

Andy Evans: Hello, and welcome to the December edition of The Association Conversation Station. This episode will be a real celebration, we hope, because we're going to be looking back at 2022, the year where we've been celebrating the Association's 50th anniversary. We'll also be looking back at prominent Association achievements and memories, and also discussing what's in store for the Students Association in the future.

I've been joined today by four fantastic guests. We've got Margaret Greenway, President Beth Metcalf, the Association's Chief Executive, Sue Goodyear, who's one of our honorary life members, and Leanne Goodall, who's a former volunteer for the Association. Welcome, everyone. I'm going to give you a chance to introduce yourselves and also just to give us an overview of your role and your relationship with the association. So, Beth, I'll start with you first.

Beth Metcalf: Hello. I'm Beth, as Andy kindly introduced me. This is my first podcast that I'm doing for the association. I'm currently the Chief Exec, which means that I work to support the staff team, the president, the council member, and try to make sure everything's in place for our volunteers so that we can provide all the services that really help OU students to get the best out of their student journey.

Andy: Thanks, Beth. I'll go to Margaret next.

Margaret Greenway: Thanks, Andy. I'm Margaret, and I'm the President of the Students Association. I first came into the role on the 1st of August, and it's my first role within the association. I've studied since 2007, attended a consultation four years ago, never really done anything else, and I thought, "Why not go for it and see what I can do to help improve student life?" Thank you.

Andy: Thanks, Margaret. I'll go to Sue next.

Sue Goodyear: Hi, my name is Sue Goodyear. There's a fair few of you who will know me. I go back to 2005. I'm currently in a privileged position of being an honorary life member, apparently, for volunteering. I've done my many roles since 2005. We're recognized. This is my first podcast. Even though it's been since 2005, I'm actually quite nervous. I'm an OU student, so I can cope and I can get on with this.

Andy: Absolutely, yeah. We're made of strong stuff here. Finally, Leanne.

Leanne Goodall: Hello. I'm Leanne Goodall. I was a student at the Open University and graduated in 2018 after studying all kinds of things, but mostly focused on art history and creative writing. I was a volunteer for the Student Association, and ended up doing quite a few different things, but all focused around radio, magazines, periscopes, live videos, etc. I look forward to talking about it today.

Andy: That's great. Thanks, Leanne. Actually, that's a good point to go on to our next question, because I was wondering, Leanne, if you could just sort of give us more detail on that really, how you first got involved with the Association itself and how this has developed over the years.

Leanne: Yeah, of course. When I began studying, it was quite a big thing for me. I think it's something that I thought, I'll probably never go to university. I don't really know why. I just kind of thought it wasn't for me. And when I eventually got to a point where I decided, hang on, I'm going to give it a go, I started my course, and I did find it quite tough at first. I think one of the ways that I tend to deal with things when I find them tough is I start writing things down, I tend to be a bit of a writer with everything. And so I began a blog actually on my study journey. I literally just started writing about all the difficult things, how I've got through things, and how they were now good again. I was only really doing it for myself, but actually, people started to read that blog and it started to help people. They were getting something from it. Other Open University students were reading it.

I think it was Heather Bloomer who - She was working with the Students Association - first found my blog. From there, she invited me to write for the magazine that the students were getting. And then after I wrote for the magazine, I was invited on as a radio guest to talk about things. It was really during that first radio show when things really kind of changed and developed for me, because I just remembered how much I used to love doing things like that when I was a little girl playing in my bedroom making radio shows. I remember Heather kind of giving me signals through the window of - wrap this bit up or stick to this time or whatever. And I was just loving it, feeding off it, doing really well. I could see her face lightening up like this radio show is going well. It just developed from there because I absolutely loved it. It started a process of me beginning to realize who I was and what I wanted to do in the future.

Andy: That's great. It's like the association sort of allows people to kind of blossom in a way. Has that been your experience as well, Margaret?

Margaret: Yeah. I mean, since coming into this role, I'll be honest, it's... Beth will know. I was a complete nervous wreck at the beginning. I couldn't even stand in front of my team and talk to them. I was like, "What do I say? What do I say?" But it's definitely given me confidence. And with studying with the OU, that has given me so much confidence.

When I first started back in 2007, I wanted to do a degree, life... had circumstances where I ended up getting married, having children, I was put on the back burner. And to be fair, I did fail the first two modules. But I kept going, kept giving it a go. And now I've got my degree, and I've been going on to masters. But yeah, definitely working with the association has definitely given me confidence and helped me blossom. There's so many opportunities out there now that I want to help other students get as well. So it's an exciting time.

Andy: That's great. How about yourself, Sue? How did you first get involved?

Sue: Well, way back when, my box of module materials had arrived through the post, and it was like, I don't know whether I can open this, and should I open it? When can I open it? Anyway, I took the plunge and opened it. And then a letter came through the door. Because I was living in South Wales. It was from the Wales Regional Forum, inviting me to a social event in the town center. I undenied and undenied, and I thought, "It's two hours of my life. I'm going. And I can ask, hopefully, some questions and stuff."

Anyway, I went to this meeting hall and I met probably about a dozen other students. Those two hours sort of changed my life. I became more involved. I started to make friendships. I felt less isolated as a student. It was possibly the best thing that I'd done, knowing that if I hadn't liked it, I could have stepped away. And because they'd sort of said to me, "If you need support, just contact us and stuff," I just loved it. Loved it. I actually got to see more of Wales as I became involved, because that was the days of secretaries, treasurers, and the search like for the meetings, and it all had to be documented and everything. But I got to travel, and as I say, meet more students. I grew in confidence and took on more roles. Yeah, it was lovely.

Andy: That's great. The listeners won't be able to see this, but we've been joined by Sue's dog as well, which is lovely to see. Sue ci., so that's great. From your perspective, Beth, in the staff team, how did you first sort of become aware of the association and think, "Oh, I want to be part of this"?

Beth: Well, I live in Milton Keynes. And obviously Milton Keynes is the home of the university campus. I've driven past it quite a few times. I had no idea really how big the OU is. You know, you just sort of drive past it as one of these other buildings. My dad works in a university and he was talking to me when I said to him, "So what does the Student Union do?" Because when I was at university, I was one of those supposedly hard-to-reach students. I didn't live on campus. I went a few years late. And so actually, my union never reached me. I didn't attend anything that they did. I didn't realize what they could offer. And so when I went for the role to work with, at the time, the new sort of elected team, because it was the first year - I joined in 2016 - they did one member one one vote. And so they weren't sure who would stand and thought there might be people who didn't know about the association. And so we worked on an induction for these new students. They rolled out this opportunity where everyone could stand and everyone could vote. It was a really good way of getting new students involved. That was a temporary contract in 2016 to help with that.

I'm still here, and I've now done three modules with the OU. I think any angle that you come at it, you get a little bit addicted, really, don't you? I've worked with loads of volunteers who say, "Oh, yeah, I came to this one thing like Sue." And then before you know it, Sue and I are sitting at some awards evening because she's been nominated for sort of Woman of the Year in Milton Keynes for all the work she's done, and we're having a drink thinking, "How did we get here?" But I think it's an incredible way of getting people together from all over the UK, the Four Nations, the rest of the world. You don't really have the opportunity to meet such diverse people in your life. You are exposed to new things. It's so interesting that people sort of hang around forever. That's my perspective from a staff and volunteer side. I've worked with a lot of the volunteers and it's really lovely to see when people come back as well.

I remember meeting Leanne when she was leading the radio station, and Sue and I came along, I think Sue had a sink in her rucksack. That was the first time I met Sue. She picked up a sink and carried it all the way to Milton Keynes. She was building her barge. It's a bit of a family. It is really nice to be involved.

Andy: Yeah, I think it's the same for me, actually. I've been here for just over 18 months. And there is a real family atmosphere in the staff team, as well as the relationship with the student leadership team, which is really lovely.

I was just wondering, next really... Obviously, we're looking back at the 50 years of the association, but I was just sort of wondering what your own individual memories were. What's your fondest memory? What are you most proud of? I'm going to start with Sue because I'm intrigued by the awards and the sink as well. So I'll start with Sue.

Sue: Right. Okay. I shall start with the sink. As we all know, an OU student goes on a journey, and from a Students Association perspective, it can be a bit of a wild journey. So I went to a student conference, and I'd been going, fortunately, to a few conferences, and I met another student at a conference who'd arrived early and was a first timer and hadn't been to a conference. So I was supporting them for a bit. A few years down the line, I got invited to go and stay with them. And then they had to meet up with another student who happened to live on a narrow boat. Anyway, I stepped on this narrow boat, and it was like whatever this is, I have to investigate it. So trundling on for a few years, I sold my house, got my narrow boat, designed it. And the sink saga... I went on the internet and went to shops and looked at sinks. Anyway, I found the one I wanted in London.

By this point, I was living in the Midlands, and I thought, "Oh, London's only near Milton Keynes. Let's go and get the sink because they don't deliver." I'd forgotten that London is so big. It's 20 minutes or whatever from Milton Keynes to London on the fast train. But then it was about an hour and a half each way across London on the tube. I had a sink and some taps in a box on a very, very hot day. On my return obviously I had a meeting at Milton Keynes in the student office, and I walked in with a sink. That was one of my more stupid things to do. What else? Oh, I've lost my train of thought.

Andy: That's okay. That's great.

Beth: Distracted by the sink story, I think.

Sue: What else was it you asked me?

Andy: About sort of what you're most proud of when your time... associated with the association.

Sue: I was utterly surprised and thrilled beyond recognition to receive the honorary life member status, whatever you want to call it. I just used to tootle my way through meetings. Sometimes, initially in the beginning, when I'm towards the end, sort of raising my hand and talking about the wrong thing at the wrong time, but being gently guided into sort of meeting etiquette and stuff. The fact of meeting other students, and then being put forward for this volunteer women leaders award was just unbelievable. Who would believe that little old me, or not so little, and probably a little bit older me would be seen as somebody worthy of being put forward for such an honour.

I think one of my main thrills and achievements was, because my role at that time, a vice president representation, was to support volunteers, we're seeing people who come forward, and had no experience of volunteering, had perhaps awkward lives behind that, where they'd been told they'd been useless or no good, would never achieve. And they had the courage to sort of say, "Hang on a minute, can I try this?" Whether or not they were volunteering at a degree ceremony or at a campus for the students who were studying as part of their module for a week. And watching them go from scared and not so confident, to loving it, and then just being thanked for helping them progress. And then some of them have gone on to do bigger, better things, and really excelled. So that's one of my favourite highlights, I think.

Andy: Yeah, absolutely. That must have been an amazing, really special night. Leanne, how about yourself? I mean, it sounds as though you were really thrilled about your involvement in the radio station when that was up and running.

Leanne: Yeah. I'll give a bit of context so that people can understand why I enjoyed that so much. When I was young, as I said, I used to make radio shows in my bedroom, I used to think about writing magazines, I used to want to be the child reporters that I saw on TV, sharing things that would help people around the world. It's something I just always loved. But when I was 15, at school, and we were asked to fill in forms about what we wanted to do for work experience, I was thinking about journalism, I was thinking about TV. My school wasn't too far from a TV studio. So I put down that I would like to work in a TV studio. When the form got sent back to me, it basically said, "Don't be silly. Put something sensible down." And so from that moment... I wasn't a particularly confident person, even though I liked speaking in that kind of media context, I wasn't a confident person at all, and I had a tendency to always put everybody else first, and what I wanted didn't matter. And so being told that the idea of getting into anything to do with media or journalism was silly, I believed it. I know that's really silly looking back now, but at 15 years old, I believed it. And so I absolutely ruled it out.

I spent many years trying different jobs. I did well with them all but they weren't the right thing for me. Something had been missing for a long time. It was only when I got made redundant after my second child that I decided to use that as a bit of a platform to try and go and find what I wanted to do, which is what led me to the Open University.

So when I was invited to start hosting the radio show, I knew that it was going to be something I was going to enjoy, but I hadn't really pieced everything together at that point. I remember sitting in that first show, getting this feedback from Heather through the glass windows that I was obviously doing quite well, and then getting feedback afterwards from the staff that had been listening and working on the show, but also from the students who had said, "I really liked it when you said that," or "I'm so glad you asked this question in an interview," or this helped me, that helped me. I got so much out of doing that and all the other things that I ended up doing with the Open University Students Association, because it validated to me who I always was, but I'd forgotten, and it also gave me such a sense of satisfaction to be helping other people. It was actually that, that later on, many years later, when I realized I could do something about it, gave me the springboard to say, "I'm going to go and get something that I want now for the rest of my life." Actually, now I work in TV making

documentaries, and I definitely credit the Open University and my time helping them do things for leading me towards that. So yeah, very, very proud to be part of it.

Andy: That's amazing. That's a life changing thing. And I think for a lot of OU students, that will have been an experience. A comment from a teacher or someone at school can really affect confidence. So that's fantastic that the OU and the association were able to change things for you. Heather still was part of the staff team. She's fab. Beth, what's your fondest Association memory?

Beth: There's a range of so many. But I think actually, it's quite a small one really. My fondest memory was actually something to do with the radio. It was, I think, when we were working on setting up a little bit of a group of students to put together content and find articles and things like that. We managed to recruit, I think, 12 or 13 other students to join us. When they all came into the room together, I was just a bit blown away. It was like the most diverse group of people I've ever come across. A couple of people have come over from abroad, a couple of people had come on a boat, someone had flown, someone had got a train, someone had come over on the ferry from Ireland. It was just listening to the journey that people have made into the room. We had such a fun day.

There were people who had, on the day, said a little bit like Sue was saying, they're really worried about coming. There was a couple of students who told us that they actually had some disabilities, which made them a little bit nervous about coming, but they'd made the journey and they got there and they felt supported. Some of them were really shy, but wanted to be involved in doing the content side of things, but were eventually convinced to do a little bit of talking. I think you bring together... OU students are so different and so diverse, just people you would never meet. We just had such an amazing day. I think it was one of those roles, where I thought, "Oh, this is really worth doing, just to get these people to meet each other and be in the same room." When else would you have that opportunity? I think all of the volunteering roles that we've had... We have elections, we have reps who sit on committees, we have people who help with graduations. Every time you meet a new group of students, and you hear their story, it's always just so lovely. I think Sue's got something to say on that one as well. I'll let you come in Sue.

Sue: Yes. I have to look back quite fondly on everything to do with the student radio. My claim to fame for that is I was the first voice to be heard on it and there was lots of umming and ahhhing and pauses and everything else. But watching and listening to the other student volunteers who were on the show as it went through the time, because it was up to about two hours and stuff... At the end the atmosphere of them all acknowledging what they'd achieved and being part of was just unbelievable. It just left a high for the rest of the day. Like you said Beth, the students who've rung in or messaged in... And so thank you. I feel more supported. It was just maybe a sentence was said that just got to them and reached them, and that changed their whole sort of learning journey and may have even got them involved. So yes, fondness, fondness, fondness for the radio.

Andy: That's great, isn't it? It's about connection, isn't it? So the radio station was really able to connect with our students in a new way, which is fab. Margaret, how about yourself? What's your fondest memory with the Association?

Margaret: Right. Well, being very new to the association, I have to go back to my first proper contact with the association, which I think was 2018. I attended a consultation in Cardiff OU. Sarah was there before she was president. We were discussing. I can't remember exactly what we were discussing but we were brainstorming, and we're getting to know each other. I made some really good friends on that day who I'm still in contact with now. We're still on Facebook. So you know, you'll see what everyone else is doing. That was my first awareness of properly what the Association did. At first I just thought it's just there, I didn't really know what it was. I didn't really engage with it. But yeah, going forward over the years, and keeping an eye on it, and every time the elections popped up, I thought, "Well, should I give it a go? Shouldn't I give it a go?" I haven't really got time at the moment. Or there'll be some technical issues. So I try. And then it'd all go to pants. So I don't know. It's not meant to be this time.

So when it did pop up this year, I thought, "You know what, I'm just going to go for it. There's been lots of changes over the last few years. What have I got to lose? I'll give it a go." And it just so happened that it was like the most people standing in an election, and with the Association. Ci. Yeah, no chance. At least I've given it a go. I had very low confidence, very low self-esteem. I had lots of turbulence in my personal life, which knocked me a bit further.

When I did win the election, it was a shock, and it was like, oh, actually, people do value what I want to stand for and what I want to put in place. Since then I've been at a graduation ceremony in New Paltz. I haven't attended my own yet. But I was able to see all the other students coming on stage and the smiles on their faces and the sense of achievement. It reminds us, this is why we're here, and we're all a family. It is addictive. When you don't study, you're lost. Like what am I supposed to do now?

Coming into this role, there's so many good memories, and meeting the team, it's an amazing team. So there's so many more things to come. I can't really point out one thing because just everything's amazing.

Andy: That's great. Now, the Student Leadership Team who've been with us since the summer have really, sort of... You really got stuck in, which is great to see. And of course, you've come in at an interesting time, because obviously, we're celebrating our 50th anniversary this year. We put out a new video, which has a lot of our achievements scene, which is available on our website. We'll give you the address at the end of the podcast for that. And also there's so many milestones which have taken place. I was just wondering, if there's one milestone you'd love to have been around for, what would it be and why? So I'll start with you, Margaret, for this question.

Margaret: Nothing like pressure. The main thing that comes to mind is... I can't remember the name. That first president of the association, she seemed like such a formidable woman. If I can leave any stamp, a fraction of that, then I'll be happy. But yeah, I think raising awareness and the education for all and just everything that she was able to do, and to put such a massive stamp on things. I think I'd start at the very beginning.

Andy: That's great. Yeah, I think it was Millicent Marsland, her name. There's some footage of her from a TV... They used to put out TV shows in the early 70s and do some footage of her. Yeah, she's so passionate. It's great to see. How about yourself, Leanne, with the same question?

Leanne: Yeah. In some veins, in the same way... I'm going to say probably more than I should here. But firstly, how could you not be proud of any of the achievements of the OU Students Association? I'd be proud to be part of any of them because absolutely all of those things go on to help people, and I love things that help people. So I think probably, initially, to be there at the start of the launch of the Students Association would have just been amazing to know. Although you probably wouldn't have known them. But for something that goes on to help so many people, that would be a real sort of proud memory.

But then thinking a bit more specifically, I also thought about when the Students Association managed to get the NUS... I think we call it totem card now, student discounts for people, which I know might seem a little bit silly, in a way. But one thing I noticed with the Open University is that a lot of students either suffer with not feeling like a real student or other people don't think they're a real student. As simple as it is giving them a discount card, that card identifies you as a student, like other people. I always loved being able to get my student discount card and be able to say, "Look, I'm a real student. I can do this too. I can get a discount." I think it kind of validates you a little bit as a student and makes people feel a bit more connected to everybody else, because OU students absolutely are real students, and do everything, if not far more than many other students ever do. And so yeah, I think I'd have been quite proud of that moment, too.

Andy: Yeah, it's amazing, those seemingly little challenges in the history. A lot of work has gone into getting them to be implemented. But yeah, that's fab. How about yourself for Sue?

Sue: I copy what Leanne has said about the student discount card. I too was excited to present my card and get bits of money off and feel part of something bigger. Like the others have said, I would have liked to have been around at the beginning to see what they wanted to plan and how they saw it progressing. It would be lovely if anybody could ever come back and say, "Well, this is how it started and this is how far we've come." Looking at the sights and the video that shows all the achievements, I think it's amazing, and I think it's an excellent combination of students over the years putting themselves forward, suggesting things and things like more diversity groups, the disabled student group, the BME groups that are now forming, and people coming on board with that. It's just a reflection of all the inclusivity that has sort of been available to us.

Andy: Yeah, it's a fab video. It really is. If you go to our website, if you go to the About Us section of our website, and then you'll find a section called Have Achievements, and it's there. It's just a fantastic whistlestop wave of seeing all the things that have been achieved over the last 50 years.

How about you, Beth? I imagine there were some things you would have really loved to have been sort of chief executive for when they went through?

Beth: Yeah. Well, I was just working out actually. I've seen and worked with six presidents. I'm sure Sue has seen many more. But each President always brings a different sort of perspective and passion. So there are different areas that we explore every couple of years when someone new comes in, which is fantastic really for keeping the association up to date with what students want, making sure we're covering a range of things. So I supported groups who got eduroam for students, who got tutorials recorded for students. But I think that the one I would have loved to be around for was when the disabled students group took that tour to Italy with their modified bus. I would have loved to go on that trip with them. That looks so amazing. They've got a little book out about it and have wheels will travel. I think it'd be a fantastic thing to do again. Students come together, fundraise to go abroad, and make it open to all.

There are so many things that have happened that you look back and you think it's all happened because students have come together with an idea and gone for it. Everything that's happened in that video is students who are saying, "This is what we want to do, and we're going to do it."

I think I would have loved to meet Millicent, but I also think I would have been petrified of her, Margaret. She seemed like a force to be reckoned with, which is exactly what you need if they're on your side. But imagine being the university up against Millicent when she was setting this up. You couldn't have said no, could you? So she's the reason we're here. But yeah, so many things I would have loved to be involved in.

There were a couple of people at our 50th dinner who'd come back, who were involved in the past. One of them was talking to us about when they were able to get hundreds of thousands of students' signatures to take to number 10, and how they worked on getting name degrees for students. So the association's the reason why you can say that you've got a particular name degree; it's not just an open degree. So I think that is another thing that really helps students, and it's something that someone said, "Why don't we have this? Let's do it." I think that's great. So, yeah, loads of things I would have been involved in, a bit of everything.

Andy: Yeah, I mean, there's still so much that the Association can do for our students now. It's so inspirational to see what's been done over the last 50 years. But there's still more things that we can help them with. I'll start with you for this question. But just really, why should students get involved with the Students Association? And how should they do it?

Beth: Well, I think that the why, if you've listened to this podcast, you're probably already convinced, right? Leanne, Sue, and Margaret's stories must be convincing enough, just the fact that people have made friends, people have felt less isolated, felt a part of something, that's a reason to get involved. For the future, what I'd love to see at the association is more support groups. We're going through quite a difficult time as a country, shall we say. And I think that finding your tribe, finding your people is really important when things are tough. I think the OU Students Association can provide that.

At the moment, we've got Disabled Students Group, we've got a group for LGBT students, and we also have a group for Black, Asian, and minority ethnicities; and I would love to see those grow. I would love to see Black students going off and having enough people to have their own group so they can do things that really matter for them. I would love to see a carers group, single parents, anything where it feels a little bit more difficult at times to study having your people in your corner and having that sort of connection and shared understanding is so important. I think that's one of the biggest things that we can provide as an association. So if you want to set up one of those groups, all you need to do is have a couple of people and put in an application to be a club and see how it goes. If it goes well, we can upgrade to a society or group. But all it needs is a couple of people who want to set up the support, and we can help. So that's what I'd love to see happen in the future. And how students can get involved is there's so many volunteer opportunities. But I think if there's a gap and you see the gap, and you think this isn't here for me, then we can help you set it up. So yeah, just tell us, tell us what's missing.

Andy: Thanks, Beth. Yeah, Margaret, from your perspective as president, why do you think it's so important for students to get involved with the Association?

Margaret: I think once you make that step and get involved in the Association, you realize there's a whole new world out there. You've got a whole new community, a family. You're not on your own, because it's very easy when studying to just feel isolated. You're in your rooms studying, trying to hit the deadlines. You're not necessarily having much contact with other students. I think just making that first step... Like I went for that consultation, I thought, "You know what, I get to meet some people. I'll be a couple of hours. They pay you some expenses anyway." So, you know, it was a win win. And from there, it just opens my mind. There's so much more out there. I think just make that first step and you won't regret it. It'll be the best thing you've ever done. So go for it.

Andy: That's great. How about you, Leanne?

Leanne: Yeah, I echo everything that has been said already. OU students are really quite a special group. The moment you meet another OU student, you have that exchange, so you know you're both students. There is an instant connection there straightaway, an instant level of understanding, and you bond with people really quickly. Now, some people are at home, isolated, feeling lonely, and it will help them. Some people aren't like that, they're actually feeling like they don't need the Association. They're fine, they're getting on with things. But I promise you, whichever camp you're in, whoever you are, if you get involved with the Open University Students Association, it will enrich your experience in one way or another. That might be because you're connecting with people. It might be because you can have discussions about your courses, or you can share ideas, you can help yourself or each other. But it might be something even better than that. You might be able to upskill, you might be able to try something new that you've never done before, or like me, you might actually open a door that then leads on to your dream career. So why not get involved?

Andy: Thanks, Leanne. Would you echo that, Sue?

Sue: Yes, I would. Get involved, take that one step. It can be a tiny step, but it can be a giant leap. The great thing about the Students Association is if you don't feel comfortable in one role or one experience, you can try a different role or a different experience, and you can have the support and the knowledge that others have gone before you and done the same, and you will just get so much more out of it. I have just had the bestest, bestest of times being involved. Mine was that letter through the door and taking two hours out of my life. And then I'm addicted now. Yeah, just try it. Just do it. There is so much opportunity. Don't listen to the sayers that say, "Why you? You're no good." Listen to yourself. You are good. You are good enough to do something.

Get involved in the Student Association, whether or not initially it's online, because you're a little bit afraid of putting yourself out there. There are roles behind the scenes, there are roles in front of the scenes. I mean, I've done all this volunteering, and I'm doing my first podcast, and I'm sort of getting through it. So thank you for listening and all that. But yeah, it's just personal achievements, and a way of doing it at its best.

Andy: Thanks, Sue. Yeah, it's so fantastic. I think this thing of looking back does give people a chance to really see what the association has done individually, and how we've been able to help students, and how it's been such a collective link between staff and students in that time. Obviously, we're looking to the future as well. I was just wondering... I'll start with you, Sue. What would you like to see from the association in the future?

Sue: I think, again, looking back at the achievements over the years that we're happy to move forward and change and acknowledge that at times change can be slow, sometimes change can be quick. I would love to see more students take that step and come on board, and then be able to sort of write their own student learning journey, because it's inclusive and it's transforming.

Andy: It really is. How about you, Beth?

Beth: Well, other than wanting to see all of our support groups grow, I would really be - I think that Margaret is committed to this as well - keen to see in this term, that the accessible formats issue gets sorted. So we're pushing for students to make sure that everyone receives their study materials in the way they need them at the time they need them, so that there is no differentiation between those who are studying online or those who need additional printed materials. So that's something that the association is really banging the drum about this year, have been for the last few years. And as Sue said, sometimes it is slow. We have improved things, but they're not there yet. I'd love us to fix that issue so that students don't have to wait or defer because they didn't receive something that makes it easier for them to study.

Andy: How's that process going, Margaret? Is it sort of two steps forward one step back or...

Margaret: Yeah, they're fully aware of the situation. I think it's a challenge of how to get the processes in place. I think it's an ongoing situation that's constantly being looked at. But they're fully aware that it's not acceptable for our students. Our

students deserve better. Everyone should have equal opportunities to be able to study and not be hindered by delays in formats. So yeah, it's definitely something that's constantly raised. They know that we're not going to be quiet about it. If it's not done in one area, we'll just go above their heads and go to the next person. So yeah, it's definitely something that's on the top of our agenda.

Andy: That sounds really exciting. Thanks, Margaret. Leanne, what would you like to see in the future of the association?

Leanne: So I have seen so many people get so much benefit from getting involved in the association in any way big or small. And so I know that there are lots of people who do get involved with that, but I also know there's lots of people who don't really know an awful lot about it still and probably don't think they need anything like that, so don't look. I would love for the Open University Students Association to be kind of in everybody's face, an option for everybody to be able to get involved. For me, I've got into documentaries, as I said, and TV, and I love sharing stories. I think that's how we connect as people. It's really, really important for OU students to be able to connect. So I would love to see even more of sharing people's personal stories and doing that in a visual way because visuals, for most people, will help enhance the story. So yeah, I'm thinking, we've got YouTube, we've got small mini documentaries of people's inspirational stories. But I'd love to see a day when those kinds of things happen and we share more about who these students are, because they're a brilliant bunch. I think that by sharing their stories, more people will get involved.

Andy: Yeah, absolutely. So there's a lot to come. There's a lot more to come, which is great. You're volunteering to run that project. Is that right, Leanne?

Leanne: Maybe one day, maybe one day.

Andy: Sue, would you like to come in?

Sue: Yes, please. Just off the back of saying that sometimes things move slowly. The study materials issue was an issue sort of when I was more prominent. It just goes to show the perseverance of students who attend meetings without OU and the President and others attending all the different areas of volunteering that they can get into. It does keep raising this issue and they have to keep acknowledging it, and they have to work on it. So if you're a student who's perhaps been affected by this, it doesn't mean you have to get involved and suddenly start waving a flag and chanting at the doors of the university. It means there may be an opportunity for you to volunteer in a part of... that deals with this situation. And then you've contributed and you can look back and say, "Yeah, I was part of that."

Andy: Absolutely. Margaret?

Margaret: Yeah. I just wanted to follow on from everyone. Basically, what I want to achieve, and for the people who follow me, for the association, is that, ideally, to double the size of the association and to increase awareness where we've got so many students who are aware and who are involved that were completely swamped. I want to be in a position where there's so many students, we need to keep doubling and doubling in size. I think the more students who are aware and get involved, the

better the student journey is, and the more diverse students we have, the more we can do to help everyone, because it's the areas where people don't really speak up, or those areas where we can do more to improve and people just need us speak up, let us know. We've made our website more accessible. So we're trying to get more engagement there. Our recent elections were the biggest engagements we've had.

I just want to have every student involved or aware of us. That's the ultimate goal. And so that we're completely swamped. We need to carry on. But yeah, the more voices we have, then the better for everyone in the end. There's always something, a position for someone. It doesn't matter. The position may not be even there, but we can create that position, we can create the role for that student if there's something that we haven't already got. So it's very flexible and it is your association. So we will do whatever we need to do.

Andy: Definitely, definitely. Did you want to come in on this, Sue.

Sue: Yeah. Just thinking about students or those who are listening to us now thinking, "Well, I can't get involved at the moment because I'm busy and I'm studying and doing whatever." There's a time between modules when you suddenly get that message on your dashboard, saying, "Yes, you're registered and stuff." Use time like that, those few months at the end of your first module or your second module to look up and engage yourself and see what else the Student Association is doing or looking towards, because you've got a couple of months there. So you do have time.

Beth: I love that too. Actually, one of the things that's usually on at that time is graduation ceremonies. I have never been more motivated with my own studies than when I've watched other people graduate, because when you're on the stool, you get people coming up to you. For example, someone's coming over to buy a mug or a hoodie for their dad who's just graduated, and they're so proud of them, or their brother, their child, and they tell you their stories. And then you go home and think, "Well, now I need to do my work. Better get this TMA done," because you're just so motivated.

Andy: Yeah, there's so much inspiration, isn't there, from our students, and so many fantastic stories. You've shared some great stories with us today, the four of you. So thank you very much for that. I feel really inspired. I'm sure our listeners will be as well. So thank you very much for joining us. And to all of you listening, Happy Christmas and see you in 2023. Thank you very much. That's it from us.

Sue: Bye.

Margaret: Thank you.

Beth: Thank you.

Andy: Thanks to Margaret, Leanne, Sue, and Beth for joining us for this edition. And remember that if you'd like to see our 50th anniversary achievements video, just visit our website at oustudents.com, and then go to the About Us section and you'll see a page called Our Achievements. You'll find the video there. Honestly, it really is a fantastic and inspirational watch. The perfect way to sum up the last half century of

the association. This has been The Association Conversation Station. It was hosted and produced by myself, Andy Evans. Thanks for listening. Have a lovely Christmas, and we'll see you in 2023.