



# Students ASSOCIATION



# THE HOOT

## Student Newsletter

Issue 6 – January 2025

A copy of the latest newsletter will be posted to your facility every six months. For enquiries or comments, please ask your Education Officer to get in touch with us at [oustudents-media@open.ac.uk](mailto:oustudents-media@open.ac.uk)

# Welcome to your newsletter!

Welcome to the sixth issue of The Hoot Newsletter. Once again, we have a collection of fantastic articles for you to enjoy!

There are a range of topics covered, including information about the Business Services team in the OU Students Association, and the work that OUSET and our Library Study Volunteers carry out.

You can also read about the priority areas that the 2024–2026 Student Leadership Team (SLT) will be working on.

There is a lovely letter that we received following the previous issue of this Newsletter that was so lovely to read and we hope that you enjoy it too!

We have also included an article about the first female SiSE graduate in Ireland, which we hope you will find as inspiring as we did!

We hope you enjoy this new issue, and if you do have any feedback, articles or commentary, please do send this to us via your education contact.

Best of luck with your continuing studies!



## 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 900 online articles have since been published.
- The name 'The Hoot' was inspired by the adorable owl we sell in our Shop.
- The Hoot's fifth birthday was celebrated on 8 April 2024.

## Want to write an article for the next edition?

Find out how on the back cover!

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# Reflections on a unique SiSE graduation

A significant event took place in February 2024 – the first ever graduation in Dublin of an Irish female Student in a Secure Environment (SiSE). The ceremony took place in Mountjoy Female Prison (Dóchas Centre). We recently spoke to the student in question, and asked her for her reflections regarding this special day (and her course in general).

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I studied the OU courses related to business, economics and management – Business Studies is indeed a challenging field. The complexity stems from its vast nature, embracing areas such as marketing, finance, operations, human resources and strategic management, in which theoretical understanding needs to be complemented with practical applications. Case studies, for example, often pose real-world business problems, demanding critical thinking and problem-solving skills. However, I truly enjoyed it, and to be honest I did not encounter any barriers to achieving my degree, despite the fact that I am in prison.

I am immensely grateful for all the support and encouragement from my Open University Coordinators, and to the SiSE team for the career guidance advice.

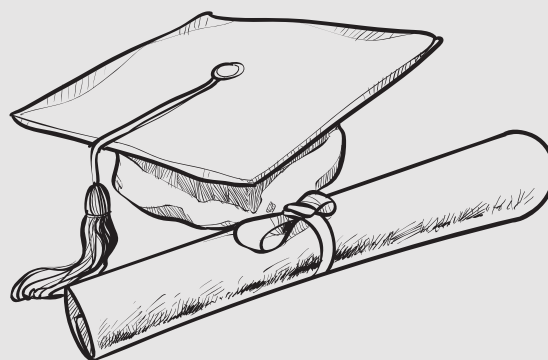
My graduation ceremony was a special culmination of my academic journey – the day when all my hard work and effort finally paid off – and I will remember it with great fondness for the rest of my life.

I wish to thank my Open University Coordinator for all the planning, preparation and deliverance. I was deeply touched by the whole ceremony, and wish to thank those who attended to celebrate my achievement.

It is a huge honour to be the first female to graduate from the Dóchas women's prison, and I hope to inspire many women towards education because each of us is unique and has an amazing set of skills and abilities which can be further enhanced by knowledge and learning.

After my release, my dream plan is to open my own sewing business, in which my knowledge application will be essential.

None of this would have been possible had I not received an education that gave me the skills, understanding and confidence to pursue my vision, and it is the only thing no one can take away from me.



# From dreams to reality: becoming a nurse and educator

A student shares her journey from leaving school with no GCSEs to becoming a nurse, and later a Practice Tutor and Staff Tutor at The Open University.

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If someone had told me 20 years ago that I would be sharing the story of my career development, I would have burst out laughing. My name is Mel: I'm 46 and mum to two children. Every day is a challenge and I feel like I am constantly juggling plates between work, studying, housework and being a mum.

I was talking to my mum about my childhood, and discussing how busy our lives were. Like me, she was a single mum who was working full-time and studying. She explained how every teacher described me as being 'a lovely, kind and well-behaved little girl' but how I was 'not an academic'. School was a massive challenge, and I didn't really understand what was going on. I had no confidence and became withdrawn and shy. I still cringe today at how little faith even my teachers had in me.

Luckily for me, I didn't listen, and my mum pushed me to do the best I could. The problem was, as a family, we didn't have the finances to afford private tutoring to enhance my education. I always dreamt of being a nurse but was always told I couldn't because I was not clever enough. After leaving school with no GCSEs, I had to work out how I was going to achieve my dream. Why was it so difficult?

I decided to go onto college and took a GNVQ Level 2 in Health and Social Care, which was equivalent to two GCSEs,

alongside my maths and English. This was a pivotal stage in my life as I was finally diagnosed with dyslexia and given the support and resources to get my thoughts down onto paper. It was a huge light bulb moment, and suddenly all the dots were joined together.

At this point, I was awarded the 'Student of the Year'. This was the first time in my life I had been recognised for my hard work and resilience.

In 2003, I worked as a Healthcare support worker in the Heart Department at my local hospital. Part of the stipulation for accepting this role was to study for my NVQ Level 3. With study support in place to accommodate my dyslexia, I successfully passed. However, I would still look at the nurses in their scrubs and wished that would be me one day.

The hospital started to work in partnership with the OU, advertising for healthcare support workers to apply for their Adult Nursing Diploma. I had been recommended for this programme and was successful in getting a place. I remember receiving the phone call from my line manager and screaming down the phone. I had just woken up from a night shift!

Panic set in again as I knew it wasn't going to be easy, but I was determined to get through it. At last, my dream had finally come true.



The Open University provided me with the opportunity to study to become a nurse, which I never thought was possible. The brick university route of education is expensive and this was never going to be an option for me. A more practical route of learning suited my personal needs, allowed me to study and I had the knowledge of being supported by my employer and the OU. This gave me the flexibility to study, while also working. I was provided with a network of support which included a mentor from the hospital and a Practice Tutor from the OU.

I successfully passed my Diploma in Adult Nursing, and I became a Band 5 on the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) register. I started work on the Heart ward. My dream had come true, and it was all thanks to the OU.

Over time, my love for nursing grew and I developed a love of teaching new students within the clinical area, especially those who were still training. At this point, I wanted to expand on my own career development, so I applied to do my degree in nursing leadership, through The Open University, which I successfully completed in 2013.

Without sounding like a cliché, The Open University opened my life to a career that everyone else said was not possible. The OU vision is 'to reach more students with learning that meets their needs and enriches society'. This resembled my pathway into nursing and paved a professional career that I always dreamed of.

Fast forward to 2018, I was working in the Heart Rehabilitation team, and I was

drawn to a Practice Tutor job advert from the OU. I remember thinking to myself, 'This is the job I was born to do'. I was successful in gaining this position and was passionate about this role, to the point that I resigned from the local Trust, where I had been working for 20 years.

Now, everyone has a phase in their life that pushes them to their limits. Mine happened three years ago, when I had a sudden change in my personal life. I had to think creatively and consider how I could utilise my nursing skills and my love of teaching in a role that suited my new lifestyle. I know fairy godmothers only appear in Cinderella but once again the OU saved my life! At this point in my life, my boss Mags was my fairy godmother. Due to my own journey, I can emphasise and have the time to listen, mentor and do whatever I can to help students as they say 'I can't do it! I don't understand, I'm running out of time!'

Now I'm a Staff Tutor for the OU. Encouraged by my line manager, I am studying for my Masters in Educational Leadership. "Oh my god, here we go again," I thought to myself. I have a degree in nursing, not education, and now I have to learn a whole new field of teaching and leadership.

As The Open University clearly points out your 'Future is Open'. How true that is! The OU gave me a future that potentially may not have happened if I had listened to my schoolteacher. Thank goodness I had the common sense to follow my dreams!

The OU 'aims to inspire' – it has done and continues to do so for me.

And they 'enable learning'. Well, if I am not an advocate for that, who is? I have been the apprentice student. I have been the mentor/practice assessor within the clinical area. I have been the Practice Tutor (and still am on a part-time role) and I now have the privilege of being a Staff Tutor, overseeing all these roles.

[This article originally appeared on 'OpenLearn' on the Open University website.](#)

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## A Student in a Secure Environment expresses their gratitude to the OU

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Three and a half years ago I was looking at some serious porridge. A decade or upwards. At that point, I could not conceive that I would have accomplished completing my first year at Uni. And now I am starting my second year, working towards my BA Honours degree in Financial Accounting.

I'm so grateful, to my college, to my teachers in prison, and most of all to The Open University. They put faith in me and backed me to start a degree and I'm smashing it. It has opened my mind and I am a sponge for knowledge now.

In here, you don't have all your comforts like you do on the out, but it's like Christmas for me when my yearly study materials arrive. I'm doing everything I can to better myself. This course has helped me in developing ambition.

**If you would like to contribute to this newsletter, you can write to us using the enclosed envelope or using the contact details below. Please mark any correspondence as The Hoot (SiSE edition), OU Students Association, PO Box 397, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes, MK7 6BE.**

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, there used to be an advert on the TV about The Open University. Its final strapline stated "The Open University changes lives". Every time the advert came on, I used to say, 'Yes it does, thank you!'

When I get out at the end of 2026, I'm going to continue my degree and be the first person in my family to gain an honours degree. I hope that this hard work that I'm putting in right now leads me to make something of my life. I'm not overconfident. I'm a reserved kid and I've come from nothing. I've come a long way from being in a gang and getting into trouble. I'm going to climb up the career ladder and I'm going to take my two beautiful daughters along for the ride. I want them to see me accomplish my goals, so they strive to do the same.

To anyone reading this, it's not just tests and results, it's about finding your passion, enjoying research, and making money eventually (fingers crossed) I hope will come. But right now, while I'm finishing my sentence, I'm going to be the best I possibly can in my chosen field. And it's all thanks to The Open University. Sincerely, thank you.

# Share your voice: Write for our Newsletter!

In a recent survey, many of you expressed interest in writing for our Newsletter but weren't sure how to get started. Great news – we're now accepting submissions for our June 2025 issue, and we'd love to feature your work!

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Submit an article of up to 400 words on any topic you're passionate about. Share your journey, offer study tips, write a heartfelt poem, or dive into fiction. Your contribution could inspire others, spark creativity, or simply bring a smile.

## Why contribute?

Writing for the Newsletter is a chance to express yourself, build confidence, and enhance your communication skills. It's also an opportunity to showcase your creativity and resilience while connecting with others. Seeing your work published can be a source of pride, and your unique perspective can motivate and encourage other students in secure environments.

## Here's a few ideas to get started:

- A personal story: Share a moment of growth, learning or determination. Your experiences can inspire others to navigate challenges.
- A poem: Convey your thoughts or emotions powerfully and creatively.
- Study tips or reflections: What keeps you focused and motivated? Share your strategies with other students.
- Fiction: Use your imagination to create a story that entertains others.

No professional writing experience is needed – just your willingness to share. We'll help with grammar and structure, if needed.

## How to submit:

Send us your article using the pre-paid envelope enclosed, addressed to:

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

Alternatively, email your submission to [oustudents-media@open.ac.uk](mailto:oustudents-media@open.ac.uk).

## Deadline: Monday, 28 April 2025.

So, grab a pen and let your thoughts flow! Whether it's a story, a poem or an article, we're excited to hear from you. Take the leap – your voice matters, and we can't wait to share it in our next newsletter!



# The Open University Students Educational Trust:

## Your student charity helping OU Students experiencing financial hardship

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OUEST is a grant-giving trust, established in 1982 by the Open University Students Association as their affiliated trust. The Trust acts as a safety net for OU Students, who might otherwise struggle to continue to fund their studies due to financial hardship, through their grant-giving activities.

OUEST specifically helps current undergraduate and postgraduate OU students who have obtained a minimum of 60 credits, and don't qualify for other avenues of financial support such as student loans. There are specific criteria for assistance from OUEST for both levels of study, which can be found by contacting us at [ouset@open.ac.uk](mailto:ouset@open.ac.uk).

### Here how OUEST helped OU Student, J:

"Getting this grant really helped with the costs of my education. My journey at The Open University has been incredibly enriching. It has enabled me to focus entirely on my studies and academic interests, without the ongoing stress of handling extra expenses. I really appreciate the sense of security and support I've received; it's been incredibly motivating."

### OU Students helping to support OUEST in 2023–2024!

What you may not know is that OUEST is 100% reliant on donations to fund its grant-giving activities. In 2023, OUEST began work with the supportive OU student community to organise exciting challenges, to raise awareness of the support OUEST

can provide, whilst also raising funds to support the Trust's grant-giving activities.

### Step Up for OUEST challenge – 2023:

The first OUEST fundraising challenge, was the Step Up for OUEST challenge, run between October to December 2023. This was a virtual distance challenge, run in collaboration with the thriving student club, OU Fit.

This was a fully assessable challenge, in which anyone could participate, whether through running, walking, swimming, rolling or your daily step counts – all were welcome to take part.

### Statistics from Step Up for OUEST – 2023:

- Over 160 students participated.
- The combined distance travelled was an amazing 18,076 km!
- £305 was raised for OUEST, through the JustGiving campaign page.

### Here are some quotes from Students who took part in the Step Up for OUEST challenge:

'Loving the challenge and seeing everyone's distances, and as a wheelchair user it has been amazing having something I can be involved in. This is how equality works, and I never once felt like I was not part of the team or my contribution was less than others. Thank you.'



‘I never mix or meet others due to my illness, but I feel like part of a team now.’

‘As someone who is not the fittest, this challenge would not have been for me, but my daughter has been doing it with me and it has really boosted my confidence and helped me to go out and about a bit more. Thank you.’

We’ll be running a shorter Step Up for OUSET challenge over four weeks in January 2025.

### **OUSET Three Yorkshire Peaks Challenge – 2024:**

The second OUSET challenge was a sponsored hike in August 2024, in which OU Students (and members of the public) could sign up to take part in the challenge, and raise funds through sponsorship to support OUSET’s grant-giving activities.

The challenge itself was to hike across 24.5 miles, covering three of Yorkshire’s most beautiful peaks, within 12 hours.

### **Statistics from OUSET Three Yorkshire Peaks Challenge, 2024:**

- Nine challengers participated, with three people completing the first two peaks, and six challengers completing all three peaks.
- They completed the challenge within 13 hours 30 mins.
- Together they raised a fantastic, combined total of £2,899.72 for OUSET, with 113 supporters.

We will be running the OUSET Three Yorkshire Peaks Challenge again in June 2025.

You can see a photo of this years amazing challenge below.



# Discover our new Student Leadership Team priorities

There are many facets to the work that the Student Leadership Team (SLT) undertakes, with each elected member having their own specific remits. However, alongside this, there are also areas of work that candidates identify as part of their manifestos during the elections.

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Following the elections, a group of us brought all the manifestos together and picked out the common themes across them all. From this, we then held an in-person SLT onboarding session to discuss these themes and dive deeper into what this work would look like in practice. Following further discussion and planning, these were turned into four priority areas that we will tackle together as a team throughout our term:

## **Student support:**

### **Campaign for access to OU student support services with increased availability that meets the needs of the OU student population.**

As the elected Student Leadership Team, we are committed to ensuring that all students have access to the support they need, when they need it. In an institution as diverse and dynamic as The Open University, it is essential that the support systems in place reflect the broad spectrum of needs across our student population.

At the heart of this priority area is the need for the availability of Student Support Teams to reflect the barriers that OU students face in accessing study, offering more options for ways that students can reach and interact with Student Support Teams (SSTs), and developing more individualised personalised support pathways that can adapt to the varying schedules, responsibilities and

backgrounds of our students. We look forward to working constructively with the University on this priority.

## **Student wellbeing:**

### **Champion initiatives that prioritise the wellbeing of the diverse OU student communities.**

There is a strong link between wellbeing and achieving success in higher education. Our enormously diverse student community is made up of individuals from all walks of life, each with their own unique challenges and needs. Ensuring that efforts to protect and improve student wellbeing reflect this diversity is central to this priority area. To champion this, the Student Leadership Team intends to introduce a range of initiatives that will provide OU students with opportunities, resources and support that will contribute to positive wellbeing.

We want to ensure that all students have the opportunity to feel as though they belong to a community that they care about, and that cares about them. This is an exciting area of work that has the potential to enhance the overall student experience.

**The academic experience:****Advocate for best-practice in teaching delivery to create a consistent academic student experience.**

As elected representatives of the student body, we believe that every student at The Open University should be entitled to a high-quality and consistent academic experience. Whether you're attending tutorials, submitting assessments, or communicating with your tutors, we believe that every student deserves clear, supportive and reliable academic interactions. At the heart of these concerns is the need for greater consistency across teaching delivery. This means ensuring that students, regardless of their course or tutor, have access to the same high standards of academic support and feedback. We believe that a clear definition of best-practice teaching delivery should be agreed upon and applied across the board to ensure all students receive the same level of quality in their academic interactions. We know that everyone at The Open University cares deeply about giving students the best possible experience, and we are excited to engage with them on this important area of work.

**The neurodivergent experience:****Campaign for improvements in policy and process to create an equitable experience for diagnosed and undiagnosed neurodivergent Students.**

At the 2024 OU Students Association Conference, OU Students passed a motion calling on the University to better support diagnosis of neurodivergent conditions such as ADHD where students are seeking a diagnosis to support their study. This priority area goes further than that in aspiring to create an environment within The Open University that is inclusive,

accessible and supportive of those who are neurodivergent, whether diagnosed or undiagnosed. Our aim is to ensure that neurodivergent students are not left behind by rigid structures or lack of understanding, and that their access to support is not determined by whether they have received an official diagnosis. We will work closely with the University to push for these much-needed changes, advocating for a culture where neurodivergent students feel seen, understood and supported. By focusing on improvements in both policy and process, we believe we can help create a more equitable and inclusive academic experience that allows all students to succeed.

If you'd like to view the motion passed at Conference 2024 to support neurodivergent students, please refer to page 14.

We look forward to getting to grips with this work and making some positive changes for all OU students. We are always looking for student input to understand student issues and celebrate best practice.



# Library Study Volunteers: supporting Students in Secure Environments

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Access to education is a powerful tool for personal growth, but for students in secure environments, barriers to resources can make academic progress difficult. The Library Study Volunteers (LSV) service bridges this gap by connecting these students with the research materials they need to succeed. The service is for students studying on Level 2 or above.

The LSV service was designed to address a specific challenge: students in secure environments often lack direct access to the Library's extensive resources. To overcome this, the LSVs, who are a group of current OU students, volunteer their time to fulfil research requests on behalf of these students.

## **How to use the service:**

To submit a research request, complete the form provided by your Education Advisor.

When filling out the form, please include the following:

- Your OU Personal Identification Number (PI Number).
- The module code.
- Whether the request relates to a specific assignment.
- Details of the resources you need.
- Any additional relevant information.

Once completed, you can return the form by post or email it to  
SiSE-General@open.ac.uk.

You will receive a new form each time we fulfil a request.

## **What happens next?**

Your request will be shared with the Library Study Volunteers (LSV) team, who will use the OU Library's databases to gather the necessary materials. On average, the team completes a request within just five days, highlighting their dedication and the service's efficiency. We are approaching the milestone of 700 completed Library Study Requests, made possible by our incredible volunteers and the dedicated staff who support this service.

After the research is completed, the materials are sent to the warehouse team for printing. The resources are then printed, packaged and dispatched to ensure you receive everything needed to complete your coursework.

## **What are the benefits?**

The LSV service provides invaluable support for students in secure environments, helping them overcome significant barriers to education.

- Access to essential resources: Students receive tailored research materials they wouldn't otherwise be able to obtain, enabling them to exceed the course requirements.
- Levelling the playing field: The service aims to give students in a secure environment as many opportunities to succeed as their peers outside secure environments.

- Empowerment through education:  
Access to learning resources fosters a sense of inclusion, and offers students a pathway to personal growth and future opportunities.

For students, the LSV service represents more than access to information – it's a lifeline that affirms their connection to a broader academic community and the possibility of achieving their goals.

### **Transforming lives through collaboration**

The Library Study Volunteers service is a testament to the power of collaboration and the impact of education. By breaking down barriers to access, it provides students in secure environments with the tools to build a brighter future, demonstrating that education is a right, not a privilege.

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### **What students in secure environments say about the Library Study Volunteers service**

“For students in secure environments, this service has been a lifeline to access academic papers for research and professional interests.”

“Without the detailed information I received, I would not have attempted my EMA. I am very grateful for the prompt service I was given, and to the OU students who spent the time researching.”

“Without being able to access the research materials such as articles and reports, I would be unable to conduct the research required to undertake my PhD studies.”

“To be able to provide external resources for assignments has been very helpful – the wealth of resources provided for each study request is wonderful.”

“This service has provided me with extra study material which I would not have had access to otherwise – thank you.”

“So often module materials provide only one perspective, so extra materials to flesh out the learning really helps.”





# The Business Services team

This team forms the backbone of support for the unique range of activities carried out by the OU Students Association, providing effective admin and finance support.

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We consist of two teams, Finance and Operations, working closely together (our roles frequently overlap).

The Finance team handles all elements of financial processing and monitoring, supporting annual budget setting and subvention negotiations with the University. The Finance team are responsible for making sure that our suppliers are promptly paid the correct amounts that are due, and selecting these suppliers to ensure that the Association receives the best value for money when making purchases. They will also ensure all submitted expenses are valid and correct so that they are reimbursed in a timely manner.

The Finance team also reconciles the Association's bank accounts, making sure that all Association funds are accounted for. The months following July are particularly busy for the Finance team as they respond to a deluge of questions and requests from our external auditors (who always assign our accounts a clean bill of health).

The Operations team provides the first point of contact for students when they reach out to us. Whether you're contacting us via email, telephone or post, we'll be your first point of contact directing you to the correct team.

We also accept and process applications for OUSET funding – our separate grant-giving trust that assists those experiencing financial hardship. We'll determine an applicant's eligibility by comparing their

circumstances against our criteria, making sure all is in order before submitting an application to our Board of Trustees.

We're also responsible for the smooth running of our online store, regularly reviewing the product range, reaching out to suppliers to secure great prices, updating product images and descriptions, and stepping up when students have issues acquiring past exam papers.

A selection of our product range is also sold at graduation ceremonies throughout the year. These stalls are run by our wonderful volunteers who we support by making sure they have everything they need on the day, so that everyone involved has a great experience.

The Operations team has access to the Open University's VOICE database system and it's our responsibility to ensure that all election candidates are eligible to stand (according to their status as current students, region and faculty). We also check that any Association competition winners are current OU students.

Both the Finance and Operations sections of our team support our colleagues during special events – we're always happy to attend the biennial Conference or ad hoc trustee meetings.

We're a flexible team who find ourselves switching tasks regularly throughout our day, and we achieve great satisfaction in assisting our Association colleagues.

# Conference 2024

We're delighted to let you know that the latest Association Conference was held on 15 June 2024. Conference happens every two years and is run for Student Members, which OU Students automatically become when starting their studies.

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## **What happens at Conference?**

Conference includes official business and engagement activities. The official business (presented by your President) includes the elected Student Leadership Team and Board of Trustees reporting on their activities since the last Conference, and receiving questions.

## **Business voting results:**

Prior to Conference, students were asked to vote on a range of resolutions. We had a record 1,828 votes and the results were presented at Conference by the President:

### **Resolution A:**

Approve an official change to the name of our elected Student team from Central Executive Committee to Student Leadership Team.

**APPROVED**

### **Resolution B:**

Amend Article 26 to introduce an additional 3-5 Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Representative positions on the elected team to provide better representation for the active groups of the Association.

**APPROVED**

### **Resolution C:**

Implement a change to Article 20 to allow Student Leadership Team elections and Student Trustee Elections to run in alternate years.

**APPROVED**

### **Resolution D:**

Students are asked to vote on a motion to rebrand the OU Students Association to be known as the OU Student Union (OpenSU).

**APPROVED**

### **Resolution E:**

Approve a motion to support the Students Association to campaign for the University to better support diagnosis of neurodivergent conditions such as ADHD where students are seeking a diagnosis to support their study.

**APPROVED**

### **Resolution F:**

Approve a motion for representatives of the OU Students Association to campaign for the University not to reduce the existing curriculum, even when making financial cuts, but rather to find ways of preserving and, wherever possible extending, the curriculum.

**APPROVED**

### **Resolution G:**

Vote to ratify the minutes of the 2022 biennial Conference.

**APPROVED**

### **Resolution H:**

Receive the report of the Trustees and the CEC on the Association's activities since the 2022 biennial Conference.

**APPROVED**

**Resolution I:**

Receive the accounts of the Association for the completed financial years since the previous biennial Conference (2021–22, 2022–23).

**APPROVED**

**Resolution J:**

Vote to approve the re-appointment of Haysmacintyre to act as the Association's auditors.

**APPROVED**

**Resolution K:**

Conference delegates are asked to vote to approve the continuation of our affiliation with National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO).

**APPROVED**

**Resolution L:**

Conference delegates are asked to vote to approve the continuation of our affiliation with Charity Finance Group (CFG).

**APPROVED**

**Resolution M:**

Conference delegates are asked to vote to approve the continuation of our affiliation with Association of Volunteer Managers (AVM).

**APPROVED**

**RESOLUTION N:**

Conference delegates are asked to vote to approve the continuation of our affiliation with WonkHE.

**APPROVED**

**What were the highlights of Conference this year?**

We did things a little differently this year, with the Conference held online and only the elected team coming onto campus, where they conducted the business session, which was streamed live to those at home. As well as the positive voting results, some other highlights from the day included:

A session entitled 'Love and Rage' saw a TV presenter talking to students about the importance of nature and protecting the environment, motivating us to do our bit: 'This is a time of crisis, and sitting down and pretending you can't do anything about it won't work – for you, for me or for the planet. It's time to get up and get moving, start thinking and start driving change.'

Another session entitled 'Quiet Leadership' helped students reimagine what many of us may assume good leaders to be. Many introverted students may have previously felt they couldn't make effective leaders, but the speaker helped us to debunk this assumption, showing how introverts can, and do, make extraordinary leaders.

A very topical session about Generative AI from two OU lecturers helped students to understand what generative AI is, and how it can be used ethically to assist students in their studies.

'How to Forge Ahead – A lived experience mental health playbook' saw a professional motivational speaker delving into his personal journey with mental health, from overcoming significant challenges to harnessing the experiences as a force for good.

During a session introducing the OU Students Educational Trust (Ouset), a staff member talked about the history of Ouset, how the Trust was set up, and how Ouset supports students, including those wishing to study from a secure environment. Attendees heard first-hand from one of our students about how Ouset has positively impacted their study journey.

And for a session entitled: 'No student left behind: An introduction to SiSE (students in secure environments)', our EDI and Student Welfare team spoke about the support offered to students studying from secure environments, like the Library Study Volunteers service, where SiSE request study materials and fellow students volunteer to arrange for them to be sent to their facility. Plus they were also told about how we reach out to students using this publication, The Hoot for SiSE Newsletter!

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## Oh No! It's Here!

This poem from one of our students describes what it's like for us all when it's Tutor Marked Assignment (TMA) time...

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Oh no! It's TMA time yet again,  
I better find that book!  
I know it's in 'ere somewhere,  
I'll pop 'n take a look.

Oh my! Look at that laundry,  
It really must be done.  
Then I'll get the book out,  
I'm sure I'll get loads done.

Oh, now it's nearly half past nine,  
There's no point starting late.  
I'll get an early night instead,  
The morning will work great.

Oh, the time, a missed alarm.  
Should not 've stayed up late!  
I keep on making promises  
I know I'm goin' to break.

Oh, now it's a rush job!  
It's made me really mad.  
I know I'm more than capable,  
Which makes me pretty sad.

Oh Crikey, It's too late to cook!  
I better get a takeout  
Eat up quick, tidy up,  
Then what's this TMA about?

So, I've dug out all my coursework,  
My tutor notes and slides,  
The question's out in front of me  
I've got blinkers on to hide.

You see the sign 'Work in Progress'?  
It means I'm getting on.  
I've cut out all distractions  
So I can act upon,

The guidance, the references, outcomes too  
Hey wow, it's looking good!  
Things aren't as bad as they first seemed,  
It's clear, I've understood.

Oh boy, I've actually done a plan,  
A list, and several drafts now,  
Shame 'Procrastination'  
's not my topic somehow!

# 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 explain 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 university-level qualifications. Even fewer people will know that upon successful completion of their studies, students can request a graduation ceremony to celebrate that achievement.

These ceremonies are hosted in the prison, and the Order of Ceremony follows the same formalities as those of our public graduation ceremonies. The graduates get to wear academic robes denoting their new status, and are presented with their qualifications. Usually attending the ceremonies are prison staff, OU staff and other OU students in prison – often families and friends can also be present. Photographs are taken, and the prison frequently provides a buffet for guests and staff.

### **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 issue!**

If you would like to contribute an article for the next issue 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), OU Students Association, First Floor, Library, Open University  
PO Box 397, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes, MK7 6BE.

Alternatively, articles can be emailed to us at: [oustudents-media@open.ac.uk](mailto:oustudents-media@open.ac.uk)

**Deadline for submissions: Monday, 28 April 2025**