

Andy: Hello and welcome to episode three of the Association Conversation Station, the official podcast of the Open University Students Association. This is the place to hear about what we do, and the things that inspire us. We hope you'll enjoy it. Now as it's Pride Month, in this episode, we'll be celebrating all things pride and how the association has developed a wonderful space for the LGBTQIA+ community. You'll be hearing from Graham Rimmer, co-founder and first chair of OU Pride, known at the time as PLEXUS, Alex Phennah, who also co-founded OU Pride and Lyndsay Thompson, the current chair of OU Pride.

This podcast contains two separate interviews. The first is with Alex and Graham, and the other is with Lyndsay so make sure you don't miss out on listening to both chats. Hearing from all three of them is really inspiring as you are about to find out. Our host is our president, Sarah Jones. Sarah, over to you.

Sarah Jones: Hello and welcome to another Association Conversation Station. My name's Sarah Jones and I'm the Students Association president and I have two wonderful guests with me today. Graham, would you like to introduce yourself and tell us a little bit about yourself?

Graham Rimmer: My name's Graham Rimmer and I'm a graduate with the Open University, so I've just graduated with my Master's in Education specializing in leadership and management. I can't remember, it was that long ago. Damn COVID has put a bit of a two-year gap into all our lives, hasn't it? I'm one of the co-founders of OU Pride.

Sarah: Brilliant. Thank you Graham. Alex, would you like to introduce yourself?

Alex Phennah: Hi Sarah, great to meet you. My name's Alex. I am also a former Open University student. It's a little bit longer than Graham. I can't even remember when I graduated. I also am one of the co-founders of OU Pride.

Sarah: Fantastic. We're talking about OU Pride, but obviously when you two started it, that's not what it was called. Can you tell me a little bit about the history of what is now known as OU Pride? I'll start with you Graham, and then move on to you Alex, and you can tell me a little bit about how it all started.

Graham: Before OU Pride, the LGBT representation was a sighting. It was just an LGBT group that was moderated by the forums. It wasn't really out there as such and then conference 2016 happened. Conference 2016, I met Alex and I reconnected with another former student, Nick Bond and basically, we started having conversations about LGBT representation and lack thereof within the Open University. Some conversations had started with, "Why do you need it?" The first response was, "The fact you're asking is an answer." But obviously, a lot of the materials that students use can be quite antiquated or quite old fashioned.

Earlier you asked us about our pronouns and a lot of the text these days is very gender specific. That's one of the reasons why we thought, "We do need to have some representation", not necessarily from LGB, but actually the T, because a lot of people who are coming to the Open University don't identify as male or female or they're trans, they could be non-binary. I think that was definitely one of the conversation starters.

Then after the conference, the conversation continued because sometimes what happens at conference is you meet people and then you dwindle off into the background but the three of us that met that time really had, "This is a conversation that's worth continuing and starting." That's where it all began. I'm going to let Alex carry on because it was him that brought up the name really. I don't want to take any thunder from him.

Sarah: Go for it, Alex.

Alex: Just to reiterate what Graham was saying there, I think we set out with three objectives and that was to represent an LGBTQ+ student voice towards the university, as Graham was saying around text materials and having that voice and knowing actually that's been one of the biggest successes of OU Pride is having the OU Student Association and the University itself listening which has been absolutely fantastic. The other was a community, I felt like I had never had any form of community at Open University until I went to a conference and I wanted to bottle that and take that for all of our LGBTQ+ students who maybe have not been there and start to create a community because it can be a very isolating experience. Then finally was signposting for support, we wanted to create a place where we could really help students get access to support that was specific to issues around LGBTQ+.

The name, we didn't just want to be another alphabet soup. At that time, there were so many letters and one thing I was hearing a lot from the straight community was, "We don't understand all of this and we didn't want another name." So, we came up with PLEXUS which was an acronym which Graham will come and explain in a second. I'm just going to throw that, just going to give you a little bit of warning, Graham. But also PLEXUS word means connections and community that was why we chose the name.

Sarah: Graham, are you just trying to work out what it is now because it's been awhile?

Graham: No.

Sarah: Are you ready?

Graham: I'm trying to spell the word. never mind. PLEXUS, as Alex was saying, it means networking. It's the Latin for network and I think it was really important and that's what we wanted to create. We talked about not an alphabet soup because people just don't understand what it means. PLEXUS is pride, learning... This is so bad because it's been three years.

Alex: Experience. Was it experience?

Graham: I remember X was no excuses because we couldn't think of anything for X. Unity and safety. I can't remember what the E is. I want to say equality or something like that but each letter had a meaning for something and it's really bad that we don't remember the E but the fact I remember the rest was good.

[music]

Sarah: The thing I think that stood out for me the most when I heard about PLEXUS because I didn't hear about PLEXUS until 2018 conference, which was basically when I got involved as an elected rep. I'd not really been involved and all of a sudden I was an elected rep. I went to a talk that you did and we had these gingerbread men that we had to put names and stuff on. And that really opened my eyes to something that I'd not really thought about. It's not because I wasn't interested, I just hadn't thought about it. It just hadn't come across my plate. It's not that I had not come across gay people or not come across people who were trans or, it wasn't that, it just hadn't crossed my mind to think about it.

That challenged me and I remember thinking about the X and that no excuses and that really stuck with me. I remember talking to another time going, can you just talk me through this because this is something that I want to understand. I want to get to grips with this. Because although I identify as straight, I want to be an ally. I want to understand and I want to hold myself to that no excuses. Because there isn't any excuse at all. That part of it really

challenged me. I know it's a long while back now, but thinking back, can you talk through any of the difficulties that you encountered when you were setting this group up because I'm sure that there were barriers and challenges?

Alex: Writing the constitution, number one. That took us forever because it's almost legal language and this was going to be the constitution for a society that we were creating. We wanted to ensure that no wording cut off anybody. I remember thinking about pronouns and making sure and going through that, making sure there was actually a section on that. Then going through the amount of times that that got sent and then sent back just to improve the wording. I knew it was super important for us to get that absolutely 100% correct and open to everybody.

Graham and myself, when we were doing this, were very acutely aware that we are both cis, white males. If you don't know what that means, I was born as a male I still identify as a male and I'm white and I am still afforded a lot more acceptance. I do not begin to understand the challenges of my brother, sisters, and NBs across the spectrum. That was something I think was a challenge for us as well, we spent a lot of time reflecting, didn't we Graham?

Graham: Absolutely. I think when we were writing that constitution, we were challenged quite a lot in terms of, "Why do you now need these representatives on your committee or a voice on your committee?" We gave the same answer Alex just gave you in terms of, "We can't represent our entire community. We can provide a voice, but actually in terms of those nuances of difficulties, we can't be that because we've not experienced it."

That was the key thing. It was that backwards and forwards having an adult debate with other elected representatives and staff members going, "This makes sense now." It's opening that conversation which enables people to learn. It's not just about opening up a book or listening to TV or something like that on the news. It's actually having a conversation with someone where you can go "Okay, this makes sense now."

On reflection, we did make the committee probably too big but the intention was there to make sure we were fully representative because Alex mentioned the alphabet soup. Me and Alex are literally just two of those letters and that's it. Do you know what I mean? We need to include, I think that's what other societies and groups have done as well across the association.

Sarah: Yeah, absolutely. I think that's one of those things, isn't it? It needed to be inclusive. At the end of the day, we're Open Universities so that to me means we need to be open to everybody. That is a massive challenge when you start, as you say, you've got this alphabet soup of people and you're trying to represent all those views because those voices are so incredibly important, aren't they to make a difference. Do you feel that you have made a difference?

Graham: I would say so. I think the key factor is that always we are still proud the fact that we were the fastest ever organisation to get their constitution passed by the CEC even though it was a lot of work and a lot of time. I feel sorry for the people that have come before that took a lot longer. That goes on the fact that me and Alex were just very determined to make it happen for people that had just been left for so long, in terms of that openness as well is the fact that one of the challenges that we had was about every single student has to be a member. I'm like, "No, that can't happen." Everyone can be involved but in terms of voice, it has to be people within the community. That was really a challenge. I think that's what we have made a difference. I look back on what we achieved and there's definitely lots of memories there and there's definitely a voice there.

We visited the nations. Everything tends to be Milton Keynes-centric or London-centric or Manchester-centric but actually, the fact that we were still doing a pride parade in Scotland, Belfast, Dublin, Wales, and Cardiff, that's an achievement.

Sarah: Can you tell me more about going and representing PLEXUS at pride events?

Graham: It was a very long week, lots of planes and trains. Alex, in the first pride parade, you were on cloud nine weren't you, in London?

Alex: It was absolutely phenomenal. It was my first experience of London Pride. I'd marched Manchester and Liverpool when I used to live up that way with different trade unions organisations. I'm actually getting a little bit emotional about it now because to have started something, to have had that representation and standing there celebrating the diversity of the people and the Open University from just myself and Graham battering that constitution and trying to get a committee going, trying to pass our enthusiasm to other people, to see that actually happen and be surrounded with staff, students management from the univ was phenomenal.

Sarah: I can't even imagine how that must have felt. But definitely, when you're talking, you get that sense of pride and that was exactly what it was about, wasn't it? It was about being proud about all the work that you'd done and the fact that you'd created a community for students to feel family.

Alex: Yeah, absolutely. I remember someone challenged me and goes, "Why do you need to be in the pride parade?" I'm like, "It lets the prospective students and the current students know that there's a community there waiting for them. That was what it was all about." Because I think people were just so unsure about what the need was. The other support group, it's obvious why that support group is there in terms of the fact that those people in that group need that extra help to get what they just deserved or the adjustments made for them within the LGBT+ community, it wasn't necessarily visible. People saw it as very much as a leisure social side. We were like, "No, actually this is about academia as well because the literature that you promote and talk about is antiquated." Some stuff is still needed there because it demonstrates that antiquated thought. In all my assignments, I always use they/them, and my tutor told me off. I was like, "You're wrong. It wasn't plural. I wasn't using it in the plural. If you read what I was writing, you would understand what I'm saying."

That changed some language in their terms, "Actually, let's let them be more inclusive." By my third year, in terms of the TMAs, it was better saying, "Please ensure you use inclusive language." I was like, "Did I trigger that or is it just the fact that the work that OU Pride have been doing triggered those conversations?"

Sarah: I think that's an important part of OU Pride, isn't it? It's about not just creating that community, but opening up those incredibly important conversations that need to be had about making sure that every individual feels welcome, feels included. That's an incredibly important conversation to have in academia, isn't it? I'm basically doing the same course that Graham's doing and it's challenging me and my perceptions of things and how much of an ally that I am.

To me, that's a really good thing. The work that I've been doing as president, working with OU Pride and also with the staff team which is OU Proud, working with these groups, trying to support these groups, trying to represent these groups at highest levels meant that I've had to have that understanding to be a good representative of those views.

I think that all stems from you two having that conversation go, "We need to do something about this." That's an incredible thing to have and as we are in our now in our 50th year, it's

great that we are talking about these things and it's good that we're having these conversations. To me, it's about that was then, this is now, what do we do next? How do we take these conversations forward?

Thinking about the OU as the biggest university in Europe, we represent currently about 175,000 students. How do we reach those? What's been good or bad about the fact that we do represent 175,000 students? Do you think that's been a massive challenge or do you think that's something, a challenge that's worth taking on?

Alex: Always worth taking on. I can speak to my experience. When I first started, I was working full-time and I know there's a number of people who get involved, who have different responsibilities, caring responsibilities or work. People have busy lives. You do your course and that's it. You might go to a weekend or an evening or a Saturday morning and it is so easy just to continue to stay disconnected.

Then through digging around the forums, which is no simple thing, can you find this information. Certainly, we need to surface that information, we need to get it in front of people quicker at the start of their journey. They go straight into their course. I know there's freshers' week, but it doesn't line up with any of their core learning.

It seemed as though an extra thing and when you're working and you're busy and, "I can't be bothered to joining tonight," or, "I've got this thing." but it's so vitally important because that's where you go, "I'm not in this alone." When you are crying in with your half a bottle of wine at 9:00 p.m. on a Tuesday, with a box of chocolates next to you trying to submit a TMA at the very last second, not that I recommend that to anybody, but did it pretty much every time, you're not alone. Get that community, find your people not just across pride.

I want to see OU Pride grow. When I completed my studies, it was the time for Graham and I to step back and grow and allow the next group of students to take that on. All I wish for them is absolute success in getting that voice bigger, getting that reach out, creating that support network. That to me is my legacy for the OU.

[music]

Sarah: That sounds like a great legacy and I will say this, OU Pride is doing a grand job at the moment. They have an incredibly active Facebook group. I can't even keep up with it if I'm perfectly honest. They just do a sterling job. Again, my eyes have been opened even more, the more that I see the days that they celebrate and I think, "I've not even thought about that."

For me, it's been a massive learning experience. It's been good that I've learnt it. It's incredibly important that I've learnt it and you're right. These are the kinds of things that we need to get in front of students right from the get-go. Let them know that these communities are there and ready for them, that we have these groups. It's incredibly important. In this month, we're celebrating pride. We're celebrating how proud we are in these things and how actually we support students. As a student at the Open University until you started PLEXUS, did you feel that there was the support there for you in, not just your studies, but in that way?

Graham: From a non-LGBT perspective, I think the student community is very much there but it's not necessarily reaching out to where it should be. Conference is really useful. Alex, I remember you saying to me the fact that you stumbled across the conference email and then basically you registered and then the rest is history type of thing. Up in Manchester, Alex used to live literally around the corner from me and the groups that we used to meet in Manchester or Liverpool or wherever, you didn't hear of because you have to be in the places I think sometimes. I think, that's where I think the main learning for the OU and the

association is really it's about going to where the students are and I think you'll find a lot of them on social media platforms or in the forum, not necessarily the forums but in the two years. So, linking with the associate lecture say, "This is coming up. Can you promote this for Rose? Can you send this and add this to your next bulletin?" There are lots of things that the OU could do on behalf of the association and vice versa, definitely some learning that can be done there. The website is a lot better. It looks a bit more current, that's definitely a plus. You're talking in a language that's more apparent these days. Forget about the fact that traditionally, OUsians are older. I know from my old job that's changed massively. People who are 18 are choosing to come to the OU because they want that flexibility and they want the learning and working etc. Two facts, the 18-year-olds, they're not on Twitter, they're on Instagram, they're on Snapchat. There's probably another one that I do not know about because I'm nearly 38.

Sarah: Tiktok.

Graham: Tiktok.

Alex: Tiktok, Yeah, it's all about Tiktok, Graham.

Sarah: It's all about the Tiktok.

Graham: It's definitely about being able to adapt to change. Unfortunately, society is changing a lot quicker than the association that you can keep up with, the fact that the OU is 50 is amazing. I think that should be celebrated and what a great month to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the first pride parade. There's definitely opportunities there. Me and Alex have done a bit about something in the parade. It's actually about being at a community level, at the grassroots level, and seeing how you can support the students in that particular way. They know we're there now. Let's keep going and I think OU pride has done a sterling job in terms of taking PLEXUS and going to a new evolution of what that means, and how they support students going forward.

Sarah: I think you're right. It's very much about how we get that message out to students that we're here and we have these groups that are specifically for them. I think it might have been Alex that said it, it's about finding your tribe. It's about finding the people that you connect with because as you said, being an OU student is incredibly isolating and you can feel that a lot. But then, I chose the OU because I could study on my computer not speaking to a single person, it didn't work that's why I chose the OU. I didn't want that community or at least, I didn't think I wanted that community, but actually I ended up going out and looking for that community, and thankfully, I found it. I found people that I connect with. I found people that challenge my thinking. I found places that I could be, not just part of it but be an ally. I know that that's something that all students can be in this space, isn't it? They can be an ally and it's not just me thinking it. It doesn't take much to be an ally. In your thinking, how would you best be an ally? How would you be an ally to somebody in the LGBTQIA+ community?

Graham: From my perspective, I can't be necessarily an ally to my own tribe as Alex would refer to us. But I am an ally to my trans brothers and sisters because I support them in terms of them being able to be who they are. We talk about many years ago, even probably 50 years ago, and we will talk about people discriminating against the fact that they have sexual relationships. Trans people existed then, the person who started the Stonewall riots was trans so I stand with them in terms of being able to give them a voice when they're necessarily not heard. If you look in the media these days, that is becoming more and more apparent. Once again, the UK government are sectionalising the LGBT+ community. They say, "We'll stop conversion therapy there. But if you're trans, sorry you need to keep going with it." That's just completely wrong. Adding to being an ally, across this globe of 72 nations, it's still illegal to love who you want to love and in some places, it's a criminal

offence. The OU has a platform that operates in some of these countries and I think that's where we need to use our voice to say, "Do you know what? No." Then, we can provide allyship that way, not necessarily on an individual basis. If you've got 175,000 students, that's a powerful voice to have.

Alex: Amazing, Graham. I was thinking of it from an individual perspective and I think there are three things that people can do. They can sit down, shut up and have a cup of coffee. That is sit down, listen and chat and take away whatever is being sent to you, ask a person. If you don't know a person, just do some research. All an ally means is that you're not the opposite of me. You don't hate my existence. You don't want to call me slurs and names as I walk past you in the street. I would love to one day be able to feel like I could walk down the street and hold my partner's hand without feeling like somebody is going to say or do something. I am in an incredible, fortunate position legally right now. It's not the same for our brothers and sisters and NBs across the spectrum so as allies of the LGBTQ+ community, we need to ensure that we are all standing together next to each other for people of colour as well, who have an even more difficult time within the LGBTQ+ community and those from different religions as well. There are lots of people out there and we're all just human. Let's just try to get along and don't be an idiot.

Sarah: Basically, be kind.

[music]

Sarah: I remember when I was younger, my grandma sat me down and she went, "Sarah, you've got one mouth and two ears. That means you need to listen twice as much as you speak." I haven't necessarily done that, but it's very much that with this, isn't it? As you say, sitting down, shutting up and listening. It's about you sharing your experience with me so that I can understand better. It's about me listening to your experience. Right at the beginning of this before we started the recording, I asked both Graham and Alex what their pronouns were. I know because I've been told that is a really good thing to do because that means that I won't make a mistake and mispronoun somebody, I know that's not the right phrase, but use the wrong pronoun. On my email, I have how I identify my pronouns and I have a link to why I identify my pronouns. I remember a conversation I had with Tim Blackman, who's the vice chancellor, around pronouns. To me, this was an incredibly important conversation even though it was a short conversation. I just said to him, "Look, I've done this training and I didn't understand why anybody did it before, but I've now put my pronouns at the end of my emails and I think it's really important because it's incredibly inclusive. It means that the people that I'm emailing know that I understand the importance of how to use their pronouns." I had this conversation with them and they were, "Can you send me the link and I'll have a look?" About two days later, I had an email from him and I went look below and underneath his name, had his pronouns.

Graham: Amazing.

Sarah: I was like, "That's incredible. The vice chancellor of the Open University listened to me speaking about this and literally just learnt and took on board what I'd said." Now, if he emails any student, that will be there and they will understand that he understands pronouns.

Graham: That's really important. It talks about misgendering as well. It's a key as well because we live in a society where an assumption is made. If you have never seen or met the person and you have a male sounding name, they assume you're male and it gets rid of that straight away. I've been in conversations where the person was called Sam and they go, "Was it Samuel?" "No, actually, it's Samantha." Alex, you have a potentially male sounding name but you could be short for Alexandra. I think it's about don't make assumptions about

people until you have a conversation with them. That's a key message.

Alex: Yeah, I agree to that point, Graham. It's really practical sometimes for some people to know what my pronouns are because we email so much nowadays. I was working with somebody over email for two years, they thought I was female. They thought my pronouns were she/her. This is before we were putting pronouns on emails. This is many many moons ago. For me, it has a practical application as well.

Sarah: Yeah, absolutely it does. I mean, at least with my name. It's a little bit easier. That's another thing, I didn't think about it because it didn't necessarily affect me because I'm perfectly comfortable in the fact that she/her/it/whatever, I'm happy to be called. My kids especially, they get my attention by whatever they call me but it's incredibly important for the people that I deal with that they know that I understand that. We've got a wide range of students in this university like we have in real life. We've got this wide range of students who come from so many different backgrounds, so many different understandings. We need to treat each person with the same respect as we expect ourselves. It's about respect, isn't it? I asked you what your pronouns are out of respect for you because I didn't want to misgender you. Thank you for telling me what the right word was.

It's a really important part of what we do now that has probably one of those things that have moved on quite a lot. I see it now more and more because we've been online so much, especially on Zoom. I can't change it on Microsoft Teams because that's set up by the university. But on Zoom, I can put my name and my pronouns, so I do. I've noticed more and more people are doing that. When you go into a meeting to introduce yourself, "Hi. my name is Sarah Jones. My pronouns are she/her." It's not difficult to do and it takes a fraction of a second to do longer than just your introduction. Maybe I have learnt something through many, many conversations with people but that's something that I'm going to take away from doing this, I've learnt an awful lot from OU Pride, from the people that have been in OU pride, from YouTube. I've learnt a lot and that's really an incredible thing. Just as we're starting to wind up a little bit, is there anything that you wish for the future when you think about where you started with PLEXUS, where OU Pride is now? Is there anything that you wish for, for the future?

Graham: There are two things in terms of what I see in the future. It's A, intersectionality because you can't do this alone so it's about how the support groups and the societies work in collaboration because I don't have one label and no one has one label. There's differences on that. In terms of growth, I know how much of a struggle it can be and you need that great determination to keep going and I know sometimes it's hard to go, "Johnny, this is something like Alex was saying and it's much in my face that you need to do." I think it's just that growth where it doesn't fall on one or two or three or four people's shoulders. It helps other people get involved and it becomes more a bit fluid with each other.

Sarah: Brilliant. Alex?

Alex: How do I follow that there? I think Graham got the nail on the head. Yeah, totally agree. The one thing I would say is to whoever they may be in the future, as long as I'm alive and OU Pride is going, if their committee ever needs anything, I'm here. I'm still in the Facebook group but I never go on Facebook. There's that and we need to work on that but I'm sure people can find a way to contact me. I want to ensure that we get the right people and we get the right passion and we get the enthusiasm to continue to grow and have a positive impact on students, staff and the Open University and therefore wider society.

Sarah: Absolutely. It's about having that positive impact, isn't it? It's been absolutely amazing speaking to both of you today. I have thoroughly enjoyed talking to you. I learnt and again learning more. For me, every time I speak to Graham, I learn something. I've learnt so much



from you today, Alex as well. It's like, back to school day today. Thank you so much for joining me. It has been an absolute pleasure talking to you and learning more about the start of PLEXUS, which is now OU Pride, so thank you. Thank you so much, Graham.

Graham: You're very welcome.

Sarah: Thank you so much Alex for joining us today.

Alex: Thank you for having us on. This has been great fun.

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Sarah: Hi, Lyndsay and welcome. Would you like to tell us a little bit about who you are and your role in all of this?

Lyndsay: My name is Lyndsay Thompson and I joined PLEXUS about 2 years ago when a position became available. Towards the end of that year, the existing committee all were up for reelection. Unfortunately, most of the team weren't gonna be students anymore so I had to stand down. I applied for the role of chair having a wee bit of experience with the team and was lucky enough to get the position. It's just been a complete roller coaster since then.

Sarah: How so a roller coaster?

Lyndsay: We rebranded towards the beginning from listening to feedback from our members and the new committee coming on board. It felt appropriate to rebrand at that point. It was going to be the start of 2 years with a brand new committee. The feedback was that we were difficult to find, but once you found us, great. To new students coming in, the word PLEXUS didn't mean anything so we decided to do a rebrand. We had a competition to come up with a new name and a new logo. Very early on, we did that and we've had a couple of committing members join us and then had to leave because of workloads. It's the life of our students, isn't it? You don't realise just how much work is involved until you're right in the middle of it.

Sarah: Absolutely. Can you tell us then a little bit about where OU Pride is now?

Lyndsay: I think we're in really good position at the moment. Our membership is growing quarter on quarter which is phenomenal. The amount of people we're getting and joining in our events and our posts on social media are growing every month. Even the forum which is normally quite quiet, those have a better chat than they are so, I'm really pleased. We're trying to make sure there's a good scope of events to suit everybody. Bearing in mind, there are three committee members so we can't do everything we want to do, so we're trying to make sure that we do enough that our members are happy and feeling involved whilst still remembering that the three of us are still students, absolutely up to their elbows and studying.

Sarah: What kind of events do you put on for students then?

Lyndsay: The last Friday of every month, we have an informal chat and it's just on Teams where members can join, chat about whatever they want, doesn't have to be OU-related, doesn't even have to be LGBTQ+ related. If there's a burning issue, they're welcome to come on and quite often the conversation starts on something vaguely uni-related and a year and a half later, we're talking about some absolutely nonsense, but it's a really good fun night. For a member of the committee, it's just about listening to what our members want and it gives them the opportunity to tell us what they want. We also have a book club roughly every 5 to 6 weeks and that does differ on everybody's workload. We try to make sure it's an

LGBTQ+ book either the author or the genre fits within kind of that range. In fact, the one we've got coming up in a couple of weeks and we've actually got the author joining us. We're doing a Q&A afterwards which we are really excited about. It's our committee member Steve's cousin that has written the book and I am just so excited. It's going to be such a good night. We also try and do fun events every month. Usually, we either run a bingo night or a quiz night but something that's been popular is our murder mystery. We started to do something different for Halloween and it went down really well. Our members are asking us for it again and again. We did one for an anti-Valentine's day for those of us that are not in settled relationships. It was something different to do, and we're in the process of planning one for Pride month although the marches are starting again. We're not entirely comfortable about being in big groups so we're going to do something online at the end of June for people that are not comfortable being out in crowds or whose ability just doesn't let them be out in the crowds, so watch their space, that is going to be a really good night.

Sarah: That sounds absolutely incredible. Talk a little bit about where OU Pride is at now. What are your aspirations for OU pPride in the future? We've been looking obviously at the association's 50th birthday and we've been celebrating 50 years of OU students. Looking forward to maybe the next few years, the next 50 years, what can you see for OU pride?

Lyndsay: Personally, I just want all OU pride to continue to serve our members and it doesn't really matter the numbers, but as long as we are doing what our membership need us to do and want us to do, then I would be very proud and very happy. Obviously, seeing the numbers growing is proof that we're doing something right. I'm also seeing not just the student association, but the OU in general taking us seriously. They're listening to what we want. When we have an issue, they are taking us seriously and they're listening, not just to the committee, but to what our members want. The three of us are there as a voice for everybody. Just being able to vote for our members, see what they're thinking, see what they're having issues with and know that it's been taken seriously. As my share in accomplishment for the 2 years, I'm so proud we've got to that stage and I just want that to continue.

Sarah: That's amazing. I think being part of OU Pride is having that representation, isn't it? Making sure that that representation is felt throughout not just the association but throughout the university. Using your student voice is just so important, isn't it?

Lyndsay: It is. I remember having a rough time in the media in general. There are always going to be people who try and cut you down but standing together, we're able to see that that's not okay, we're not going to stand for it, and we're being listened to. At the end of the day, that makes everybody feel a little bit more secure.

Sarah: That's what it's about, isn't it? Making sure that OU Pride membership feels safe in what they do and safe in saying things and just creating that safe space, isn't it? It's about creating that safe space for your members and making sure that their voice is not only listened to but really represented throughout the university.

Lyndsay: Absolutely. Yeah. That's my main aim for the next couple of years.

Sarah: That's amazing. Thank you so much Lyndsay for joining us. It's been brilliant listening to what's going to be hopefully happening in the future of OU Pride. I'm excited to see where it's going to go. Thank you so much.

Lyndsay: Thank you for inviting me. Lovely to speak to you.

Sarah: Brilliant. Thank you so much and thank you everybody for joining us.

Georgia: Our thanks go to Graham, Alex and Lyndsay for their inspirational insights and of course, to Sarah for hosting. We hope you enjoyed this episode and Happy Pride Month. This has been the Association Conversation Station. It was hosted by our president, Sarah Jones and produced by Andy Evans and me, Georgia Demopoulou. See you next time.

[END]