



The Open
University



Students ASSOCIATION



THE HOOT

Student Newsletter

Issue 4 - December 2023

A copy of the latest newsletter will be posted to your facility every six months. For enquiries or comments, please ask your learning facilitator to get in touch with us at oustudents-media@open.ac.uk

Welcome to your newsletter!

Welcome to our fabulous fourth edition of The Hoot Newsletter.

Once again, we have been working on your feedback and delivering more bespoke articles, this time featuring a careers section and an essay planning skills guide delivered by our Student Hub Live study skills experts.

We're introducing you to more of our Association teams, the Tutor Awards as well as sharing articles on Black History Month.

We hope you enjoy this new edition and as always, we welcome you to send in any feedback, articles and commentary via your education contact. Will your piece feature in our summer edition?

The back pages of this issue offer an insight into OU study and are ideal to share with those who may be inspired to follow in your footsteps and start studying too.

Best of luck with your studies and wishing you a successful start to your academic year.

Vice President Engagement



THE **HOOOT**

The Hoot History

- The Hoot was founded in 2019 after OU students' hunger for content outgrew the Association's previous print and PDF magazine.
- Over 600 online articles have since been published.
- The name 'The Hoot' was inspired by the adorable owl we sell in the Shop.
- The Hoot's fourth birthday was celebrated on 8 April 2023.

Want to write an article for the next edition?

Find out how on the back cover!

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Conference 2024 – tell us your ideas!

The next Students Association Conference will be held in 2024. Conference is run for Student Members, which OU Students automatically become when starting their studies.

The requirement for a biennial Conference, to be held a maximum of 30 months apart, is written into our governing documents of the Articles of Association and Bye-laws, so it must happen and we're looking forward to it! Our last Conference was held in January 2022, so the next one is due around the middle of 2024 at the latest. We are currently in the early planning stages and are seeking student views and ideas.

What happens at Conference?

Conference includes official business and engagement activities. The official business includes the elected Student Leadership Team (SLT) and Board of Trustees (BoT) reporting on their activities since the last Conference, and receiving questions from Student Members. Students can also suggest new or amended policies, services that they think the Association could be offering, or how things could be improved. An example of a current service offered by the Students Association that you may have used is the Library Study Volunteers programme, where volunteers assist Students in Secure Environments (SiSE) with their research requirements.

How can I have a say?

If you are an OU student you are already a Students Association member (unless you have opted out). During Freshers Fortnight in October we held a session with students to introduce them to Conference and to ask them to share ideas, views and experiences. We would like to invite our SiSE to do the same. We want Conference 2023 to be our most inclusive yet.

Here are some prompts that may help you, but your views and ideas don't have to be limited to these.

- Do you have any ideas for new services that could assist SiSE in their studies?
- Suggestions for how current services could be improved?
- Are there any particular topics you would like to suggest for discussion at Conference, and to hear back about here afterwards?
- Do you have any suggestions for ways SiSE could be involved or to hear back about Conference?

In thinking about this it's important to remember that while the Students Association is separate to The Open University, we advocate for all OU students. Our mission is to make a positive difference to all OU students, and this includes you.

You can write to us using the enclosed envelope or using the contact details below.

**Please clearly mark any correspondence as:
Students Association Conference**

Post:

PO Box 397
Walton Hall
Milton Keynes

MK7 6BE

Email:

oustudents-conference@open.ac.uk

OU Students Association Tutor Awards

In 2022, the OU Students Association launched its annual Tutor Awards initiative as a way for students to recognise the positive difference tutors have made to their experience when studying with The Open University.

In an environment where it is easier to criticise than compliment, the Association felt it was important to provide a platform that acknowledges the important relationship between the student and their tutor, who are very often the only person a student will engage with at the University on a regular basis.

After being created at short notice, the 2022 Tutor Awards saw 175 students nominating their tutors. In the 2023 Tutor Awards, we saw an increase of 421% in nominations, taking us to a total of 738 nominations being received. As part of the initiative, students are also invited to be part of the judging panels and nearly 50% of those who submitted nominations volunteered to take part.

When nominating their tutor, students are asked to consider whether a tutor they have engaged with in the last 18 months has gone above and beyond in supporting them whilst studying with The Open University. This is not limited to academic support, and we often see nominations citing the personal or pastoral support that the tutor has provided. This demonstrates the impact that a tutor can have on different areas of a student's life, providing support to help them through both their studies and day-to-day life.

Judging who should be a winner and runner-up out of each of the four faculties was a very difficult job for the judging panels,

but we want to share with you the four winning nominations from the 2023 Tutor Awards:

“My tutor has worked tirelessly, challenging me to push on to a higher level. I have not only become a better student but am more confident as a person. My tutor supported me when I suffered a bereavement in the family. I truly believe she deserves some recognition for all of her hard work.”

“My tutor is a very high-calibre, talented scholar and teacher. The feedback I receive is thoughtful, detailed and respectful. My tutor is a role model for other university professors. He has been there to support me through some personal challenges, and genuinely embraces the OU mission. He has made me feel like I truly belong to the OU.”

“Despite my personal challenges, my tutor has been kind, empathetic and patient. They are always available to help. They made me realise that everyone struggles with something, and that's ok!”

“My tutor is the most supportive tutor I have had in four years of studying with the OU. I have grown academically, as they help to scaffold my learning. I cannot speak highly enough of their communication, always replying promptly. He is encouraging and a generally lovely human.”

Black History Month 2023

Black History Month holds a profound significance as a pivotal observance, celebrated annually in October in the United Kingdom.

Black History Month is dedicated to celebrating the diverse contributions of the Black communities within the context of the country's cultural, social, and historical tapestry. Over the past few decades, it has played a vital transformative role in fostering a more inclusive and equitable society as well as in highlighting the importance of racial justice.

The event has helped to propel the transformation of public opinion in the UK by inducing many noteworthy shifts:

Educational reforms: Black History Month has acted as a catalyst for educational change by promoting calls for a more inclusive curriculum. In response, many institutions have in turn responded by incorporating the community's past contributions as well as striving towards delivering their student populace with a comprehensive education on the country's diverse history.

Increased engagement of communities: the event has strengthened the bond between communities by attempting to provide a platform for collective action which has subsequently encouraged a multitude of activist voices that have amplified the concerns of the Black community.

Boosted awareness: the event has raised awareness of the existing racial disparities, focusing discussions on how to eradicate racism and systemic inequality experienced by the Black community.

Some notable personalities who have played a key role in promoting the importance of recognising the struggles, resilience and triumphs of the Black community are:

Baroness Doreen Lawrence: Doreen Lawrence is the mother of Stephen Lawrence, a young Black man whose racially motivated murder in 1993 sparked outrage and led to significant changes in British law and policing. Doreen Lawrence's tireless efforts for justice and racial equality earned her a life peerage.

Diane Abbott: as the first Black woman elected to the British Parliament in 1987, Diane Abbott has been a trailblazer in British politics. Throughout her career, she has been an advocate for racial equality, social justice and immigration reform.

Akala (Kingslee James Daley): Akala is a rapper, poet, and political activist who has used his platform to address issues of race, class and inequality. His work in education and his thought-provoking speeches and writings have contributed significantly to the discourse on race in the UK.

David Lammy: Member of Parliament and prominent activist, David Lammy has been a vocal advocate for racial justice and equality in the UK. He has been at the forefront of efforts to address systemic racism, particularly within the criminal justice system.

CAWFEWAS - a short story

One of our students living in a secure environment submitted this futuristic short story to include in this edition of our newsletter.

Two people were huddled together at a table dominated by computer lights, when one of them shouted excitedly, “There it is! Keep that frequency and go to sequence five on the CAWFEWAS”.

The lights flashed and a recording system automatically switched on as it always did when CAWFEWAS was activated.

“Can you tell me what’s being picked up or is it ‘gobble-de-gook’ again?”

“I don’t know at the moment. Let CAWFEWAS do the job, we will know in a few minutes whether we have a good hit!”

This was the latest trial to see if the new recording had solved previous problems as every time they made an amendment another problem arose. The year was 2029 and over the past two years Sue Kinder and Keith Machintosh had worked on CAWFEWAS. The idea had started as a joke, when Sue said to Keith, “Wouldn’t it be good if we could pick up conversations out of the airwaves?”

This started Keith thinking and within two months he had come up with a prototype enabling conversations to be intercepted from the airwaves. When he showed it to Sue, she reacted with scepticism.

“I only said it as a joke – I didn’t think you’d do anything.” But Keith persisted. Together, they developed the program, with Keith the computer expert and Sue the Audiologist. Over time they’d had many setbacks and nearly gave up. Their friends thought that they were mad and would eventually give up. This did not happen.

The first breakthrough came after eighteen months, when they picked up a partial speech by Churchill, it was fragmented and did not make sense. They continued to monitor the airwaves until one night they picked up dialogue that was cohesive.

“What do you think?”, Keith said to Sue. After a couple of minutes Sue turned to Keith and said, “It is Margaret Thatcher speaking at a party conference. I don’t know what year but it seems to be intact”.



“Can you pick up any other conversations from that time, so we can identify the year?”

“No, I can’t find any threads. I don’t think it was a full speech. We need to adjust the frequency and let CAWFEWAS do its magic”.

Sue and Keith amended the frequency and scanned the airwaves, but picked up nothing new. “Well let’s play the recording and see if we can work out what year it was.”

They worked through the night, but got nowhere.

That evening, they met up to continue. The next two months did not reveal any more and they were getting disheartened. After all the ramifications of their work would ratify history. CAWFEWAS (Collect Audio Waves From Ether Worldwide And Synchronise) was what would convince the world.

They were at the table and about to finish when Sue screamed, “I have something! It’s very clear! It’s the Queen’s Coronation in Westminster Abbey from 1953”.

Keith looked at Sue and said, “This is it. We have done it and it makes sense!”



Another sound came from the speakers. It sounded like a laugh. They stared at each other and adjusted the controls but the laughter continued with a voice coming across saying, “Don’t be fooled! It can’t be achieved because airwaves just disintegrate. Only recordings survive, CAWFEWAS (Caution Aware Wanton Friends End Witless Audio Scams)”.

With that Keith and Sue just looked at each other and said, “We have been conned by our so-called friends!”

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This student submitted their short story to be included in The Hoot Newsletter for Students Living in Secure Environments. If you would like to submit a piece of writing, we would love to read it.

Simply handwrite your article on a piece of paper and send to us using the pre-paid envelope that was sent to your facility or email it to: oustudents-media@open.ac.uk

Planning your best essay - from Student Hub Live

Would you like to write excellent essays with ease? Then read on. An excellent essay isn't in the writing – it's all in the planning. 70% of your time should be spent planning and reading.

After you have done your reading, you plan your content. Essay paragraphs don't need to be long, around 200-400 words, but each must fulfil a purpose:

1. The introduction (about 10-15% of your word count) helps your reader to understand the map of what is coming up.
2. Each paragraph (75-80% of your essay length is from all your paragraphs) then adds just one point to your argument (in academic terms, 'argument' is the building of evidence to persuade your reader that you can justify your claims).
3. The conclusion (about 10% of the length) should bring together your thoughts.

The introduction should have four main parts:

1. **HOOK** – a sentence to get your audience engaged and interested in what they are about to read; a bit like my first sentence.
2. You should then have the **CONTEXT** where you define the important terms in the question in your own words.
3. The **MAP** – what journey are you going to take your reader on. This part should be the last thing you write in the whole essay.
4. Finish with the **THESIS** – what are you going to prove in your essay?

An essay must build an argument point by point to convince the reader. Each paragraph you add must have just a single point that adds to this thread and must be supported with evidence.

A strong structure is PEEL:

1. **POINT** – what is it that you are trying to convince your reader to believe.
2. **EVIDENCE** – what external evidence from an acknowledged expert source can you provide that backs up your point? This is where you'll need your in-text citation which should look something like this (Jones and Kumar, 2023).
3. **EXPLANATION** – you need to join together your point and evidence with an explanation of why the evidence supports your point.
4. **LINK** – to give your essay flow you can add a link to another part of the essay or the question. This is an optional part of the paragraph.

Another optional type of sentence is a **FILLER**. This is a sentence that adds to the flow of your essay but doesn't add to building the story that is your argument.

Have a look at this paragraph in an essay comparing rowing to running. What purpose does each sentence (1-5) have? You will find the answer at the end of the article.

1. 2000m row and 1500m run are both raced at similar speeds.
2. "If you dream and want to work hard then you can achieve." Mo Farah
3. In Olympic final of 2020 Peter Piper won by running at 2.02 mins per 500m and Jack Horner rowed at 1.58 mins per 500m. (Nursery rhymes, 2021)
4. These times are within 3% of each other showing a close similarity.
5. The reasons for this will be covered in the following sections.

You might find you need more than one piece of evidence and explanation for your point but the paragraph should only have that one point.

The conclusion should be your grand FINALE where you join together the points you've made and your thesis/question. It should have NO NEW material in it and the thought you should have whilst writing it is: "What do I want my audience to REMEMBER?" as it will be the last thing they read.

You need a plan so that you can see the overview before you write. You could do a diagram. You'll need a branch for the

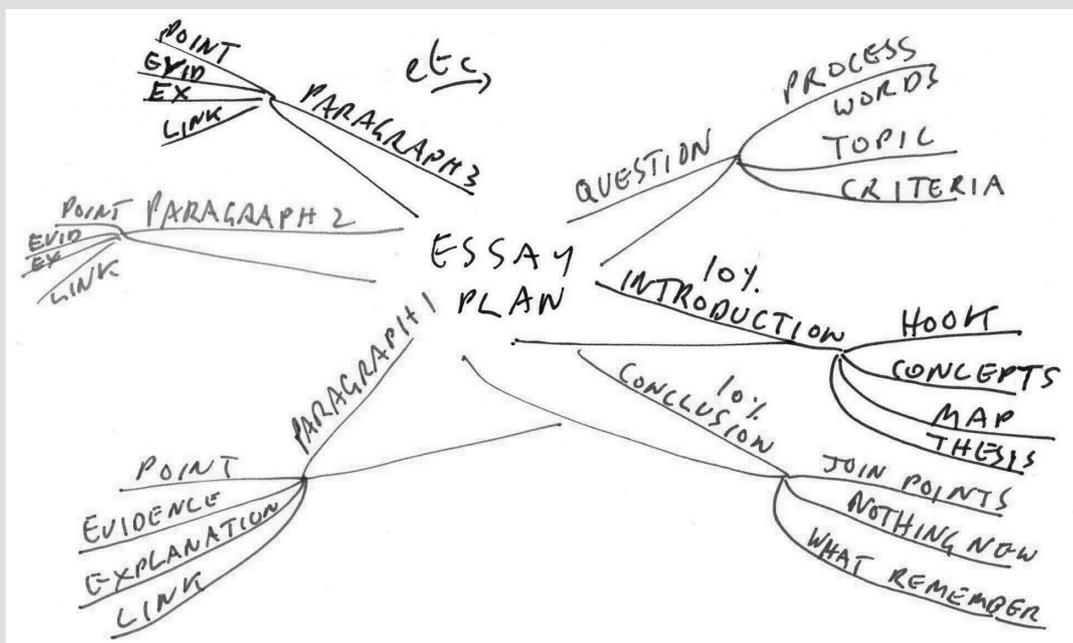
question analysis, the introduction, the conclusion and each paragraph. You might even need to do two diagrams to fit everything in. Another alternative is to make a table four columns wide and lots of rows long. The top four cells join to make one cell with the essay title, due date and number of words. The next row has your process words, topic words and criteria from the question. Then the next row is your header row, one for each column for essay part/content/number of words/source material. Then each row is one part of your essay. You can put both your in-text citation and reference in the fourth column so you can find them easily later.

Remember when you first write, it is not going to be seen by anyone else and you will polish it from this first draft to your final essay.

Good luck!

Margaret
Student Hub Live presenter

Answer to activity: 1. Point 2. Filler 3. Evidence 4. Explanation 5. Link



Careers and Employability Service

As with all students, Open University students residing in a secure environment, whether in prison or a secure unit, are entitled to careers support. This service is delivered and adapted depending on a student's circumstances.

Eligibility for careers support

Students are eligible for careers support from the moment they register for a qualification and the service continues for up to three years after they have finished studying with us.

Students may contact us as many times as needed and our service continues once they are back in the community.

Proactive contact

The careers team proactively write to students at three points during their studies to let them know about the service available. These points are:

- When they first become an OU student
- After achieving their degree whilst in a secure environment
- On returning to the community

What does careers advice mean?

Thinking about your future and making it happen isn't just a list of practical steps. It's about how you feel about yourself, your life, who you are and who you want to be.

By choosing to study, students have brought about a change in their life. Many OU students find that the process of studying and learning can make them feel differently about themselves and the world around them.

This is a process – not a one-off decision, and the careers team can support the student on this journey by:

- Recognising skills and attributes
- Identifying examples to evidence the development and use of their skills and attributes
- Identifying the gaps
- Exploring ways of overcoming gaps whilst in a secure environment
- Planning for Cat D (for students in prison)
- Exploring career options
- Presenting themselves well in job applications
- Planning and navigating a path ahead
- Discussing job seeking and issues around disclosing a sentence



Careers interviews

Careers interviews are usually carried out over the telephone although we know this is not possible in all settings. If telephone contact is inappropriate for your setting, we are more than happy to correspond by letter, or you may email us and we can continue a dialogue this way.

Appointments last around 45 minutes – but the times can be adjusted to fit in with you. All we need to know is the number to call and a mutually convenient time.

Students are sent action plans, CV templates, information on disclosing, job profiles and much more, following an appointment.

Information and advice

Our support covers all aspects of planning your career:

1. Your Career Planning Guide is a booklet available on the Virtual Campus in prisons, in hard copy format, as a downloadable PDF or in a disk format. This workbook will assist you with:
 - Identifying your skills
 - Exploring career options
 - Making decisions
 - CVs, application forms and interviews
 - How to present a gap in your employment history on a CV
2. We can review CVs and offer advice.
3. We can also print and send copies of job profiles for students to explore options.



Job seeking once in the community

Students in secure environments are often unfamiliar with the graduate job market. Here's how we can help:

- Opportunity Hub – we advertise live vacancies (if students have access to our online systems)
- Leaflet with links to organisations specialising in supporting people with convictions or disabilities, including mental health
- Mock interviews
- Internships
- Advice for CVs
- Personal statement reviews
- Skills audits
- How to arrange networking and work shadowing and why they count
- A copy of Your Career Planning Guide is sent to all students when we are informed they have returned to the community.

Procedure for contact

Please speak to your education department and ask them to contact the regional SiSE team if you would like to arrange a Careers appointment. You will then be sent a short questionnaire to complete regarding your interests so that the careers advice can be prepared when they speak to you.



20 things created by Black inventors

Who invented whiskey? Who invented peanut butter or traffic lights? Who invented gas masks or the ceramic toilet?

The world would not be the same without so many excellent inventions by Black men and women. However, many of us may not be aware of who the people are behind the inventions we know and love. In this article, you will learn who the brains are behind brilliant inventions that you use in your everyday life.

1. Potato crisps

(Almost) everyone loves crisps in the UK. Did you know that a New York chef, George Crum, worked in a resort when he encountered a grumpy, dissatisfied customer who returned his French fries back to the kitchen? George took pride in his culinary skills, and he didn't like people leaving and complaining about the food. So, he re-made the customer's order. He cut the potatoes as thinly as possible and fried them in oil and seasoned them with salt. This was the day when potato crisps were born. A worldwide sensation!

2. Home security systems

American Mary Van Brittan Brown invented an early security unit for her own home. She and her husband patented their brilliant invention in 1969. All home security systems worldwide were built upon her early invention and design.

3. Peanut butter

A crowd favourite! People love it, dogs love it, even bears love it! We should thank George Washington Carver for the invention of peanut butter.

4. Three-light traffic lights

Garrett Morgan contributed to road safety in the US and was the first Black person in Ohio to own a car. After witnessing a collision at an intersection in the city, Morgan was inspired to invent an addition to the current traffic light by adding a 'yield' component which would warn incoming drivers of an impending stop.

5. Folding cabinet beds

A business woman, Sarah Goode, was the first Black woman in the US to receive a US patent. Some of you may have her invention in your parents' or grandparents' home even today – a folding cabinet bed.

6. Gas masks

The first gas mask was invented by Garrett Morgan after he noticed how many firefighters were killed due to smoke inhalation. He called his invention a 'safety hood'; it went over the head and featured tubes connected to wet sponges that filtered out the smoke and provided oxygen to firefighters. He saved many lives.

7. Blood banks

Surgeon Charles Richard Drew discovered a method of separating red blood cells from plasma and then storing the two components separately while he was studying towards his university degree. He researched the field of blood transfusions, developing improved techniques for blood storage and applied his expert knowledge to developing large-scale blood banks

early in World War II.

8. Improved ironing boards

In the late 19th century, the ironing board was improved by Sarah Boone. Sarah's design morphed into the modern board that we use today.

9. Automatic elevator doors

Alexander Miles took out a patent in 1887 for a mechanism that automatically opens and closes elevator shaft doors.

10. Colour IBM PC monitors

You can thank Mark Dean for co-inventing the colour monitor. Without his invention, we would be typing on black and white computer screens.

11. Tissue holders

Mary Davidson invented the tissue holder to help her in day-to-day life living with multiple sclerosis. She also developed the very first sanitary belt, a predecessor to modern menstruation pads. Mary received five patents in her lifetime and holds the record for the most patents awarded to a Black woman by the US government.

12. Laserphaco

An ophthalmologist and laser scientist, Patricia Bath, invented a device and technique used to remove cataracts and revive patients' eyesight.

13. Automatic gear shifts

Richard Spikes created the automatic gear shift, helping people drive up hills everywhere.

14. Clothes dryers

George T. Sampson was the inventor of the clothes dryer in 1892.

15. Folding chairs

You likely have a couple in your garden. The folding chair was invented by John Purdy.

16. Ice cream scoopers

Before the ice cream scooper was invented, people scooped ice cream with spoons. That was until Alfred L. Cralle invented the ice cream scooper.

17. Lawnmowers

John Albert Burr designed a lawnmower with traction wheels and a rotary blade that was designed to not easily get plugged up with lawn clippings.

18. Ceramic toilets

Thomas Elkins was a dentist, abolitionist, surgeon, pharmacist and inventor. One of the many things he invented was a ceramic toilet including a mirror and a washstand.

19. Baby prams

William H. Richardson created the first pram with independent wheels and a turning bassinet, so parents could keep an eye on their child.

20. Whiskey

The inventor of whiskey was a skilled distiller, Nathan Green, nicknamed Nearest, from Lynchburg, Tennessee. He created the original recipe. He mentored Jack Daniel and taught him his craft. Jack later created his own brand using Nathan's teachings. The public did not believe Green was the real inventor and it was unknown to the public until many decades later. Nathan Green passed away in the 1890s, and his family later created a world-famous whiskey brand, 'Uncle Nearest Premium Whiskey', which has won numerous international awards.

Understanding yourself: mastering your motivation

Master your motivation with this self-coaching session from the Open University's Personal Learning Advice (PLA) service. In this article, we're looking into ways to master your motivation.

What is motivation?

Motivation can be described as the process that initiates, guides and maintains goal-oriented behaviours. In everyday terms, motivation is what causes you to act and helps drive you to success.

Motivation has a huge impact on how well you perform, and as individuals we're motivated by different things in different ways. Psychologists tend to agree that when it comes to motivation there are two types:

Intrinsic motivation:

What drives you from within. The individual values and preferences that make tasks more meaningful to YOU. It occurs when you're compelled to do something out of pleasure, importance or desire. It could involve solving a complicated problem, a desire to learn, passion for a subject or achieving a goal. Usually these are things that you're in control of.

Extrinsic motivation:

Incentives provided externally by OTHERS. It often involves rewards such as trophies, money, social recognition or praise; sometimes it can even involve fear to make you do something. Often these are things that others provide and see, and they're often things you aren't in control of.

It's important to remember that neither of these types of motivation is inherently good nor bad. Most people find they are

motivated by a combination of the two, however research does support that having internal motivators will have longer-term benefits, including consistency, achievement and greater overall personal satisfaction.

What is important is understanding what motivates YOU

Identifying your key motivators will help you figure out what really matters to you and why. This is key to achieving your goals and your personal satisfaction. Here's a quick activity you can complete to help identify your key motivators:

1. Find 10-15 minutes to sit calmly and reflect on all the reasons why you started your OU studies.
2. Take a piece of paper and write these reasons down. Tip – don't try and analyse your thoughts and reasons at this stage.
3. Next identify if these reasons are intrinsic (internal to you) or extrinsic (external to you). It might help to move the reasons into separate columns or to mark them with two different colours.
4. Look at your intrinsic reasons, these are likely to be things you have control of and are things you can take steps to develop. They are often very closely linked to your overall goal and help build your personal 'why'.

So now you have a clearer understanding of what motivates you it's useful to acknowledge that there may be times throughout your studies when you lack motivation or feel stuck – this can happen to all of us, we're human!

The good news is that lacking motivation and feeling stuck is never permanent. Take some time to review the following motivation top tips and reflect on your responses.

Tips to help you master your motivation

Remember your 'WHY'

Self-knowledge is important, it will unlock the 'why' behind your motivation. Ask yourself:

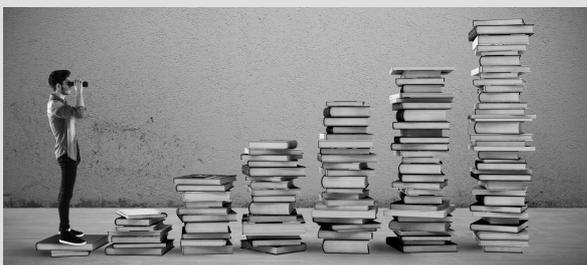
- What am I studying and why did I choose it?
- What's important to me about my studies?

Know yourself

Understanding and learning more about your skills, abilities and even areas for improvement is key to improving your motivation.

In addition, in your studies it's important to notice your levels of motivation, understanding what does and doesn't motivate you to take action. Ask yourself:

- How do I learn best?
- What distracts me?
- How do I like to study?
- What positive study habits work for me?



Identify your goal(s) and take action

Having goals in mind is essential to keeping motivated. When you think about your goals and the desire to achieve these goals, identifying the steps you'll take becomes clearer. Ask yourself:

- What are my study goals? How are my goals SMART – specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound
- What steps will I take to achieve these goals?
- What's the first step I'll take?
- How will I stay on track with my studies?

Reflect and track your progress

Taking pride in your progress and achievements, even the small ones can boost your self-confidence and motivate you to achieve more. It's useful to reflect and pinpoint exactly what worked so you can repeat it in the future. Ask yourself:

- How will I know I've been successful?
- What will my success look like or feel like?
- How can I repeat and continue my success?

Use your responses to track your progress during your studies.

These top tips can help you generate, increase and maintain your motivation, get unstuck and take action to progress towards your goals.

...And finally

It's important to remember that everyone at varying times in a day, week, year and lifetime can struggle with motivation. Mastering your motivation is important, it helps drive you to keep going in the face of set-backs, to take action and to work towards your goals.

Who are the Community team?

We are very aware that students who feel part of a community achieve better outcomes from their education and creating a sense of community for the 180,000 OU students worldwide is a real challenge as we're all distance learners.



The OU Students Association's Community team helps create a welcoming, interesting and fun community for all OU scholars. We do this in a huge number of ways but right now our most high profile annual event is taking place.

Every year we are responsible for selecting the team that represents the OU on BBC Two's University Challenge. This is possibly the Community team's most fun job and as the TV show gets audiences of over two million, it's the biggest exposure that OU students get nationally each year.

The selection process runs throughout the year and we whittle down around 200 applicants to a final five (a team of four plus one reserve) who go for TV auditions in January. We then hope that we've picked a good combination of great quizzers and interesting characters with a first class range of general knowledge, who get selected for the TV stage.

The Open University has won University Challenge twice before in 1984 and 1999 and we had high hopes for our 2023/24 team. However you might have heard that the OU team played Hertford College,

Oxford in the first round in early September and sadly lost by 230 to 155. However as one of the highest scoring first round losers they played a second match in late October which they won! So we will keep cheering them on and who knows how far they will get?

We know that for many OU students seeing your peers on TV is a real inspiration and makes you feel a part of something much bigger and this can be a great help in overcoming the feelings of isolation that distance learners might experience.

In many respects the Students Association, and the Community team in particular, are a bit like a tightrope walker's safety net, in that it may never be used but it's incredibly reassuring and confidence building just knowing it's there.

We appreciate that many of the activities that the Community team run such as Freshers, Clubs and Societies and Student Meet-ups are not always accessible for students in secure environments but despite that we hope you feel a part of a wider community and take heart in knowing that your fellow students across the world are working hard just like you.



Who are the Executive Support and Staff Welfare team?

We are a small but dedicated team that work tirelessly to help our staff and volunteers perform at their best and to answer any questions. This means that we cover everything from HR advice to recruitment, training, and organising events, all with a smile!



Although we are not student facing, our team act as the oil that keeps all parts of the OU Students Association moving!

We support staff and the elected volunteers in our Student Leadership Team (SLT) as they work to deliver services that will improve the education experience for all Open University students, wherever they are based. The SLT has been elected to lead the Association's work on four key priority areas for students:

1. **Communities and Engagement:** to improve the student experience by creating more spaces for students to engage with each other.
2. **Representation:** to increase the influence of student views at all levels of the OU and beyond e.g. government.
3. **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI), plus Accessibility:** to promote EDI and reduce any barriers to using University services and student support. Access for all includes those with physical disabilities or mental challenges.

4. **Association awareness:** to increase awareness of Association services and opportunities e.g. Freshers Week, Clubs and elections.

One of our most important jobs is to work closely with the elected SLT to identify key student issues. As a student union, the Association is separate from the OU and we exist to make sure that you, as students, have a voice in all decisions that might affect your studies. Sometimes this means challenging OU policies, so it is important that the Association is independent and student-led.

As a distance-learning University, we support the SLT in finding creative ways to reach out and engage with our student community, wherever they are based. We also arrange quarterly SLT meetings to get together and share progress on current challenges and successes. The SLT reports, show what gets discussed and any actions, a sort of "You said, we did".

Our team also support the Board of Trustees (BoT) to meet and oversee the finances, governance and compliance of us as an Association. The BoT oversees the Association strategy to make sure that we deliver the right student services and use our limited resources in ways that will make the most positive difference for the largest number of students.

Want to study with The Open University?

The Open University has changed the lives of more than 2 million people, bringing them new knowledge, skills, interests and inspiration, and helping them achieve goals. If you have picked up this newsletter but are not a student then read on, as the SiSE (Students in Secure Environments) Team write about where to start.

Why The 'Open' University?

The reason we're called The Open University is that we are open to people based on their potential rather than their prior qualifications. You simply need the determination to succeed. Whatever the change you want to make, whatever your goal, it starts here.

Where to start - Access modules

If you haven't studied at university level before, or it's been a long time since you last studied, you may prefer to begin with an Access module. They are specially designed to help you find out what it's like to study with the OU, get a taste of a subject area, develop your study skills, and build your confidence. Evidence indicates that students who start with an Access module are more likely to be successful when they advance to Stage 1 of their undergraduate qualification.

There are five Access modules to choose from:

- Arts and languages
- People, work and society
- Science, technology and maths
- Psychology, social science and wellbeing
- Business and Law

These modules are 30 weeks long, starting in February, May or October. All study materials are provided, including books and printed materials. Most students study for about nine hours a week and work is

assessed through short written assignments and other smaller pieces of assessed work. There is no exam.

Funding Access modules

There are various methods of funding, but in England and Wales, you may be able to study an Access module free of charge through special funding arrangements with the Prisoners' Education Trust (PET). Although there are no OU entry requirements, PET requires that you have Level 2 Literacy and in some cases Level 2 Numeracy before funding Higher Education studies. In Northern Ireland or Scotland your OU national office will be able to advise on the funding available in your nation.

Undergraduate qualifications

If you feel confident about going straight into one of our undergraduate qualifications then you can choose from a broad range of subject areas:

- Arts and humanities
- Business and management
- Environment
- Health and social care
- Languages
- Law
- Mathematics
- Psychology
- Science
- Social sciences
- Sport, fitness and coaching

Many undergraduate courses do not require any prior knowledge of the subject, but you will normally be expected to show that you can study successfully at National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Level 2 or its equivalent. In Scotland, you must have studied successfully at Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) Level 6 in a relevant subject such as English (Scottish Highers equate to SCQF Level 6). In the Republic of Ireland, you must have studied successfully to Leaving Certificate level or QQI Level 5 in at least two subjects.

Funding Undergraduate qualifications

The arrangements for the funding of higher education are different across the four nations of the UK and internationally. The fees and funding available to you are based on where you're ordinarily resident, rather than on the location of your prison. Your education department can provide you with further information about funding options.

Interested in studying with us?

Please contact your education department for further advice and information about all OU study.



OU Regional Manager (right) congratulates a student at graduation. Photo: OU SiSE team

Prison graduation ceremonies - a celebration of success

Many people would perhaps be surprised to find out that prisoners have the possibility of studying towards a university level qualification such as a Higher Education Diploma, an undergraduate or postgraduate degree. Even fewer people will know that upon successful completion of their studies, students can request a prison graduation ceremony to celebrate that achievement.

Prison graduation ceremonies are usually hosted in the prison chapel or similar space within the prison. The Order of Ceremony follows the same formalities as those used during our public graduation ceremonies held up and down the country. It is a formal event where graduates get to wear academic robes which denotes their new status whilst celebrating their achievements with family members and friends, invited dignitaries, prison service staff, OU academics and staff and other OU students. Many prisons will facilitate photographs and provide a buffet for guests and staff on the day.

How to request a prison graduation ceremony

To request an Open University prison graduation ceremony to celebrate your academic achievements, you simply need to contact your education department and complete an Expression of Interest form. The information provided will help the education department and the OU's SiSE team to facilitate and organise your ceremony. These events can take time to arrange, so make sure you submit your request as soon as you receive confirmation of your award from the University.



About the OU Students Association

All Open University students are automatically members of the OU Students Association.

The OU Students Association was born in 1972, just a few years after The Open University was established by Royal Charter.

Our mission

We're on a mission to make a positive difference for all OU students. This is a mission we believe in and that we use to make all of our decisions.

We work together. We genuinely care about each other, offering compassion and safety. Our best ideas, projects and events are born from truly listening to one another.

We celebrate our differences. We understand that we will never all agree. Some conversations are hard, but they need to be had. So long as we share our individual perspectives respectfully and with acknowledgement for others' hardships, journeys and barriers, there is always something we can learn from one another.

Our vision

Your Students Association will:

- Empower a student voice that is strong and effective in representing the diversity of our members
- Work collaboratively with the University to ensure that students are at the centre of decision-making
- Build an inclusive community which nurtures a sense of pride and belonging
- Provide relevant, quality services which enhance the student experience

Our values

Welcoming - Accountable - Bold - Adaptable - Sustainable

Write an article for the next edition!

If you would like to contribute an article for the next edition in June then we would love to feature your writing. You can submit articles of up to 400 words on any topic of your choice. Send it to us using the pre-paid envelope we have enclosed, addressed to:

The Hoot (SiSE edition), PO Box 397, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes MK7 6BE

Alternatively, articles can be emailed to us at: oustudents-media@open.ac.uk

Deadline for submissions: Monday 11 March 2024