to the end.

But actually, most students want to get to the end. And most students want to meet their, get their qualification or complete their Ph.D. And unless we talk to students and the Students Association, we're not going to be able to make the student experience meet the needs of our students, which are obviously changing all the time as technologies change, and student body changes, and funding arrangements change. We need to be in constant dialogue and communication with our students. And so we're really grateful for the Students Association for facilitating that and creating a bit more of a community because we know distance, that is difficult. And Students Association play a huge role in providing opportunities for students to actually get together and get to know each other, even if they do remain at a distance.

**Rachel:** Yeah.

**Dan:** Yeah, I'll just jump in, Sarah.

**Sarah:** Yes, please do. Yeah.

**Dan:** There's something Rachel said that just triggered something. I think it's important not to take for granted the positive relationship that we do have because you do. And for some of our students that might have studied at other institutions, they might be aware and others who have only studied at the OU might not be aware. There are universities where their relationship with their students union is incredibly adversarial. And it's constant conflict. And I think the experience is that those institutions and those student representatives have, it probably isn't incredibly, probably isn't very positive, and doesn't feel like they're able to achieve the things I want to achieve.

So I think we're we're very kind of fortunate to have the close relationship that we have. That means that when there are issues that we need to raise, we don't have to feel like we're having to march on Westminster, or whatever the equivalent of march on Walton Hall. To get that, we can have those positive conversations with the relationships that we've worked really hard to foster. And I think that's something that we shouldn't take for granted and needs, we kept kind of constantly. It work on those relationships and ensure that they are



positive and that we understand each other's kind of priorities and agendas.

**Sarah:** Yeah, absolutely. We've touched a little bit on the relationships that we have with it. The Open University has with the Open University Students Association. And Rachel has also touched on this about our relationship agreement. So, Rachel, can you just tell us a little bit about that relationship agreement?

**Rachel:** Yes. So it's a formal document. It's agreed by the University's Council, which is our sort of top decision-making body. And it's about what we've agreed the university will provide in terms of support for the association, and what the association will commit to in terms of being engaged with the university. And that's all written down. So that if there is ever any dispute, which thankfully, is very rare. It's all there and we haven't agreed [inaudible] forwards. But my favorite bit of the relationship agreement is appendix two. [inaudible]. It's a bit, this renewed every year that says, these are the projects that the university and Students Association will be working on over the coming year. And over the last, I look after that document, we've been looking at refreshing it, haven't we? And it's really interesting, the last two years. This headline has been, we will work together to make sure that the impact of the covid pandemic is minimized on students. And that's a really important thing that has to be. We have to be able to respond quickly.

And so the relationship agreement is quite formal and written, but actually, the relationships between yourself and your colleagues and our Senior Team, the vice-chancellor, and the deputy vice-chancellor, and my boss, who is the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for students, are the things that make sure that when these things, when things like the pandemic, or issues with exams, or other things that happened suddenly need to be responded to. Those relationships are also in place. That means students' views can be used to inform how the university responds.

So, but we can also set out. We are going to work on issues around equality, diversity, and inclusion in the coming year. And specifically, that might be around inclusive curriculum or closing the [inaudible], yeah, and things like that. And that's quite a nice way of reflecting on what we've done in the last year and what we're going to work on in the future.

**Sarah:** Yeah, absolutely, absolutely. And it's really important. And I, it really does help us with how we work together. And as you say, it's those relationships that are incredibly important to how we work together. And so thinking about, so we're obviously celebrating our 50 years as a Students Association. And the OU has literally just celebrated its 53rd birthday set in existence. So what do you think that we can do to strengthen that relationship for the next 50 years? So I'd come to you first, Rachel, and then to Dan.

**Rachel:** Yeah, I think we're in a really good position to keep working together. And happy birthday, by the way. And congratulations on all the work you're doing to celebrate those 50 years because they are well worth celebrating. And it's funny to think there wasn't a Students Association right at the beginning of the OU. And even that was a, so students wanted a Students Association. So the university supported setting that up. And that was probably our very first sort of example of you said we did in terms of Student Voice making a difference.

I think it's about continuing to work together to build those relations, not just those personal relationships, which I think are really important, but also those formal documentation of what we've agreed and how we do that. And I think we have a shared commitment as well, don't we, to involving more students in our work and keeping a, I don't want to call it a pipeline because that sounds [inaudible]. But we want more students to keep refreshing what we do, both in their Student Voice. I know the terms of our Student Voice activities, but also I know in the Students Association, we need to hear from all across our diversity of our student body. And we don't just need to hear from you, we want to work with you.

So I think the way we strengthen our relationship is to keep working together to get new students involved and to keep ourselves relevant and innovative and fresh and making sure we're open appropriately enough to what students are telling us, and changing, if necessary, as a result.

**Sarah:** Absolutely. Thank you, Rachel. Dan, what do you think we can do to strengthen our relationship?

**Dan:** Yeah, I think I'd probably echo what Rachel just said, really, in kind of working together to engage more new students in the work that we're doing. And I think probably the way that we would best do that is to kind of probably, certainly from an association perspective, be a little bit more proactive at explaining why it's important and why work that we do has an impact on the journey, and what that impact is. And sometimes we assume that the students have the time to do their own digging and understand, or that they have an automatic understanding because they're an OU student. And I think we can always do a little bit more to make those messages around why we do what we do, why the university cares about providing open-access education to everyone, and what that means. And, yeah. And I think through that work we'll automatically strengthen our relationship because I think the only way we can really do that is together.

**Sarah:** Yeah, now I agree. I agree. Thank you both so much. It's been a real pleasure to talk to you both today. And it's lovely to hear all the work that's been done with partnerships between the OU and the Students Association. And all I can say is, long may it continue. So thank you, Rachel, for joining us today. And thank you, Dan, for joining us today. And thank you everybody for listening. Thank you.

**Andy:** So there you have it. The first edition of the Association Conversation Station. We really hope you enjoyed it. Our thanks go to Rachel and Dan for giving up their time. And also, of course, to Sarah, our president for hosting.

There'll be another podcast coming up later this month because the 16th of May is the 50th birthday of the association. We are going to mark this with a special extra podcast. We're going to look back at our first half-century and discuss some of the important milestones along the way. It's going to be great. So we hope you can join us then.

This has been the Association Conversation Station. This episode was hosted by our president, Sarah Jones, and produced by myself, Andy Evans. See you next time.

[END]