

Andy Evans: Hi there, and welcome to the latest edition of The Association Conversation Station. The official podcast of the Open University Students Association. As November has marked International Men's Day, that this latest episode, Emily Cox from the Association's Volunteering and Representation team has been joined by our Deputy President, Gareth Jones, our Chair of Societies, Nigel Patterson, and our former Vice President of Education, William Butler.

They will tell us about how they are involved in the Association, their relationship with the OU, and their experiences as an OU student. Don't forget that you can now find transcripts for our previous podcast episodes at oustudents.com/podcast. The transcription for this episode will be available very soon. Anyway, on with the podcast. Emily, all yours.

Emily Cox: Hello and welcome to the November edition of the Association's Conversation Station. I'm Emily, your host for this episode and an Events and Projects Officer at the OU Students Association. The topic of the month is Men of the Association.

I would like to welcome Gareth, William, and Nigel, our three fantastic guests today who are joining me to share some wonderful memories and talk about all things in Association. I will let them introduce themselves, kicking off with Gareth.

Gareth Jones: Thank you, Emily. So, I'm Gareth Jones. I'm currently the Deputy President of the OU Students Association. And in that role, I say as part of the Student Leadership Team, and the Board of Trustees. My role as Deputy President is one of only two-page student leadership roles at the Association.

Emily: That's perfect. Thank you very much, and now, pass over to William.

William Butler: Hi there. I started my OUSA career as a Committee Representative in the early '80s, and then the KNDP Education, elected in 1985. My only roles and goals have been involved in Senate on the Academic Board, and various other things.

I was a student member of the University Council from '87 to 1990. A student member of the Board of the School of [inaudible], but I think that's enough of a list of various things that I was on.

Emily: No, it's great to hear so many different things that you got involved with. Thank you. Lastly, I'll pass it over to Nigel.

Nigel Patterson: Yes, I'm Nigel. I'm presently the Chair of the Student Societies Committee. And I became involved in that simply because I became involved in two of our many exciting societies. So Fusion, which is the Physics and Astronomy Society, and M500, which is our Math Society.

On top of that, I'm the Student Representative. We call them the Central Committee Representatives, but "Student Rep", everyone relates to that. I'm on the Senate and the Student Experience Committee, and on the Math's and Stats Faculty Board.

Previously, I've been a rep on the STEM Faculty Teaching Committee, Faculty Assembly, and also the School of Physical Sciences, and Buddhist studies. Once upon a time, a long, long time ago, when the world was young, I was a rep on something that was then called the Examinations and Assessments Committee, which is a forerunner to today's Qualifications and Assessments Committee which is quite obviously pronounced QUAC.

Emily: Thank you, and it's so great to hear from three people with such a varied range of interests and things have gotten involved with the association. So, now that we know little bit about you, it would be great if you could share some of your favorite memories from being part of the association, and William if I pass over to you first that be great. Thank you.

William: Yes, one of the most significant things I was involved in was VP of Education what was described as the home computing to bit. This is all happening around sort of '85 and '86. And this is very much to do with you know, the whole kind of issue about trying to ensure that students had access and people would be excluded on the basis of cost and you know that the university continue to be open.

The issue was about costs and access the effect of openness. One of the key things that was happening was very much an emerging partnership between students and staff, both part-time staff and full-time staff. So that the key moment and the whole thing was a setup to bit in November 1986, where who's the put forward a motion and I'll just read it. So, Senate should resolve that no foundation course should include an essential home computing element that raises compulsory known the cost above the set look limit.

So again, as sort of second look, students have used to some additional costs. You know, on the separate thing that was one of the key things at that time. So, we wanted to ensure that when the new technology course was introduced because that was what started the whole thing that there weren't huge additional costs put on to the students.

Looking back on it. I hope we weren't seen as a lot of Ike's. You know, we weren't it was very much about accents and obviously things would have been done significantly. Since then, the other thing I suppose I'll just quote is the Sesame Student, the University newspaper time in January 1987, Dr. Berglas Boozer, succeeding in getting a senate commitment to keeping the course which is done.

As the university prepares to jump over the frightening precipice into the computing age. So, you know, it was a, it felt like a very monumental thing, and I always spent quite a lot of time preparing a speech to the Senate, making sure that we have the appropriate support of other people who rose in the going to speak. So, I mean, when you're into that kind of situation, obviously, you know, preparation is a pretty key. That felt like a kind of a significant thing to have happened on my watch.

Emily: Absolutely! What were what was the reception like when you first started the conversation about it?

William: It was difficult to stand up straight to a large body that was then, you know,

a lot of people skeptical to know how you're being received up on your feet, instead of trying not to Minar and, you know, try not to cough, you know, when you're making that kind of proposal to a large gathering. But clearly the fact that was passed and a number of other speakers, both work full-time staff in the part-time staff, get up to support meant that it was good. That obviously contributed to it being the last, I can't remember what the wonderful thing numbers were, just that we got what we needed to get.

Emily: That's fantastic. And it's very obvious to see kind of the impact that would have had carrying on for that we owe you. Thank you, William. If I pass over to Nigel in the same question.

Nigel: Okay. I just say something, very, very briefly before hand, about the home computing policy. Originally, when the university started, it did actually use computers from the very beginning. Even though there was no world wide web and no internet protocols, they actually use little our computers in local study centers that work were basically remote terminals to computer center zones by the OU. The home computing policy was absolutely essential because back in those days, the most families didn't have computers and it was very successful in keeping the standard specification and a price down. So, good on you William because that really made a big difference for students that follows. And in fact, I first registered for study with the OU just as the home computing policy was coming to an end because now computers were widespread and there were all sorts of different computers around. So, it was no longer necessary in the way that it had been. When it was first introduced.

Little things I'd been involved in, probably, the one that I was most proud of, although it would pass almost without notice is for some time the Students Association had campaigns for a second undergraduate qualification when the OU was first set up. There was just the BI open degree, and there was a campaign for an open BSC as well. So back then, students needed to, well, first of all, module teams, it was agreed to introduce some the open BSE. But then faculties had to either label their, their courses, their modules as either BI Apple and so, okay, for the BI open BSC Apple, so, okay, for the BSC open, or both the ball. Now, there's a mere legend lesson for you, and that both lessons could be used for either of BI or BSC.

And the faculty of have seen computing, as it then was did a cracker, they called all of their modules courses, they called them all bootable. As pastors and altars are the most as something use slides, they called bootable. And up until very recently, it was when the government changed the rules on fees. But up until that time you could actually get a BA in Math instead of a BSC. So, I went for the BA because Math is an art.

Okay. So, my little contribution to that debate, was that there was some on the committee that wanted you to only count BA courses towards the BI open or BSC courses tool to be a simp. And, and I managed to persuade the committee that actually, this is an open degree in its against spirit of openness if we don't allow at least a broader study and have some courses from other side. But from that I was also the chap that but forward motions that conference on name degrees and other qualifications. And I must be at that point, retrospect.

I mean at the time, looked as if this was going to be something great and revolutionary and it was that we now do have name degrees, but I was always looking on open door once it had been agreed that there would be BSCs then other changes, but will not charge it in incoming. And so, I moved the motions. I was terrified and when I stood on the stage and stare into the BBC camera lens. But I managed to keep it together to move the resolutions and that's my tub of footnote in history.

Emily: Thank you Nigel. And I think that shows just how many of the courses and things like that all intertwine and why the Open University can be such a fantastic place to study. Gareth I'll pass over to you. So, what was your significant event or achievement you've been a part of? Just one though so I understand he's been involved in plenty.

Gareth: Thanks. I don't know how I follow William and Nigel, to be honest with after that, but I'll give it my best shot. I think one thing that really does stand out for me and it's still ongoing at the moment, but changes are definitely coming, is improving the academic references available for students when they move on to either further study or progression in their career. So early on in my term as the faculty rep for Business and Law, I talked about two years ago now, it came to my attention that I have quite a few students were struggling to progress onto further study or to get training cut on their contracts for Law students, and so on, because of the very basic nature of the academic references available to students at that point. So for me, seeing so many people, actually questioned the value of studying in this case, Law with the OU, when they couldn't actually go on to the next steps in their planned career journey was really disappointing. So this was something that I discussed with the Law School and in fairness to them, they put a process in place to get through them, students who were experiencing some difficulty. But I think I'm not being disrespectful to anybody in the Law School when I say that this was more like a sticking plaster instead of a permanent solution and I think this became quite evident 12 months later on. So we're talking a year back from now when the same issues started coming back to my inbox, where students were struggling, to get on training contracts, trying to struggling to do Masters at other institutions, because, again, the reference is just weren't sufficient. So I took it upon myself to actually make this a governance issue with the OU. So, actually worked with a, quite a few of our reps to look at the issue. I also spoke with the associate lecturers and start off by taking a paper to what's called a board of study. So it's fairly the very origin within each school where a lot of these academic issues are discussed. And I highlighted the issues that students were facing. I actually use some quotes that I'd received from students about how it was affecting them and the response I had in lower border studies was unanimous in saying that this was an issue that needed rectifying, the support from the teaching director. The students experienced managers who are really facing the brunt of this issue from students. And they were the ones who put the plaster in place and really did try to make a difference, but it just wasn't sustainable. This issue ended up going up through the different governance levels and at every stage, every it received unanimous support that this was an issue that needed rectifying for students. So, I was really glad mean as we've all organizations, any governance structure, it takes a little while for issues to reach the right level where changes can be made.

But this all started and you can December last year and then in the summer of this year, I received notification that the OU would recognize that this was an issue that needed rectifying. They were putting in place a pilot project starting with the Law School this autumn. So, it's actually in progress at the moment. They're going to learn from that pilot project and actually roll out a new initiative across the OU to actually address this issue so that in the future students who are looking to move on to different stages of academia or two different industries which might require more bespoke reference can actually have their needs met. So for me, I think obviously there's still a little bit to go before this fully get over the line, but I think for me there's an issue that's going to benefit students for many years to come.

Emily: It sounds incredible. And I think it just goes to show how much work the association does kind of behind the scenes towards improving the studying experience for your students.

Gareth: I think you're right. And then I think for me it's a great example of the power of the student voice. This started off with a handful of students raising an issue and it progressed to different student reps being involved. As it went through the governance structure, they would have been different reps all the way up the Senate level where this would have been discussed as a quality and monitoring enhancement improvement as well. So, this started off with just a handful of students saying this issue and it's going to impact students for years to come.

Emily: Absolutely. And it just kind of, that those three stories just kind of scratch the tip of the iceberg on all of the things that have been successful through work through the association. So obviously you explain some of those fantastic achievement. But what other milestones have you seen throughout your time here or when you were here that stand out to you? Nigel, I'll come to you first.

Nigel: Now, I'm not sure what role the association actually played in our having academic representation on OU governance committees. But certainly, that is one key position that we have now. And the other is that, I understand that for many years, OU students weren't able to use their own library. They weren't allowed to use the OU library. And to rub salt into the wound, students from other libraries were able to make use of our library through this commune access scheme which was not a happy state of affairs. And it took the association sometime of campaigning to actually get that changed. But now all OU students can use their library. It is a fantastic library because with the digital library, you have access to all sorts of books that it would simply be too costly to have a physical copy of, plus a wealth of different journal articles. So that is excellent. And if you ever get down to walk them whole, which every OU student should do at least once in their career to see their campus. You can also go to visit the physical library where you can look at both existing course units, but also compare those some of the course units, courses that are no longer around. And there's a wealth of physical books, etc., which you can borrow.

And you can actually renew up to three times. So if you don't go in town so often you can still borrow and then bring them back when you do. That's one of my things I think it's great for the association do.

Emily: Thank you Nigel. It really is a beautiful campus and a lovely library to visit. Gareth, I'll pass it over to you.

Gareth: Yeah. I'm going to start by apologizing because I'm going to use the C words. But I think for me, obviously having been involved with the association for a lot less time than my other guests here. I think the coronavirus pandemic, our response as an association has been quite a significant milestone within my time at least at the association. So, the pandemic really started to have an impact when I was a Central Committee rep in the law school and I became part of the student leadership team as the faculty rep for business and law right at the height of the first wave of the pandemic. So, for me, it really did almost define my term as a faculty rep for business and law. A lot of work went on behind the scenes, by all student representatives and staff as well when engaging with the student at with the OU to ensure that the student voice was at the heart of any decision that the OU is making. I think it's fair to say that this was pretty much an unprecedented time. Decisions had to be made very quickly and I wouldn't say that all of them were right, but they were all taken with the right intent. Also, I think our workload as student representatives has increased a lot, and because of pandemic, I think, since the pandemic hit, it's been a lot easier to invite students into conversations and into meetings because the audio is pretty much working online whereas a lot of their meetings would have been held face-to-face on their campus and Milton Keynes. So, where there's in the past, you might have been unfeasible to invite us for the 30-minute meeting. We're now getting a lot of these short of meeting invites to go to. So, our workload as student representatives has increased a lot and I think that has add a significant effective means. Obviously our voices a lot more embedded within the OU, but it also means that we're stretched a lot further as well. So, I think that has been a key part. And I think we're still adapting to these changes. I think for some of us we don't think the pandemic is completely left. Obviously, we are hopefully coming out at the other side of it but we're still adapting to the changes that have happened as a consequence of this. I think it's fair to say, we're still trying to find our feet in this new way of working going forward as well. So, I think for my time is really being the overarching single event that is defined from three and a half years as a student rep.

Emily: Thank you, Gareth. And yeah, as someone who started working at the association during the pandemic. It was a really positive surprise to see how seamless it was and how much everything had adapted. So yeah, definitely something to be proud of. William, pass over to you.

William: Yeah. I mean, as I always made my major milestones during in my time was the 1985 cuts campaign which was really was a kind of an act of stature that to the university. The stature was into our second term. The University was facing suffering cuts students to its funding, which would have a major effect on what it was able to do, what it was able to deliver. So, invitation was launched on from soon in '85. There was lots of lobbying and peace. I think the whole kind of a network was critical in that because we the whole kind of thought you know, linking of students throughout the country working locally to get signatures. And those days, they have to sign on a bond paper and you had to collect [inaudible]. You couldn't do anything but like clicks. So, it was a much kind of more difficult thing to do. We got clicks something like 60,000 signatures which, you know, in that time and doing it that way, you know, they don't like an awful lot.

We also did some parliamentary lobbying went through this process that organizations often do of getting an early day motion put forward. There was something like I think about 60 and peace supported that including some members of the authority part conservatives at that point in time. So, I mean, those two things together, I think had the effect of eventually making the government change in mind. I mean, essentially, what the petition was saying, what was the talking about the importance of the University as both a national and an international institution that was making up a major contribution to the Education and Training needs of the country and what the petition all for was for the government to restore the funding to the University to level which enabled it to maintained what we describe does it standing service to the United Kingdom. So, I mean that make a difference.

I think the other thing that's worth mentioning is that we had the support on the encouragement of Sir John Harlock. He was the Vise Chancellor at that time, and he was very much perceived as a student Chancellor. He was always championing the students. And also, John Needham. He died in February. John Needham mostly what we call the permanent secretary at that point in time. And John was really doing a lot working behind the scenes in lobbying in talking to him peace. And in fact, you know, he was one of, if I recall it correctly, was heavily involved in drafting the wording of the petition. So again, it seemed like, very, very significant thing up. We were doing on the, you know, the numbers of was that turned up parliament, the day, you know, that the day that the petition was deliberated to Downing Street with these piles of paper petition to on a stretcher.

I am not sure if that was particularly significant or not. We had to carry up something but, you know, looking back on it. Perhaps, it did have some significance and we took that to Downing Street and knocked on the door. And you know, and it was as I say, it did make the parabola.

Emily: It sounds like an incredibly powerful piece of work, and I think just shows how important the student voices in numbers to forgetting things achieved. So yeah, that's thank you for sharing that story because that's fantastic.

So, moving on, obviously I could talk for days about why I would recommend students to get involved to students' association. But it would be fantastic to hear from you guys about why you would recommend getting involved with the student's association. Gareth, I'll come to you first please.

Yeah, I think folks don't want any. I think it's the skills you would gain from getting involved in the Students Association is one key selling point. For me, I think this such a variety of different roles that you can get involved with. Even if it's just attending events, you're going to gain different skills that can help you throughout life. And that could be a part of career progression, CV building or just day-to-day life. I mean for me, I think you look at the personal skills that you have and stuff like just conversations, you have regaining confidence, that sort of idea for me. It's easy to overlook how much association actually help you in that sort of area.

Emily: Yeah, absolutely. Thank you, Gareth. I'll pass over to Nigel.

Nigel: For me, part of my motive was it's a great University. I want it to continue to be this great University for present and future students as it has been for me. So, partly my motive is yes, it's a worse saying thank you to the association from the University. And then it's nice to meet some of the people that are also involved in representing you and running the association. And in fact, actually, several of these I know count as dear friends, and as well as that is interesting to meet some of the people that are responsible for running the university and running those modules that we study for writing them.

So, yes. I know quite a number of people that hold various academic positions within the university. But yeah, who is that so with the main reasons? I mean I'm now in my dotage so a career or anything like that is something of the past.

Emily: Thank you Nigel. And yeah, absolutely. When I've spoken to people have gotten involved with the association before the building of communities and meeting new people has been at the forefront of a lot of what they've said. William, for faster, you please.

William: I think the critical thing is about. People getting involved because they're passionate and they want to make the proverbial difference from. They want to want to affect that change. I make a contribution and I think that's for me, those are kind of critical reasons for wanting for urgent people to get involved. And, you know, I would complete you reinforce what Gareth were saying about what that means in terms of development of your skills. Particularly your advocacy skills, you know, because we were involved in going to not two different situations, you know, both locally. And you know, if you're involved as a student rep on the national level. So, you know, one develops, you know, those are books e-skills quite, quite quickly and hopefully learns to listen as much as to talk.

Emily: Wonderful reasons to get involved with the association. Thank you. So obviously you've spoken about, obviously Nigel, you touched on making friends and meeting new people. But what did you or are you currently gaining? In regards to Gareth and Nigel, from being involved and being a part of the Students Association. So, what did you personally developed? Gareth, I'll come to you first.

Gareth: Yeah, I mentioned in my previous response about regaining confidence and I think we that is something that I really do identify with. So, I came to the OU after experiencing some mental health challenges back in 2016. That really left me unable to work for a period of time and the OU was really something I wanted to do just to keep the brain ticking over whilst I was at home and unable to work.

Prior to this, I was really outgoing, really confident, but I think it's fair to say that at that time, I was a shell of my former self. I'd like to think that over the last couple of years being involved in the Student Association has really helped me to regain that confidence. Brought me right back up with the shell. So that is some guide I will take always take away with me. Nigel so mentioned friends as well. And again, that is something that I really do identify with. So next time I'll likely be going to my second OU wedding in a space of a couple of years. And this is between people to people who have met solely for the OU on both occasions as well. One of them was from the east coast of Scotland Maddie and somebody from the west coast of Wales. So

travelled up to Dundee for the wedding between them and that was back when I very first started studying law and the next one is between two student reps actually who met volunteering at the association. So there's people there that I'm going to be friends with I know for the rest of my life. I know I'm planning to attend some people graduations who I met four years ago. Next year, when they graduate. So, I hate then two elements angry, gaining confidence, and bring myself up the shell, and also making friends or something that I will definitely take away.

Emily: Thank you for sharing that story and I'm a stickler for a lovely romance story. So, thank you for sharing that too. William, I'll pass it over to you, thanks.

William: I think, our support was been sudden in terms of whole kind of thing and my confidence I was singled back to what we went back both. Gareth and I were saying about skills and everything that one gets by participating and sharing. And, you know, engaging with kind of life. I'm trying to affect you in just so I mean, I should have learned and hold quite a lot of those skills through my kind of representative career. As I was saying earlier on, both kind of, as a kind of a reps and committees, then become involved as an officer of the association and then sort of going on to various Senior Communities like the youth council.

Those all I think provided me and unreinforced, I suppose, the skills that I already had to kind of help me going forward in the future. I think that's what a lot of us hope to get out of what we do at the University. Not just the academic stuff of the other things around that, that support you and help you to develop as a human being. So for me that meant, I mean what I've done since has been Chief Executive of a couple National voluntary organizations, Trustees of the number of others. And I am currently chair of our other National complicity charity that I double with kind of being involved in any local charities as well. So, I've been uh I've become a professional meeting goer, but hopefully, you know the meetings, I attend are the ones that we try to make sure that we can focus on getting things done rather than talking. And again, sort of reflecting backs, I know that there have been times when I've been involved in discussions and we only University committees and Hooser committees were perhaps, you know, us like include what's the side of our own voices. Perhaps sometimes gets in the way of actually getting on. I'm making decisions because that's what meetings are about. Focusing on what the issues are making decisions and following those decisions through.

Emily: You're absolutely, right. Thank you for sharing that. And I think, yeah, you've spoken about how important extracurricular activities can be especially when studying at the OU because it will it gives you that often, find people say it gives you that social element as well alongside studies that can be quite with distance learning can be quite singular. So, thank you for sharing that. Nigel?

Nigel: Okay. Though some, but the moments one of the things I've been working on is to try and develop a sense of community among students and also preferably academics within the university. It's very difficult to really have much for community in the same way that you would in a bricks-and-mortar university when you rarely see each other. But some, I've, in the Math's and stats study home-sized side with the agreements for the director of teaching. We've set up a new students' discussion forum. I'm chatting with Kath, a former president of the association who is herself

actually been doing a lot of work on developing a sense of community. She's now an associate lecturer within the university. So, to see if there are any things that we could do together there, I didn't range a trip of students studying Math's, Physics, and Chemistry to Newton's birthplace. Also thought manner, which is why he developed most of his important ideas in physics.

I'm thinking this wasn't my idea originally. I wish I could claim credit for it because it was an excellent idea. But somebody else got there first, but I'm trying to revive set of regular student colloquia on the Math's MSC program. So, the idea is we take it in turns to presenter talked on something and have some questions and answers and maybe if we get enough people that are willing and brave enough to lead a discussion, then I'm hoping to get that off the ground. Maybe just a wee bit before Christmas but I still need more people to sign up. So those I would say probably the main things I'm trying to do. When I suppose will I get out of it is I don't do it, get anything else out of it. But if something works, then you feel, you've made a positive difference to something, then you don't feel good about it. Oh, and the other thing I'm trying to do is has been a long-term project but that is as members of academic governance committees, we have to sign a confidentiality clause, which places restrictions on what we can and cannot share with the students with their to represent. So, I'm trying to see what I can get the university to agree to us, being able to consult on. And to report back on and hitherto. This has been only confined to those few committees that I've been involved in. It's not been a university initiative, but you know, if I can get chairs of committees to agree to meet, yes you can talk about that. Then that will be a good way forward because also often, sadly, students really don't know that they do have students that are there to represent them on the academic governance committee that serves all levels.

Emily: Thank you, Nigel. What is great to see so many initiatives being moved forward. So, we obviously all have ideas about what we wanted to accomplish when we were at the association or what we're looking to accomplish now. But what would you like to see from the Students Association in the future? Gareth, I'll go to you first.

Gareth: I think I'd like to slightly rephrase the question if you don't mind Emily. So, I think as a student association with quite good at reacting to the needs as they arise. So obviously, as technology changes, as our student demographic changes, we do introduce different stuff that can benefit students. What, I'd love to see, is great at awareness of what we actually do for students. We do so much good work that is often unseen by the wider student population. I think I would love to see more people getting involved if that's in student representation, if they are saying hosting meetups whether they're online, face-to-face. Even if it's interacting in some of our clubs, our societies or just utilizing some of our support services that we've got here, we do so much already that. I think the biggest emphasis that we need to do is making sure that people know it's there for them and that all of your students can benefit from these automatically.

Emily: Absolutely. More shouting from the rooftops of ideas, please, I'd love to see that. William?

William: The context to put this in and it's tearing the obvious that we're living in an age of extreme uncertainty and as individuals and organizations, we have to be to

get better at dealing with that uncertainty managing the uncertainty dealing with the kind of stresses and strains that cause I think it's also just wanting back something character saying. I think we need to look at being thought of, in terms of what we do as opposed to always reactive. Although that's increasingly difficult in the current uncertain situation. But as I've always wanted would say and hope this doesn't sound to the ground. I think it's about the organization reflecting learning and then acting on that. I'm kind of recognizing that it can't do everything and there needs to be an important process of deciding on the priorities about among all this what is it that you want to focus on and what criteria do you use to judge that. You know, what's in the best interest of the greatest number of students or whatever the criteria is? I think you have to be clear because otherwise, you don't have that kind of guidance you can end up kind of just trying to do too much and not delivering anything. In these kinds of situations are reminded of that classic three years it's been used lots of times and attribute up to lots of people. Marks Gandhi whoever but it's the one that says those who fail to learn the lessons of history are doomed to repeat its mistakes. Not so I think that just reinforces just the whole kind of thing about learning. I'm reflecting sort of, you know, trying to death of work to do what we can and what we need to in order to drive forward the issues that were touching.

Emily: Thank you William. And I think the student leadership team have been working tirelessly on their priorities, which in the way that you were explaining kind of focusing in on things they want to focus on or concentrate on during their term. So, it's great to see that it's moving in that direction. Nigel?

Nigel: I hope one that says not too controversial, but once upon a time, students used to be able to propose, debate, immense, do either agree or disagree the policies of their Association. And I mean, that was back in the days where we had an annual conference and the conference was based around resolutions moved by individual students at their branches, all regions, which were then debated at conference. Okay. Now a lot of how we work has changed. I don't think that we could do it and it in that way anymore, but I do think that we ought to explore facilities for enabling ordinary students to actually propose some of the policies of their association. One way of doing this could be to set up a policy discussion forum and any student would be free to post a policy proposal within that, and then when it's coming up towards conference times, so every two years. Maybe we could have some students to vote on their favorite for half a dozen of these and then have those debated at conference and voted on or not. But I'm very, very much in favor of enhancing democracy and of enhancing participation. And I do think that that might be one way of doing it. Let's, I think, at the moment I'm alone before us as well as a hoax month.

Emily: Nigel is debating for debate. But I think that the increase of students that we see getting involved every year, could encourage that kind of conversation in the future. We've had record numbers coming into our elections over the last couple of years, the last two. So, you never know. You never know, thank you for your answers for that one. So, this is like a big question for students looking to get involved maybe. But is there any advice you'd like to pass on following on from your own experiences as an OU student? William, I'll come to you first.

William: Well, I don't think I've been holding back an advice up to now. I think that's what apparent personality, and in terms of responding to what you're asking earlier on. I don't think that is based on kind of long developed experience. You know, I've got the scars in the back to prove it. As people often say, but I want to reinforce is the importance of things happening locally. I mean, Nigel was talking about tie things. The importance of kind of individual students and making a contribution and I think that's always going to be case. Certainly, in my day, you know, local branches feeding into Regional consultative committees leading into the central Consultants committee. I'm sure the names have changed but the whole kind of infrastructure of trying to ensure that students have the opportunity to have a voice to an to be able to share and persuade others of the importance of a particular issue is critical. And I think without those kind of opportunities that it's important that the association creates those. Without those, I think, you know that the organization of the University will be much prettier. So I think it's really important to start local. And clearly, if you're talking about the university having up a creator and improved voice on a central level influencing the university. That's a very important kind of training and development grind for students coming through. Without it, you actually don't get people with the skills coming forward. So, you know, local is a critical part of making national work. As both the other thing I would just kind of, you know, some up with on that is I think it's very important I think for you say there's a bit individuals but I think it's important when organizations as well that organizations are on givers. You know we need to get that with that balance right between giving and receiving. Organizations need to be givers of not so but sharing the kind of skills and experiences that were talking about, to be able to affect the kind of changes that we need to. And one of my sorts of my effort contentions and theory the left undone number of convictions but I should finish it off with this one. It's from Kahlil Gibran, a known Lebanese poet. He says, "All you have shall someday be given; therefore give now, that the season of giving maybe yours and not your inheritors." So that's about how do we as an organization ensure that we are behaving in the best possible way to support the needs of those we're representing.

Emily: Thank you so much. I have to have thoroughly enjoyed the quotes you thrown in and thank you for the wealth of knowledge that you've shared with us as well today. Really appreciate that. Thank you. Nigel?

Nigel: One piece of advice would be to jump right in. Everybody started at the beginning once upon a time and nobody's going to be critical of you. Nobody's going to look to see if you made a mistake just get involved. And my other piece of advice, which I hope is not too contradictory is being realistic about what you can do about what time you have available and about how long something is going to take to do. And that should apply both to your studies and so on. How many modules you really can realistically study at one time and what other important things are there in your life at the same time. And similarly, when you volunteer, be realistic about what you can do in natural but any one penny one time. So, I suppose I'm afraid I don't have a quote here, but I'd go for the border and moderation in a middle way.

Emily: Thanks, Nigel. Very wise words. Pass it on to Gareth, thank you.

Gareth: Thanks, Emily. I think we often hear that there is no such thing as a typical OU student. And I hate likewise, and you can tell there's no typical OU Journey, but I

think throughout this whole discussion we've talked about the different opportunities, different experiences that we've all had and I think my advice to students would be make the most of the opportunities that are available to you. So, whether that is getting involved in representation, standing in the election, or even just attending a meeting with your fellow students, meeting some friends that could become friends for life. I think you've got the opportunity to tailor your own OU journey in any way that you want. So, I think don't miss out on that opportunity. I think make it your own and enjoy it more than anything. And that's the key thing here. We all come along with education in mind, whether that is just a study of topic or fun for career and so on. But make the most of every opportunity that comes your way because you just might regret it afterwards.

Emily: Thank you. I think there's a blanket sense of dip your toe in and see what else you could potentially get involved with if you win enjoy that. So, was there anything else? Anyone would like to add or say, about their time at the association?

Nigel: I'd like to add something. At the beginning of 1969, the OU did not exist. It has the enthusiasm of a prime minister whose idea it was, and it was Harold Wilson, and it had a very enthusiastic Minister of Arts who is going to see the thing through, and that was Jenny Lee and at the outset she was determined that it was not going to be second-rate University. It would be every bit as decent university, as any other. And sure, its conception, several of whom whose members thought that it was, for example, blithering nonsense. And one complained that he wished, he could have strangled his at birth, but it was within so much, of actually being stopped before it started. Beginning in '69, no University, no Charter and there were 4 immediate employees of the university. The Vice Chancellor, the University Secretary, a PA for the Vice Chancellor, an admin assistant, and they had temporary offices in London, okay? But the beginning of 1971, just two years later, they were teaching their first courses, their original foundation courses.

And you think, without all the benefits that we have today of new technology, how long did you think stay come in two years. That's nonsense? Old days. It would be at least five years of planning before it was incredible how swiftly they moved. Their life depended upon it and what was to become our University depended upon it. And what's that little story I actually heard this past of the OU's 50th birthday celebrations or the 50th birthday of its teaching its first courses.

One more thing to add on that school. There is one great British institution that truly does deserve two birthdays, and that's the OU. The first birthday is the one that is currently commemorated, and that was April 23, 1969. Because that was the day on which the privy Council granted the OU its royal charter. The other one that is equally important, most entirely forgotten is exactly three months later, the 23rd of July 1969. For 23rd of July was the first Congregation of the University that was held at the Royal Society buildings because the OU didn't have its own premises at that time. That was when I'm Jeffrey Crowther was installed as Chancellor of the University. And in his inaugural speech, he laid out his mission for what the university should be and specifically what was going to distinguish the Open University from other universities and that was the time that the Open University should be open to people, places, methods, and ideas. And that remains the mission of the University today. It seems to me, a crying shame that we don't also remember

the 23rd of July. One day, we'll get this changed.

Emily: Thank you, Nigel. I would really like to say thank you to Gareth, Nigel, and William for joining us today and to share their experiences, stories, and advice with everybody listening. I've absolutely loved listening to everything you had to say today. And if you want to find out about any of the opportunities that Gareth, or Nigel, and William have mentioned, you head to www.oustudents.com and you will find a wealth of interesting volunteer opportunities, clubs and societies, and meet up opportunities that you can get involved with. But for now, thank you very much to all 3 of our guests and I hope you have a lovely day.

Andy: Thank you to Emily, Gareth, Nigel, and William for joining us this month. By the way, remember to take part in our annual membership survey. It's open until Sunday, the 11th of December. As part of the survey, you'll be able to enter our prize draw to win some fantastic prizes, including Samsung Galaxy tablets and a laptop worth up to £900. Just visit www.oustudents.com/ams to take part in the survey. This has been the Association Conversation Station. It was hosted by Emily Cox and produced by Andy Evans. Thank you for listening and see you next time.